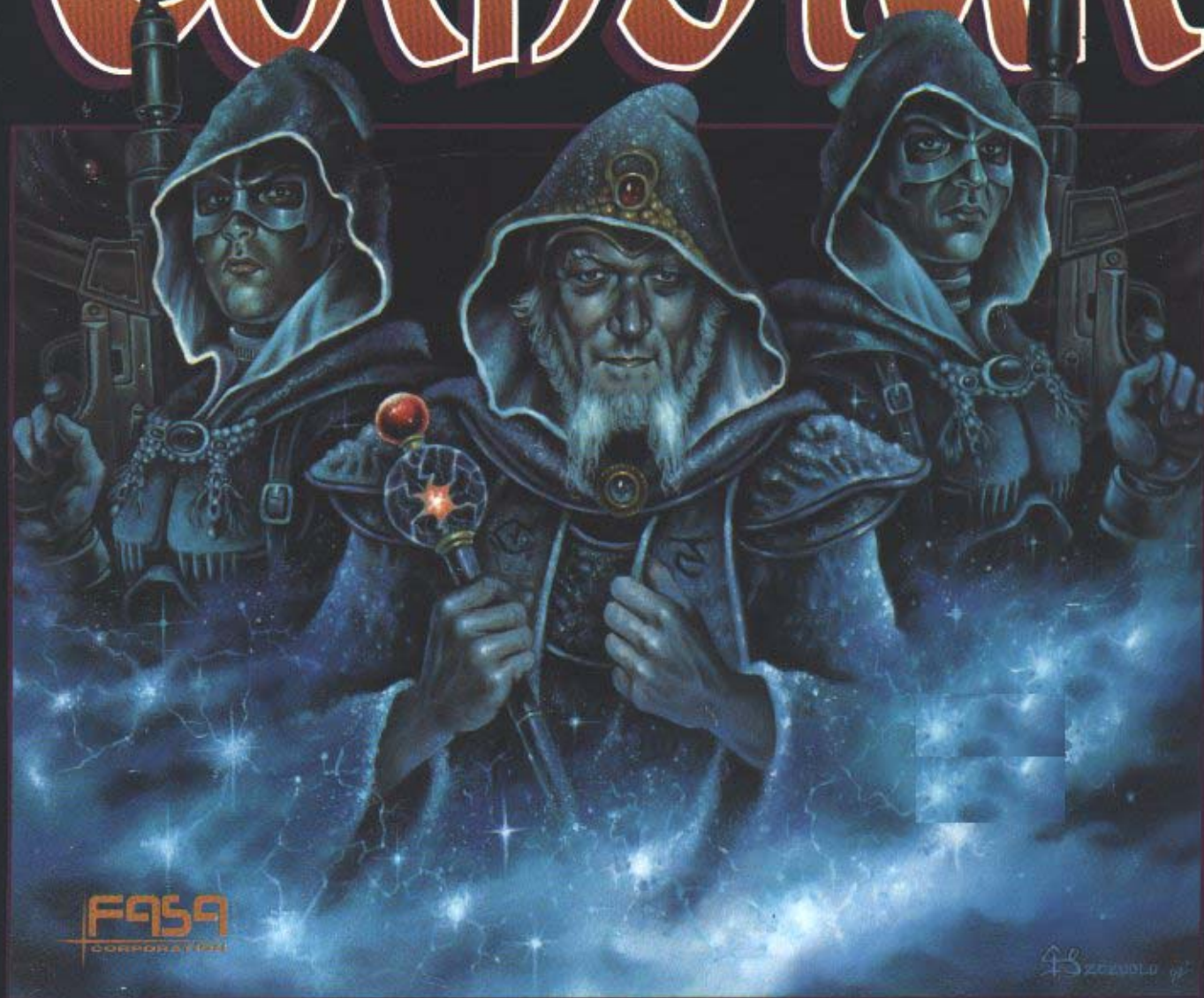


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COMSTAR



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE COMSTAR ORDER	4	The Waterly Era	59
Introduction	4	Covert Operations	59
HISTORY OF COMSTAR	5	Rosebud	59
The Rise of Blake	6	Flush	61
Linking the Stars	6	Spread of the Com Guards	62
The Amaris Coup	7	War of 3039	64
Long Road to Terra	8	Aftermath	64
Liberation of Terra	8	The Clan War	65
Hilton Head Complex	9	Year of Peace	66
Collapse of the Star League	9	Conflict Renewed	67
Reconstruction	10	Counterattack	67
Birth of ComStar	11	Battle for Tukayyid	69
Operation Exodus	11	Operation Scorpion	72
The First Circuit	11	NEW ORDERS	75
Operation Silver Shield	11	New ComStar	76
The Foundation Years	14	Reformation	76
Prosperity and Principles	14	United We Stand	77
Expansion Years	14	Organization	80
Mercenary Review Board	15	Rank Structure	81
Public Image	16	The First Circuit	81
Creation of ROM	16	Reformation-Era ROM	82
A New Order	18	Com Guards in the Reformation	82
Death of Blake	18	Com Guards—Deployment As of 3055	84
A Brotherhood Divided	18	The Sol System	86
The Purification	19	Relations with the Inner Sphere	87
The Word of Blake	20	ComStar Personalities	89
The ComStar War	24	Primus Sharilar Mori	89
Puppet of the Primus	24	Precentor Martial Anastasius Focht	89
Dance of Death	25	Precentor ROM Victoria Parardeau	89
Dark Hours, Dark Deeds	25	Word of Blake	90
Marik Gives In	26	The Renegades	90
The Consolidation Years	28	The Marik Alliance	91
Karpov Ascendant	28	Monkey Warfare	92
ComStar Strikes	29	Organization	93
The Veddard Affair	31	Current Doctrine	95
War Renewed	32	Politics	95
Slow Change	33	Word Of Blake Personalities	96
Civil War	35	Precentor Blane of Gibson	96
Kurstin the Mad	35	Precentor Martial Trent Arian	97
Age of Enlightenment	39	Precentor Demona Aziz	97
Calm Before the Storm	44	Precentor ROM Alexander Kernoff	97
The Explorer Primus	44	NEW BATTLEMECHS	98
The Tripitz Affair	46	ComStar Nexus	98
The Jolly Roger Affair	49	ComStar Raijin	100
The Mysterious Dragoons	50	Word of Blake Grand Crusader	102
The Tiepolo Years	51	GAME SUPPLEMENT	104
Old Business	51	Comstar Archetypes	105
House of Cards	51		
New Avalon Institute of Science	52		
Circles Within Circles	53		
Fourth Succession War	56		

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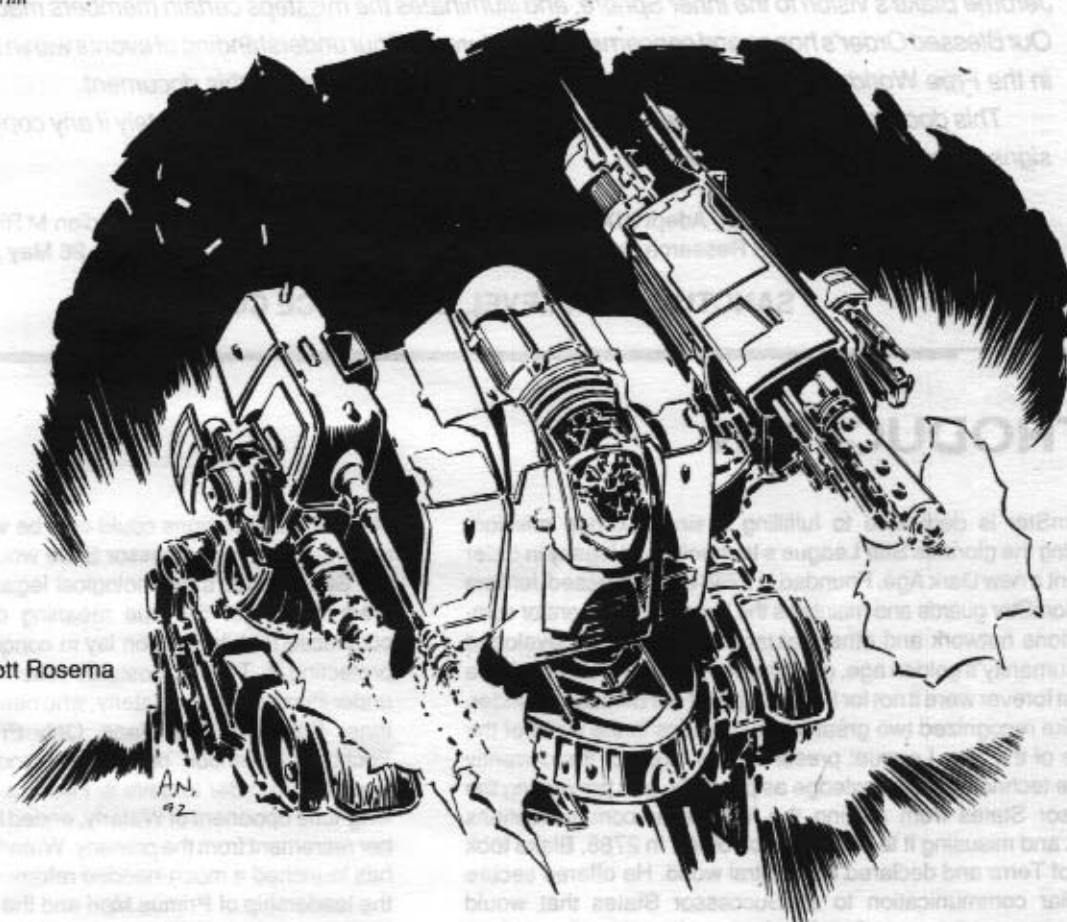
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Author's Dedication:

To Cynthia and Victoria with all my love

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THE COMSTAR ORDER

COMSTAR CLASSIFIED REPORT

This classified document is an historical briefing for use by ComStar personnel ranked acolyte and higher only. As part of our blessed Order's Reformation, Primus Mori authorized this document covering the development of our Order from the fall of the Star League to the current schism resulting in the Word of Blake organization. This document provides the facts of each Primus' rise and fall, recounts ComStar's efforts to bring Jerome Blake's vision to the Inner Sphere, and illuminates the missteps certain members made over the years. Our Blessed Order's hopes and concerns for the future, and our understanding of events within the Word of Blake in the Free Worlds League appear in a separate section at the end of this document.

This document was transmitted via a secure channel. Notify ROM immediately if any copy received shows signs of tampering by Word of Blake.

—Nonda Toolippi, Adept XIX-delta Norash Murrilvellthiun, Adept XV-sigma Adien M'Ripon,
Adept I-omega Research Team-chi/ComStar History ComStar Archives, Terra 26 May 3055

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INTRODUCTION

ComStar is dedicated to fulfilling a single, divine mission: preserving the glorious Star League's technological legacy in order to prevent a new Dark Age. Founded in 2788 by the Blessed Jerome Blake, ComStar guards and maintains the hyperpulse generator communications network and other valuable technologies developed during humanity's golden age, guarding knowledge that might have been lost forever were it not for the foresight of our Blessed Founder.

Blake recognized two great responsibilities in the wake of the collapse of the Star League: preserving as much of the currently available technological knowledge as possible, and preventing the Successor States from seizing the interstellar communications network and misusing it to destroy each other. In 2788, Blake took control of Terra and declared it a neutral world. He offered secure interstellar communication to all Successor States that would pledge to respect the neutrality of the hyperpulse generator stations and personnel. The Inner Sphere leaders recognized that open communications were crucial to their survival, agreed to Blake's demands, and the blessed Order of ComStar was born. Blake created the First Circuit to administer ComStar's affairs and fostered a "secret brotherhood" mentality among ComStar's members in order to keep the secrets of the Star League safe.

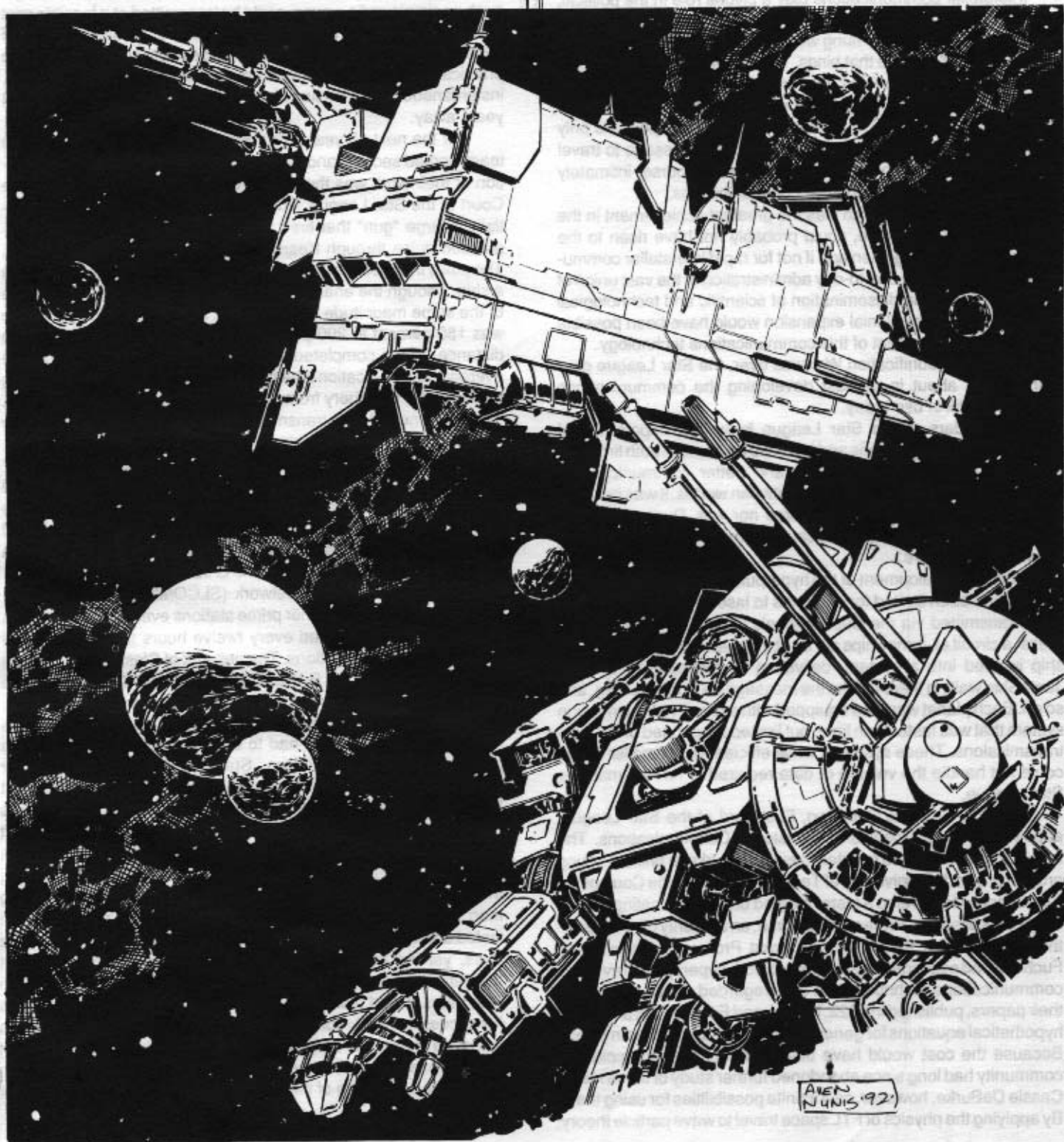
After Blake's death in 2819, Conrad Toyama of Dieron took control of ComStar. He replaced its corporate structure with a rigid, religious hierarchy, and shrouded its activities in mystic rituals. Toyama declared himself Primus, the highest authority in ComStar, bequeathing that august title and its responsibilities to every leader of ComStar who followed him.

Initially, Primus Toyama's carefully crafted religious mystery served Blake's vision by fostering the belief that the sacred magic

of HPG transmissions could only be wielded by ComStar adepts, ensuring that no Successor State would attempt to take control of the Star League's technological legacy. One faction of ComStar gradually forgot the true meaning of Blake's vision, however, convinced that its mission lay in conquering humanity rather than protecting it. These apostates reached the zenith of their power under Primus Myndo Waterly, who nearly succeeded in handing the Inner Sphere to the Clans. Only Precentor Martial Anastasius Focht's intervention prevented Myndo Waterly from destroying humanity in order to save it. Focht, a true disciple of Blake and a long-time opponent of Waterly, ended her misguided rule by forcing her retirement from the primacy. Waterly's successor, Sharilar Mori, has launched a much-needed reform of our blessed Order. Under the leadership of Primus Mori and the Precentor Martial, ComStar has returned to fulfilling its original purpose as the enlightened guardians of the Inner Sphere.

[ComStar no longer represents the word of Blake. Primus Myndo Waterly carried Blake's true vision in her heart and in her leadership, and the traitors Focht and Mori cut her down before she could bring to fruition Blake's grand design. This document is their version of events from ComStar's inception, and they have rewritten history to serve their ends. We have corrected the most blatant revisions that the "New ComStar" presents here as truth, but read critically. We in the Word of Blake fight to preserve Blake's true intent: we offer asylum to all who believe in Primus Waterly's vision for humanity's future. Captain-General Thomas Marik will soon take her place, to lead us forward to our destiny. Join us, and help redeem the Inner Sphere!]

HISTORY OF COMSTAR





THE RISE OF BLAKE

LINKING THE STARS

Interstellar communications play a pivotal role in the political, social, and economic survival of the human race. With mankind now inhabiting hundreds of far-flung worlds, rapid communications has become the essential tie that binds. Through the use of hyperpulse generators (HPGs) mankind has the ability to communicate relatively easily and quickly across the vast reaches of space. Before the invention of the HPG, such communication was possible only through simple codes, and it took months for a message to travel across the stars. The history of ComStar is, of course, intimately bound to the history of interstellar communications.

The Star League, which was the greatest achievement in the history of the human race, could probably not have risen to the heights of a glorious golden age if not for rapid interstellar communications. Neither the day-to-day administration of the vast union of star systems nor the dissemination of scientific and technological innovations nor the colonial expansion would have been possible without the development of this communications technology.

Once the Reunification War was over, the Star League government set about in earnest developing the communications technology still in use today.

The leaders of the Star League knew the importance of interstellar communications and invested a fortune in both time and money to develop newer, faster, and better communications. Without the ability to communicate between worlds, it was possible to conduct neither friendly commerce nor war. During the early years of space exploration, messages from Terra to Tharkad took two months to arrive.

Until the development of the hyperpulse generator, communications had been limited for centuries to laser-pulse messages or were transmitted via the Star League's version of the Pony Express: a circuit of JumpShips set up at intervals across space. One ship jumped into a system, delivering its message to another JumpShip waiting there to take the message on to the next leg, and so on. Each planet was also equipped with a primitive transmission system that was faster than light, but limited to scanned or fax-type transmissions. These systems, while efficient on a smaller scale, could not handle the volume of data required to run the massive Star League.

In 2614, Nicholas Cameron, First Lord of the Star League, appointed Joshua Hoshiko as Minister of Communications. The following year, Hoshiko enlisted Cassie DeBurke, a brilliant young professor from the University of Terra (located near the Court of the Star League) to develop a faster method of communicating across the depths of space. Professor DeBurke, an authority on the faster-than-light physics theories of the great Professors Kearny and Fuchida, had examined their theses on both hyperspace travel and communications technology. In a disregarded section of one of their papers, published in 2222, Kearny and Fuchida had published hypothetical equations for generating artificial jump points in space. Because the cost would have been astronomical, the scientific community had long since abandoned further study of these ideas. Cassie DeBurke, however, saw infinite possibilities for using them. By applying the physics of FTL space travel to wave particle theory,


DeBurke theorized that it would be possible to send radio transmissions through hyperspace in much the same way as faster-than-light ships traveled. Unlike matter, bundles of modulated energy, such as simple radio waves, could be transmitted at a feasible cost and were well within the operational range of modest reactors. If hyperspace transmission of energy pulses could be converted into practical technology, it would make possible the inexpensive, instantaneous transmission of messages to receivers up to 50 light years away.

For the next 15 years, Professor DeBurke and her research team worked secretly and feverishly on her theories. The culmination of their work was the first HPG station, built just outside the Court of the Star League. The hyperpulse generator was essentially a large "gun" that fired an extremely high-frequency compressed pulse through Kearny-Fuchida space at a target world. The pulse traveled the immense distance instantaneously, just like a ship. Though the energy required for a single transmission was of the same magnitude as for a jump, the range of an HPG pulse was 180 percent to 200 percent farther than the maximum jump distance. When completed, the system would effectively cut the average communication time between Terra and the farthest-flung worlds of the Periphery from over a year to less than five months. The brand-new station transmitted the first HPG message on New Year's Day, 2630. In tribute to past communications pioneers, DeBurke's first message said, "Watson, come quick. I need you."

In less than two decades massive HPG transmitters linked more than 95 percent of the Terran Hegemony worlds. The League's member-states were provided with a small number of large transmitters, known as Class A or prime stations, and with a much greater number of Class B HPG transmitters. Under the Star League Communications Network (SLCOMNET), all prime stations transmitted to the other prime stations every six hours. Class B transmitters transmitted every twelve hours to a maximum of three Class A prime stations. The network of Class A stations was known as the First, or Prime, Communication Circuit, while the Class B stations were known as the Outer Communication Circuit.

During the later years of the Star League, the massive Department of Communications had to employ private corporations to provide some of its services. Starlight Broadcasting Ltd., for example, provided the necessary personnel to staff the vast SLCOMNET's widespread stations. Communications Enterprises Inc., based on Terra, was the sole provider of hardware to support the vast, intricate HPG network that held the Star League together.

Working in unison with the Department of Communications, these corporations played a key role in creating and sustaining man's golden age. This era of peace, prosperity, and expansion lasted some 150 years, from 2601–2750. Unity existed among the stars, yet the member-states of the League continued to fight "hidden wars" during this time, and when First Lord Cameron of the Star League died unexpectedly, leaving his eight-year-old son as his successor, the leaders of the various member-states saw it as a chance to promote their own interests and power. Perhaps most treacherous among these was the Amaris family, rulers of the Rim Worlds Republic, one of the Periphery territorial states of the Star League.



When Richard Cameron reached his majority, becoming First Lord in 2762, he began a series of disastrous moves that further increased tensions between him and the High Council. The cunning Stefan Amaris pretended to be the young Richard's only friend and ally until he saw the chance to make his own move. With three-quarters of the Star League army out fighting in the distant Periphery by 2766, after New Vandenburg and 17 other Periphery worlds seceded from the Star League in 2765, the time was right.

THE AMARIS COUP

In late December of 2766 Amaris assassinated Richard Cameron, his family, and anyone else with a drop of Cameron blood, while his troops simultaneously seized 95 of the Terran Hegemony's 103 worlds. In order to prevent calls for help from reaching the Star League's other Member States, Amaris made the capture of the Hegemony's HPGs his first priority.

General Kerensky immediately called for a cease-fire in the Periphery and declared war on Stefan the Usurper. Though many in the SLDF clamored for an immediate strike against Amaris, the recent Periphery campaigns had stretched Kerensky's forces too thin to launch a successful campaign against Terra. Kerensky solved the problem by attacking the nearby Rim Worlds Republic, Stefan Amaris' Periphery kingdom. Conquest of Amaris' home territory gave the SLDF both the military supplies they needed and the action they craved against the tyrant they hated. Kerensky used the Rim Worlds conquest to buy time, training and building up his troops for eighteen months. In 2772, a revitalized Star League Army began its long march toward Terra.

During the initial twelve hours of the coup, the Rim Worlds Republican forces controlled more than 70 percent of the HPG stations within the Terran Hegemony. Another 20 percent were destroyed outright rather than risk them falling into the hands of Star League loyalists to warn the rest of the Inner Sphere of Amaris' treachery. With Terra under his heel, Amaris controlled the very heart of the SLCOMNET. He gave explicit orders that HPG personnel were to be captured rather than killed. He knew how complex and difficult to maintain were the HPG systems themselves. He could capture the equipment, but even a madman like Amaris understood the need for properly trained personnel to run the massive but delicate devices.

Most of the Hegemony personnel were captured quickly, too stunned by the sudden overthrow of the government to even signal for help. Some did escape and lived in hiding, waiting for the day when the Star League Defense Forces (SLDF) would return. Certain units, like the 3986th North American Infantry Battalion (The New Grunts) took to the wilderness of Hegemony worlds to fight a vicious guerrilla war that lasted until the liberation. Lances of the 191st Royal BattleMech Division, once the home of the Royal Black Watch Regiment, survived the initial slaughter of Star League units in the Hegemony and lived to join in the liberation of Terra. On New Earth, the chief technician sabotaged the transmitter rather than let it fall into Republican hands. He and his staff were executed for their resistance, but such acts were not uncommon as the mighty Terran Hegemony crumbled.

By February 2767 only a handful of trained Star League communications personnel were still alive and free. Most of these survived only by chance, being for one reason or another in one of

the other member-states. The ranking member among this group was the young Jerome Blake. At age 28, Blake had been the lead operations officer at the A station on the planet Oliver. When Stefan Amaris carried out his bloody coup in 2766, Blake was in the Free Worlds League, taking his first holiday in three years.

At the time of the Amaris coup, Jerome Blake was working for Starlight Broadcasting Ltd. on permanent assignment with the Star League Department of Communications. He, like other loyalists, sought out the SLDF and volunteered to assist General Aleksandr Kerensky's army in any way possible. With the Prime Communications Circuit either disabled or under Amaris control, General Kerensky assigned the young Blake and his fellow technicians the task of devising a way to maintain and use the remaining Class B stations in the Inner Sphere.

[Kerensky was a fool in many ways; the existence of the

JEROME BLAKE

Jerome Blake found himself thrust into the saddle of history. Born in 2739 on Terra in the small town of Galesburg in the former North American state of Michigan, Blake was a child prodigy who early in life became interested in engineering. He graduated from the University of Lambrecht at age 16.

Like many such prodigies, Jerome Blake was a serious, introverted person. He had little interest in other subjects or activities, and was too shy to make many friends.

Much of Jerome Blake's childhood was spent in study, which culminated in his decision to specialize in hyperpulse mathematics and physics when he began his university career. Very little information is available on the early life of Jerome Blake, the boy. This is due in part to the secrecy of ComStar as well as to the order to destroy records that came in the wake of the Amaris coup. The general impression is that the young Blake was basically a loner, awkward and uncomfortable in social situations.

Yet history would set this man apart. This single, almost invisible figure of a man would end up ruling the only surviving element of the mighty interstellar government of the Star League.

—From *Jerome Blake, A Provocative Look at the Man Behind the Machine*, by Clark Harter, New Avalon Press, 3037

[It should surprise no one that the Word of Blake has sent our operatives in the Federated Commonwealth a death warrant for the author of this unholy trash. His book portrays the blessed Blake as nothing more than a freak child genius, devoid of personality. Yet Blake's own journals show the depth of his character. May Clark Harter never sleep, wondering when we will make him pay for his blasphemy against Blake and his divine will.]



accursed Clans is proof of his divine madness. The Word of Blake views Kerensky as the man who single-handedly destroyed the Star League when he abandoned the Inner Sphere forever, taking most of the Star League army with him. Yet even Kerensky saw the holy light that the blessed Blake offered mankind.]

Our own archivists have questions about why General Kerensky opted to make use of Blake and the several dozen other surviving HPG techs. It is well known that the SLDF already had its own Communications Command and a wide array of portable HPGs. Blake's journals, however, obliquely answer this question by pointing out that running a station-size HPG required a much wider range of skills than operating a portable.

While the SLDF launched the Rim Worlds campaign, Blake set about the task of creating a makeshift Prime Circuit out of those HPGs that Amaris did not control. Though slow and cumbersome, this ad hoc circuit became the backbone of communications for both the SLDF and the Great Houses of the Inner Sphere. Profiting from the technical ineptness of the Amaris forces, Blake managed to tap their HPG transmissions, feeding vital information to the SLDF.

LONG ROAD TO TERRA

Over the next twelve years Kerensky and his army inexorably approached Terra, advancing from world to world. By the end of 2774 Kerensky and his allies had surrounded Amaris on a ring of worlds heavily occupied by SLDF troops. As Kerensky moved ever closer to the final battle for Terra, Jerome Blake volunteered his techs to lead advance communications recon teams. Their missions during landing operations were to restore operations in recaptured HPGs as soon as possible, crucial work because losses in earlier fighting had dramatically reduced the number of Kerensky's portable HPGs. Some of the first landing operations by Blake's special teams became lifesaving missions. With an HPG station returned to operation and under his control, the general could communicate with the other SLDF task forces for reallocation of troops and ships as needed.

The public viewed Blake and his teams of young men and women as swashbuckling heroes, civilians caught up in the most horrible calamity of all time. Holovids portrayed them as adventurers, yet Jerome Blake's journals clearly show that the team consisted more of technicians than heroes.

[Most of the hapless and primitive historians of the Inner Sphere have downplayed the role of our sainted founder. If not for the efforts of the blessed Blake, the liberation of Terra would have never been possible. To gloss over such feats cheats history and the people of the Inner Sphere of the truth.]

The technicians that were part of Blake's team were ingenious and innovative. When Kerensky's forces retook the world of Carver V, for example, the HPG was semi-operational, but its fusion reactor had been sabotaged by the Amaris forces. In a crude but successful rescue, a lone technician commandeered two crippled assault BattleMechs and hardwired their reactors into the HPG. It was just such cobbled-together field repairs that kept some semblance of communications operating within the Inner Sphere.

During the capture of Dieron, Blake personally led the team that reactivated the Class A HPG in the former capital city of Olivet. Deeply entrenched Amaris forces managed to break through the SLDF's defenses around Olivet and began firing on the HPG station. Three of Blake's team were killed outright and he took a head wound in the attack. Though suffering no loss of mental capacity, Blake did lapse into several short comas during his later years—attributed to the injury.

[Again we see the heretics writing their own version of reality. In truth these "comas" were times of Blake's greatest inspiration and foresight. In his own journal entries made following these meditations we see his most creative and innovative lessons for our blessed Order. Only thin science would attribute these times of deep meditation to old war injuries.]

When General Kerensky heard of Blake's injuries, he had him transferred aboard the flagship McKenna's Pride for treatment, testimony to the respect the general held for the young man.

LIBERATION OF TERRA

The battle to regain Terra was by far the most bloody of the entire civil war. The SLDF suffered heavy losses against the Space Defense System and the spaceborne Caspers that defended Terra. Jerome Blake had recovered from his wounds of two years earlier, but he and his team played only a minor role during the invasion because Amaris had destroyed Terra's HPG transmitter after Kerensky had recaptured New Earth.

Blake landed on Terra once the Court of the Star League had been secured on September 29, 2779. He had witnessed the horrors of the Amaris occupation on other Hegemony worlds, but the damage to Terra, his homeworld, was the most devastating. Unity City was in ruins, millions lying dead in the rubble.

[According to the journals of the blessed Blake, he fell to his knees and wept upon his landing on Terra, having seen the worst that mankind could unleash upon itself.]

The prime HPG station on Terra had been located on the central campus of the University of Terra just outside Unity City. When Blake and his crew arrived, they found the building in ruins. Tied to the HPG transmitter controls were the dead bodies of the operators, killed two months earlier. The station itself was written off as a total loss, only salvageable for a few spare parts.

HILTON HEAD COMPLEX

Jerome Blake focused on his initial assignment of restoring communications. Terra, once the heart and soul of the Star League's vast communications network, now relied on back-up and small portable systems merely to communicate with the other worlds of the Inner Sphere. In December 2779 Blake traveled to Hilton Head Island in North America to visit a possible new center for the battered communications network.

Before the Amaris coup the Department of Communications had begun work on a new, upgraded HPG transmitting station there. The work was never completed, but Amaris had left the facility untouched. Workers for Communications Enterprises Inc. had carefully buried their precious communications equipment, then simply abandoned the complex. Jerome Blake's survey gave him new hope in his dream of repairing the Star League's communications network. Within a month construction resumed on the new HPG site.

HILTON HEAD

Hilton Head Island of Terra's old North America had been an important tourist attraction/resort during the latter years of the Star League. Communications Enterprises had spent enormous sums to purchase most of the island for their new HPG transmission complex.

The complex itself was to occupy a large portion of the island. Central to it would be a massive HPG transmitter and computer coordination system for managing the Star League's communications network. The central complex was an architectural masterpiece of marble and ferrosteel, both beautiful and strong enough to survive a direct nuclear strike.

Surrounding the complex was to be an enclosed living community for the workers, including housing projects, a massive park, a zoo, a library facility, as well as museums and some of the standard tourist attractions. It was to be a model Star League community, centerpiece of the most complex communications network ever created.

Hilton Head Complex was half-completed when Amaris launched his coup. Most of the construction workers fled, returning to their families and homes as news of the horrid events unfolded. Those who remained behind carefully and methodically mothballed the remaining construction materials, concealing them from the occupation troops.

When the Republican forces of Amaris' 203rd Republican Guards Division (The Sword of Saddam) landed on Hilton Head five weeks after the coup, they found nothing more than a handful of personnel making a meager living in the seemingly abandoned construction site. They set up camp within two kilometers of the central complex, but never stumbled onto the buried materials.

—From *Hilton Head, Then and Now*, Adept Will Kemp, ComStar Archives, January 3039

COLLAPSE OF THE STAR LEAGUE

On October 10, 2780, the Council Lords convened in the ruins of Unity City to discuss the future of the Star League. Nicoletta Calderon, with the backing of General Kerensky, nominated Jerome Blake for the position of Minister of Communications. Nicoletta argued that re-establishing the HPG network and maintaining it was of key importance to rebuilding the shattered Star League. Jerome Blake had proved to be politically neutral and had demonstrated his administrative and organizational skills during the war.

Blake was not present during the deliberations or even aware of his nomination. During the two-day proceedings by the High Council he was overseeing the installation of the primary fusion reactor on Hilton Head Island. When the time came for a final vote, all the House Lords voted to approve Jerome Blake, though John Davion agreed reluctantly.

[Even in the earliest of times, the accursed Davion bloodline proved itself to be dangerous and deceitful.]

Within a month the same Council stripped General Kerensky of his title of Protector of the Realm. Ten months later, they had still not been able to agree on which of them should become the new First Lord, and their long months of arguments, disagreements, and failed negotiations had left them angry and exhausted. On August 12, 2781, the Lords of the High Council decided to adjourn for the last time and to return to their respective realms, setting the stage for the complete collapse of the Star League. Blake's appointment was the only other matter the Lords of the Council ever agreed upon.

The citizens of Terra and the rest of the Hegemony found themselves leaderless after the devastating war. Protests were immediately launched calling for Kerensky to assume the mantle of power, but without the approval of the High Council. Kerensky turned down the call. In the eyes of Terrans, Jerome Blake seemed to be the next logical choice to lead the government and the reconstruction effort because he was the only existing Minister of the Star League. For the most part he remained an unknown figure, an administrator who did not seek public exposure.

[Again the heretics of ComStar play down the savior role that Blake assumed. His acts more than compensate for the heresy of the current ComStar.]

Blake initially balked at the idea of becoming the leader of the Hegemony, desiring only to serve the former Department of Communications. On a tour of Europe and Asia in January 2781 he saw how Terra, the jewel of mankind, had been left to rot by the Council Lords.

While making their own efforts to gear up for war, they had lifted not a finger to rebuild Terra, and the world's population was struggling simply to stay alive in the aftermath of the devastating civil war and occupation by the Amaris troops. Surveying the other Hegemony worlds, Jerome Blake found that they had fared no better under the iron rule of Emperor Amaris. Food, water, and power had been reserved for Amaris' troops. The Republicans drained conquered planets, stripping cities and the surrounding countryside of resources and supplies, often causing the loss of thousands of lives. Farmers were told to triple the yield of their farms or die. Universities and instructors suffered as well. Any research project with potential military applications was moved to Terra to be monitored by the Emperor's scientists. The rest of the university was destroyed. Professors who were of no value to the military were either killed or forced to build defenses for the local Republican garrison.

RECONSTRUCTION

In February 2782 Jerome Blake sent out messages to the Council Lords urging that they appoint someone to oversee the reconstruction effort. He did not seek the position for himself, but hoped to persuade the Council Lords to meet in person to discuss the appointment. Instead, most responded by suggesting that Blake do as he saw fit until they could agree to convene again, which was exactly what none of them ever intended to do. Blake reluctantly found himself holding the reins of the most massive reconstruction effort in mankind's history, despite his personal wishes.

[This is a fallacy. Jerome Blake wanted to take over the reconstruction effort. He never once balked at his responsibilities. His own journals refer to the reconstruction as a "challenge of unprecedented magnitude." Once more we see ComStar twisting the truth to portray our founder as a weak man, when, in reality, he sought only to save the huddled masses of mankind.]

Blake ordered all operational HPG stations in the former Hegemony to undertake an immediate census of the survivors as well as an inventory of all necessary supplies. In turn, he used these facilities as a distribution network to move supplies to the hungry masses. The SLDF contributed heavily to the rebuilding effort, primarily by offering transportation and manpower to Blake's informal government. His work in organizing relief efforts for the populace raised Jerome Blake's reputation and prestige among the common people to new heights.

A JEWEL DESTROYED

The most visible wound Terra suffered during the war was the devastation of Unity City and the Court of the Star League. During the initial stages of the Amaris coup, Stefan Amaris had deployed a small nuclear device outside the Court in an attempt to destroy the Royal Black Watch Regiment. More than a third of Unity City went up in flames by the end of the day as a result of the blast. The Star League Court was charred black on the north and west sides, but had been designed to survive such an airburst. Adding to the misery was the effect the firestorms had on the once-lush hillsides overlooking the magnificent city. With the ground cover reduced to ashes, the hills became virtually unprotected raw soil. Two days after the coup a torrential rain turned these same hills into a massive series of mud slides pouring down on the inhabitants of the ruined city. More than half of Unity City was entombed by the mud flows, which buried anything less than two stories tall. A standing swamp formed in the west of the city, a cesspool that remains to this day. In recent years ComStar has worked to unearth some of the ruined city, uncovering some important artifacts of life in the Star League capital.

—From *The Aftermath: Terra After the War*, by Randy J. DeCock, Rule Press, 2803



The reconstruction effort concentrated on Terra, the homeworld of mankind, which had suffered the brunt of the madness of the Amaris rule. Almost every major city had become a vast ghost town. The detonation of more than a dozen nuclear warheads had left some parts of the planet as zones of death and decay. Blake's methods paid off; by 2782 most of Terra's population was being housed and fed through efforts coordinated out of the Department of Communications. Blake believed that once Terra was restored, he could turn his efforts to the other Hegemony worlds. It was his private hope that the Council Lords would return, but Blake could not know that these were the final acts of the once mighty Star League.

In the spring of 2783 Blake issued a command to his techs to abandon reconstruction efforts in Unity City and to seal the Court of the Star League. He directed the SLDF relief forces to assist with the salvage operations of the former capital and the relocation of the surviving population. In his own prophetic words, "The devastation and death that remained in the once proud capital carries a taint that only centuries can cleanse. Until a new First Lord is appointed, the Court shall remain sealed." All governmental and administrative functions were moved to Hilton Head Island, which had become a massive complex of hurried construction and ad hoc administration. Since the day Blake issued that simple order, the Court has never been used, though it continues to be maintained in pristine condition by specially assigned personnel.



BIRTH OF COMSTAR

The civil war was over, but the Star League had collapsed. Military losses alone were staggering. The Star League Defense Forces had dropped from 486 divisions to 113. One hundred million people were dead, four times that many were wounded, and ten times more were left homeless. Equally disastrous was the severe damage inflicted on the interstellar communications network, the lifeblood of the Star League.

OPERATION EXODUS

When the High Council lords stripped Kerensky of his title of Protector of the Realm, they also ordered him to disband the Regular Army troops to create garrisons for the Terran Hegemony worlds. Though Kerensky's troops were ready to help him overthrow the High Council, the general refused to betray the Star League, the only government that had ever united humanity under one banner.

After the High Council members adjourned for the last time, effectively dismantling the Star League, each returned home to build up his or her own military. Many former Amaris troops found employment as mercenaries, and before long the Council Lords were also attempting to recruit among Regular Army regiments.

In that era Kerensky traveled routinely and regularly between New Earth, the SLDF's base of operations, and Terra. In late 2783 he arrived to witness the completion of the Hilton Head HPG, one of Jerome Blake's proudest moments. The First Circuit might still be in disarray, but at least Terra could quickly and easily communicate with any stations still functional.

After the official ceremony the two men met privately, at which time Kerensky confided his intention to leave the Inner Sphere. He told Blake that when he objected to the leaders of the Inner Sphere attempting to recruit among the SLDF, they had responded by asking for his resignation. On February 14, 2784, the general summoned more than 100 division commanders and an equal number of lesser officers to a secret meeting on New Earth, and together they laid their plans.

In an act of sincere respect and friendship, Jerome Blake agreed not to reveal the general's decision to the leaders of the Great Houses of the Inner Sphere. He also tried to persuade Kerensky not to completely abandon the Inner Sphere to the chaos of war that would surely engulf it in the days to come. When Blake saw that the die was cast, the decision forged, he asked the general to speak to those commanders who would remain behind and ask them to support his reconstruction efforts.

For the next six months Kerensky's quartermasters quietly acquired more than 200 transports as well as supplies and parts. Preoccupied with their own military preparations, the former Council Lords paid little heed to these preparations. During this time every Star League army soldier was allowed to choose for him or herself whether to stay in the Inner Sphere or join Operation Exodus. More than 80 percent decided to follow their beloved general into the unknown.

To the great surprise of the leaders of the Inner Sphere, the Exodus fleet departed known space on November 5, 2784, leaving the former Terran Hegemony defended by only a handful of unorganized SLDF units. True to his agreement, Kerensky had

asked the commanders who remained behind to pledge their assistance to Blake's reconstruction effort. Jerome Blake concealed the fact of these units' existence, letting the House Lords believe that they too had departed. In his journals of that time Jerome Blake wrote that he felt much like the legendary Dutch boy who had to try to hold back a flood by plugging a hole in a massive dike with his finger.

THE FIRST CIRCUIT

Three days after the Exodus, Blake had reestablished the Prime, or First, Circuit of the former SLCOMNET. The planets of New Earth, Barnard, Alpha C, Bryant, Procyon, and Dieron became the new First Circuit. It seemed a hollow victory, though, because Blake knew that tensions among the rival House Lords had escalated to the point where all-out war was inevitable.

In December 2785 he named the technician Conrad Toyama chief administrator of the Dieron HPG. The young Toyama had joined the Department of Communications shortly after Blake's appointment as minister, and before long earned the older man's respect. That esteem deepened as Blake observed Toyama's fine leadership in his new, important post.

As a member of the newly formed First Circuit, Toyama suggested that the Department of Communications was no longer a suitable name for Blake's organization. He proposed that the First Circuit adopt the name of ComStar, a blend of Communications Enterprises Inc. and Starlight Broadcasting Ltd., which had formerly sold their services to the Star League. Blake backed the proposal and from that point forward the organization was known as ComStar.

[What our revisionist brothers and sisters have ignored is the way Saint Toyama actually arrived at the name ComStar. While working with a repair crew at the Dieron HPG he accidentally received a brief high-voltage shock. Upon recovering he told of seeing the shade of Richard Cameron, who had whispered the name to him. Such was the enlightened manner in which the name of our original order came to be.]

The First Circuit was a small group made up of the chief administrators of the HPG transmitters on the former Hegemony worlds. Jerome Blake drafted a simple, two-page set of parliamentary rules and procedures for running the First Circuit meetings. His document called for a prime administrator to act as chair and president, but gave the First Circuit the power to veto the prime administrator's decisions by a majority vote. Blake's short memo eventually would become part of the Articles of ComStar, the basis of our blessed Order's law.

OPERATION SILVER SHIELD

The rebuilding of the Hegemony worlds continued for two more years. The First Circuit acted as the only governing body on Terra, assuming control of the former Hegemony worlds as well as the ever-growing communications network. As Prime Administrator of the First Circuit, Blake saw the ever-growing armies of the Great Houses of the Inner Sphere as a threat to the weak and virtually unprotected worlds of the Hegemony.

In his journal entries he prophesied that Terra would certainly be an important prize in any war among the former members of the Star League. As the birthworld of humanity, the planet's value was as symbolic as it was strategic, economic, or otherwise. Blake's deepest fear was that all the efforts to rebuild would be destroyed once more by the Council Lords' lust for power. In a secret meeting with the First Circuit in the winter of 2786, Blake outlined a daring plan for building a communications network that might survive the violence of the coming wars. Though simple in design, the plan was complex in execution. Dubbed Operation Silver Shield, the plan consisted of three key parts. First was to persuade the leaders of the Great Houses to agree to the neutrality of ComStar facilities, property, and personnel. Second, he would formalize the ComStar Letter of Credit as a common currency for exchange with all Houses for services. Finally, Blake planned to seize Terra and as many of the surrounding worlds of the Hegemony as possible before war engulfed the rest of the Inner Sphere. The action would take the House Lords by surprise, and thus it would succeed. As possessions of ComStar these planets would be neutral and provide ComStar with resources for possible future expansion.

The First Circuit members were initially shocked by the sheer audacity of the plan. Others, however, pushed for an even more militant approach, such as refortifying the Hegemony worlds in the event of war. Still others, a small minority, suggested that ComStar sponsor talks with the House Lords, with the goal of restoring the Star League. In the end, Blake persuaded the divided and skeptical First Circuit to back him if his negotiations with the House Lords regarding ComStar's neutrality proved successful.


In 2786 he undertook an historic tour to meet with the former Council Lords of the Star League. The goal of his "peace mission" was to protect what ComStar had created and rebuilt. Implementing his plan, Blake told the Lords that the motivation for his visit was

to win neutrality for all ComStar facilities and properties in the event of war. In return, ComStar would continue to maintain communications services, for a fee. That fee would be in a new form of currency, the ComStar Letter of Credit. The introduction of this new scrip had begun a year before with the virtual collapse of the Star League's economic structure. For obvious reasons Blake had not the slightest intention of informing any House leader of his designs to seize and control the former Hegemony.

He first met with Archon Jennifer Steiner of the Lyran Commonwealth who welcomed the idea if, and only if, her counterparts among the other House rulers would make the same agreement. In an outright lie Blake informed the Archon that the other Lords had already agreed to the plan, thus securing her approval. As Blake continued with his visits to the Great Houses, he used essentially the same technique to win over the other rulers. By the end of the year he had won promises that the House Lords would guarantee the safety of the communications network if Blake would guarantee ComStar's neutrality. In this farsighted act of diplomacy Jerome Blake saved the interstellar communications network as well as the high technology that had built it. Impressed by the success of talks they had privately thought doomed to failure, the First Circuit enthusiastically accepted Blake's authority and provided him with the base of support he needed to carry out the next step of his bold plan.

[To speak of Jerome Blake as a liar in his diplomacy is the highest form of blasphemy. In truth, such a technique has been a standard diplomatic practice for centuries. As a visionary, the blessed Blake knew he must use any means necessary to achieve his ends among the greedy, warmongering House Lords. The unholy ComStar's own records of interviews with those House leaders stand as testimony to this. They quote Minoru Kurita, for example, as saying that, "Accepting the Blake initiative is the logical course. Only a fool cuts his own throat before entering battle."]





The basic agreement outlining the neutrality of ComStar was a simple three-page document known as the Communications Protocol of 2787. It was signed separately by each of the House Lords, the crowning victory of Blake's diplomatic journey. Though the original document is vague in some areas, it solidly established ComStar's neutrality. Eventually the Communications Protocol of 2787 merged with other documents written by Blake to become the basis for the Articles of ComStar—the laws governing the Order.

The timing of the first two phases of Operation Silver Shield was fortuitous. With Kerensky and most of the Star League army vanished from the Inner Sphere, there was nothing standing between the House Lords and all-out war. In December 2786, when Minoru Kurita, Coordinator of the Draconis Combine, declared himself First Lord of the Star League, the other four House Lords quickly followed suit. What would one day be known as the First Succession War, a conflagration of unparalleled brutality, had begun. In the next 30 years the warring leaders of the five Great Houses of the Inner Sphere would cast aside the Ares Conventions, smashing cities, destroying vital industrial facilities, and butchering hundreds of millions of civilians. Few worlds would escape unscathed, and all would be affected by the complete disruption of trade, commerce, and communications.

While one by one the Great Houses were entering into the war, Blake met with the First Circuit on March 13, 2788, with revised plans for the military portion of Operation Silver Shield. Instead of attempting to recapture most of the former Hegemony, ComStar would make use of its dwindling resources to seize Terra alone, while stripping all materiel and useful technology from the surrounding worlds. The plan was quickly adopted, and Blake recruited several mercenary BattleMech regiments with the promise that they would be paid out of a huge find of spare parts and equipment that had been discovered near Unity City. Blake then arranged to meet with the former SLDF commanders who had promised Kerensky that they would be loyal to Blake and whose presence on Terra Blake had concealed. ComStar had at its disposal eight full divisions, half of them Mech-equipped, and an assortment of smaller units, but more than enough BattleMechs and other vehicles in storage to support a much larger military.

Blake appointed General Lauren Hayes of the 151st Royal BattleMech Division (Ulysses S. Grant Division) as the overall commander of the operation. Hayes' only true local opposition were several companies of House troops stationed on Terra by the various leaders of the Inner Sphere. They had sent the troops to Terra after the Exodus for "internal security" reasons, but the units posed a minor threat at best.

On June 25, 2788, 0600 hours TST, all HPG transmitters were shut down. Operation Silver Shield began in silence. The entire event was filmed and documented by ComStar, per orders from Blake and the First Circuit.

Prime targets were the remains of ground bases that had once backed up the Star League's space defense system on Terra, most of which fell quickly. Some opposition came from a company of House Davion troops working on a relief effort in Europe. They holed up in Berlin and battled it out with Hayes' troops for five hours before being wiped out.

The largest military confrontation during Silver Shield took place in a series of running battles in South America. Two former SLDF Mechanized Infantry Divisions left behind in South America refused to submit to ComStar's sudden use of military force to

BLAKE'S PROCLAMATION

People of the former Star League. I am Jerome Blake, Prime Administrator of ComStar. As of now, 0900 hours Terran Standard Time, military forces under my direct command have seized control of the Sol star system. ComStar is now officially in control of Terra and all former Star League facilities remaining in the system. From this time forward I proclaim Terra and the entire Sol system as neutral under the protection of ComStar, under the terms and conditions of the Communications Protocol of 2787. As the previous broadcast has made clear, ComStar has sufficient military force to defend the homeworld of mankind from any aggressor.

Our goals are peaceful. We seek the unity and prosperity of mankind. This action was taken to save lives in the devastating war that is unfolding. ComStar will continue to offer its communications services to all member states, as long as the Sol system and our neutrality are honored.

—Transcript of ComStar Transmission T-2788-06-28-0903:02:01, Alpha Plus Priority

control Terra. Using the Amazon rain forest as a natural defense, these troops refused to give way. Hayes attempted several Mech assaults, but found the terrain too difficult to wage conventional warfare. Using a combined attack with the 13th Royal Infantry Division (The Superstition Division) and remnants of the 251st BattleMech Division's Third Strike Regiment, she finally managed to force the two divisions to surrender, but not until both sides had suffered heavy losses.

At the end of 72 hours the First Circuit stations resumed transmission to broadcast scenes of Blake's military takeover of Terra. His willingness to use such blatant force sent a clear message to the former Council Lords that if any of them attempted to attack Terra, it would cost them dearly. Jerome Blake also transmitted a short message to the people of the Inner Sphere.

So preoccupied were the House Lords of the Inner Sphere with fighting one another and attempting to gobble up whatever they could of the fallen Terran Hegemony that Blake's announcement took them completely by surprise. Suddenly they were denied access to Terra, the womb of humanity. Documents uncovered by ROM three decades after Operation Silver Shield revealed that Minoru Kurita and Kenyon Marik intended to attempt to seize Terra proper at some time during the First Succession War. The other Inner Sphere leaders would surely have contested such an action with military force. Thus did Operation Silver Shield spare Terra further death and destruction.

After Blake's transmission each of the five Lords sent curt messages to Terra, claiming that Blake had betrayed the intent of their previous accords. But none dared challenge him or his control of Terra. Perhaps each one secretly believed that he or she would have plenty of time to deal with the rebellious Blake once his or her army had successfully beaten all other opposition.



T H E F O U N D A T I O N S

Y E A R S

Now that Blake officially, "held the title to Terra free and clear," he sought to consolidate his holdings before the rest of the Hegemony crumbled inward around him. Within five days of the completion of Silver Shield, ComStar DropShips descended on New Earth, the former headquarters of the SLDF. For the next eight days they stripped the facility of every shred of equipment and military hardware, carefully loading up the goods. Everything was transported to Terra and meticulously mothballed, with great pains taken to conceal the vast amount of military hardware recovered. In Blake's own words to the First Circuit, these 'Mechs represented "an insurance policy" against interference by the warring Great Houses.

PROSPERITY AND PRINCIPLES

Though Jerome Blake had spent most of his life as a technician and administrator, he now showed a natural talent as a political economist. Until now ComStar had been operating in the red because of its massive reconstruction projects, the organization having run up huge debts with each of the Houses. Through the creation of the ComStar Letter of Credit, Blake now managed to pay off those massive loans. Carefully managing the rate of exchange by manipulating the price of transmissions, he used the vast HPG communications network to take advantage of price/demand fluctuations as the First Succession War raged on. In the spring of 2802 a jubilant Jerome Blake announced to the First Circuit that ComStar was earning a true profit for the first time since its formation.

This picture had its dark side, however. To strengthen ComStar's economic position, Blake often chose to restore the communications network first on worlds that were destined to earn ComStar the most profit. For that reason, more than 50 percent of the worlds once linked to the HPG network were still excluded from communications in 2802, while virtually all contact had been lost with the Periphery planets, worlds lying beyond even the Inner Sphere. Internal audits in 2802 indicated that ComStar had reintegrated almost 40 percent of the former Star League worlds, but that was still far less than during the peak years of the SLCOMNET. Though some historians believe that Blake ignored the Periphery purely out of a profit motive, internal ComStar documents of First Circuit meetings indicate that Blake may have been more motivated by a general mistrust of the Periphery. In at least three direct statements he lays the blame for the destruction of the Star League on the secession of New Vandenburg and 17 other Periphery worlds, the spark that ultimately ignited the greatest civil war mankind had ever seen. It would be several generations before the far reaches of the Periphery could re-establish contact with the rest of the Inner Sphere.

[Again we are plagued by twisted truths. When fully researched, it is obvious that the "statements" referred to here have been taken totally out of context. Nor were the blessed Blake's motives as simple or weak as mere profits. Money meant little to Jerome Blake,

who even at his most powerful led a spartan life. As ever, his prime motivation was service to mankind. Blake knew that restoring communications to the most heavily populated worlds meant the improvement of more lives of more people in one fell swoop.]

EXPANSION YEARS

Jerome Blake's leadership of ComStar lasted 31 years. During that time he laid the groundwork that would define the philosophy, operations, and structure of ComStar for centuries to come.

One of his deep beliefs was that ComStar must retain its purity by remaining somewhat isolated from the "outside world," and he used the organization's bureaucracy and technocracy to accomplish that goal. Any member who discussed even the most mundane technology with outsiders was severely punished and could be expelled from the organization.

Being something of a mystic Blake believed that the decline of civilization was a form of punishment that humanity was suffering for its sins. It was also obvious by this time that the scope of the destruction of the wars being fought around him would eventually destroy civilization completely unless some individual or group undertook to guard precious technological and scientific knowledge. This Jerome Blake considered to be ComStar's highest purpose: the maintenance and preservation of human knowledge at all costs. Thus, ComStar became a haven for all manner of technicians, prospering while the rest of interstellar society was tearing itself to shreds.

During Blake's tenure ComStar continued to expand its services, improving and upgrading its stations and restoring a regular short-distance mail service to supplement its HPG transmissions. The ComStar Letter of Credit (forerunner of the C-bill) had begun to serve as a medium of exchange between both rival and friendly houses, superseding House currencies in the interstellar marketplace.

Under Blake's leadership, the First Circuit, now the absolute governing body of ComStar, barred all but its own members from its meetings and imposed a "secret-society" mentality on its subordinates. An internal security force known as ROM was formed in 2811 (see below) to help prevent leakage of technological information to the outside and to help thwart defection of ComStar personnel to the Successor States. ROM quickly became feared and respected throughout ComStar, punishing not only "treason" but also "doctrinal" (i.e., policy) disputes with dispatch and efficiency.

In 2791 the First Circuit created the ComStar Archives Branch to document the massive displaced population of the Inner Sphere. Many families became separated because of the ravages of war, and so ComStar organized a gigantic family/genetic tracking network to assist in reuniting scattered individuals. Also the Sol Administration Branch was formed to oversee the maintenance of Terra, Venus, and Mars and the civilian populations of those worlds.

MERCENARY REVIEW BOARD

One of the longest-lasting branches of service Blake founded was the Mercenary Review Board. Developed as a means to monitor and control mercenary contracts, the project might have seemed beyond the traditional scope of ComStar, but each of the House Lords responded with enthusiasm to Blake's proposal for such a board.

The Mercenary Review Board allowed ComStar agents to serve as brokers for all mercenaries and their employers in the Inner Sphere. After negotiating a contract, an employer would turn over the full amount of money (plus a 5 percent handling charge) to local ComStar authorities. ComStar, in turn, would advance as

much of the payment as it saw fit to the mercenary unit for necessary purchases and operating capital. Upon successful completion of their contract, the mercenaries would collect the balance (less a second 5 percent handling charge).

Arbitration of contracts by the Mercenary Review Board proved a valuable safeguard on both sides. Any unit failing to perform contracted services after taking an advance would find itself unable to evade ComStar's almost universal reach. ComStar would inform other potential employers of a rogue unit's actions, and had the power to threaten an interdiction against any House employing such a unit. ComStar could generally be trusted to return money to the original employer when a unit skipped on a contract, and in the interim, to use the money for profitable investments. To ensure fair dealings on the part of employers as well as those they hired, Blake provided for a panel of ComStar administrators to hear claims concerning breaches of faith and to judge the veracity of complaints. Upon reaching a verdict, the panel would broadcast its findings throughout the Inner Sphere. As the reputations of mercenary units and their employers have a bearing on subsequent negotiations involving other units or Houses, violating contractual terms offered little profit to any concerned. Through the Mercenary Review Board's variety of activities, ComStar functioned not only as a communications service, but also as a mercenary guild, an inter-League criminal extradition service, and a banking house, all of which added considerably through the centuries to ComStar's power and prestige.

In 2956, approximately a century and a half after the founding of the Review Board, soldiers of fortune set up the Mercenaries Guild in the Inner Sphere. The Guild was intended to protect the rights of mercenary troops and guarantee certain conditions of employment. Though the short-lived Guild apparently broke up in 2968 over members' inability to abide by Guild standards in contract negotiations, historical research has shown that the Guild fell victim to the organized and determined opposition of ComStar, which saw the Guild as a threat to its own preeminence as a neutral arbiter of inter-House dealings. The only remaining vestige of the Guild is the few, scattered Guild Hiring Halls not taken over by ComStar, where mercenaries and prospective employers can seek one another out.

The Mercenary Review Board survived for 300 years until the time of Primus Myndo Waterly's ill-conceived Operation Scorpion, an attempt to impose a Communications Interdiction over the entire Inner Sphere. After she bungled the attempt, the House Lords refused to acknowledge the authority of ComStar's Mercenary Review Board. Instead they set up a more "neutral" version of the Review Board on the Wolf's Dragoons world of Outreach.

[Primus Waterly was no fool. If anything, she saw the threat to the word of Blake and responded as would any loyal member of our Order. Scorpion failed only because of the corruption created within ComStar's ranks by Anastasius Focht and Sharilar Mori. The equally corrupt House Lords declined to accept our blessed Order's mediation, not out of mistrust for ComStar or even the Word of Blake, but because they seek more power for themselves. As Blake saw, this egotistical lust for power will eventually lead to their downfall.]

GREAT MINDS THINK ALIKE

Many people do not realize that the ComStar Mercenary Review Board was not formed as a result of some vision of Jerome Blake, but rather at the request of Draconis Combine leader Minoru Kurita.

In the winter of 2789 all the Great Houses of the Inner Sphere were having problems with mercenary units. These scum often fled in battle or sought to blackmail their employer for higher fees in the middle of a fight. Their lack of morals and ethics made them undesirable as warriors, yet the Combine had little choice but to use them.

During the campaign for Imbrial III I learned personally of their deceitfulness when the 201st Republican Lancers (The Longhorns) were sent into battle, only to turn and flee. Had I the airpower to spare I would have shot their DropShips to dust. We won the battle despite the heavy losses caused by their betrayal.

In a transmission to Jerome Blake, Coordinator Minoru Kurita mentioned the growing unruliness of the mercenaries. I was present and saw the content of the message. Minoru suggested the creation of a policing agency that was neutral yet served all Houses. Imagine our shock when only a week later Jerome Blake announced the formation of something to be called the Mercenary Review Board, claiming that he had devised the concept. History had once again cheated the Dragon.

[To take the word of one of the most vicious warlords ever to char a world to a cinder is foolishness. In this interview Warlord Scoble claims that history cheated his precious Combine of an honor. In truth, it was the brilliance of Jerome Blake that conceived of and created the Mercenary Review Board, just as he did so many other innovations.]

—Warlord Scoble (DCMS), quoted in *The Mercenary Through History*, edited by Allan Dysart, Stewartson Press, FWL Publishing Ltd., 3053

PUBLIC IMAGE

The raging hell of the First Succession War provided ComStar with numerous propaganda opportunities. During the Combine's invasion of Trolloc Prime, for example, ComStar HPG personnel successfully located shelter for more than three thousand refugees. During the Eridani Light Horse's strike against Sendai in revenge for House Kurita's killing of the mercenaries' families, ComStar evacuated more than twelve thousand refugees, sheltering them in three different facilities in the Draconis Combine. Such actions gave ComStar the aura of a benevolent organization in the eyes of the civilians, an image that Jerome Blake encouraged and continued to promote.

In 2796 Coordinator Minoru Kurita was assassinated on Kentares IV. In retaliation his son Jinjiro called for the death of every citizen on Kentares, leading to the mass slaughter of more than 90 percent of the world's population. ComStar personnel were not spared.

The head of the Kentares HPG station, Nolan Mordiki, continued to transmit news of the horrors he was witnessing, even as the Kurita forces were besieging his station. Though ComStar protocol neither authorized nor approved such an action, Nolan eventually rose to become a member of the First Circuit for his bravery and daring during the massacre.

By 2800 the reconstruction of Terra was nearly complete. For the most part the people of Terra had come to accept ComStar as their true government, a kind of benevolent dictatorship under the control of Blake and the First Circuit.

[Hypocritical words from those who follow the murderer Focht.]

Jerome Blake, meanwhile, continued to be visionary. The war raged around him and his world, a conflagration that Blake foresaw would continue for several generations and that would destroy most of the high technology perfected in the golden age of the Star League. In Blake's own words, "ComStar is the only hope of preserving the future of human beings in the Inner Sphere."

CREATION OF ROM

The spring of 2811 brought the proof of Blake's words. Having lost a majority of her nation's technology to the First Succession War, Chancellor Ilsa Liao of the Capellan Confederation sought to restore her realm's technological base by bribing ComStar technicians to defect to the Confederation.

Shortly after the first attempt to entice techs away from ComStar, a group of "terrorists" attempted to seize control of the HPG station on the Capellan world of Nanking. They might have succeeded, if not for the brave efforts of the station's technicians and chief administrator. Using their knowledge of the station's layout and a handful of weapons, the staff managed to ambush the "terrorists," killing them all. Though the Capellans denied any involvement in what they called "an act by independent terrorists," the First Circuit called for an immediate investigation. The investigation turned up proof that the Capellan government had sent the "terrorists" to seize control of an isolated HPG as part of a larger plan to gain control of all of ComStar's HPG stations in the Confederation.

The evidence was thin at best, but the possibility of an external threat was enough to force the Prime Administrator to act. Jerome

Blake proposed the immediate creation of a covert security force to protect ComStar's precious HPG network from both external and internal threats. Operatives would work as undercover agents within the ranks of ComStar's technicians, as well as posing as citizens. To be known as ROM, this secret intelligence network would locate threats to ComStar and eliminate them before any damage was done. ROM reported directly to the Prime Administrator. It took a full year for ROM to be activated, at which time Jerome Blake ordered its start-up activities to begin in the Capellan Confederation.

By the spring of 2812 ROM had begun to spread its operations throughout the Inner Sphere, but with most of its focus in the Capellan Confederation. The first test of the organization occurred when ROM uncovered a plot within the Confederation to assassinate Robin Bishop, Chief Administrator of the Bryant HPG and a member of the First Circuit. ROM also learned the names of the operatives assigned to the assassination attempt, as well as the time, date, and place. Jerome Blake himself placed the motion before the First Circuit to permit ROM to strike first, killing the would-be assassins.

DOUBLE AGENT

ROM served a number of functions within ComStar during the Blake regime. Most notable were its actions against the Capellan Confederation in their attempts to bribe members of ComStar to defect. Jerome Blake also used the organization as an internal security force. One of the lesser-known incidents of ROM's early years was the case of the spy Emma Gomez in the spring of 2813.

Gomez served as an assistant to the head of the HPG station on Carver V. In reality, Emma Gomez was an agent of SAFE, the Free Worlds League intelligence service, who had managed to penetrate ComStar's ranks. She was feeding transmission coding schemes back to the Free Worlds League and also passing information her station relayed for the First Circuit, especially that relating to ComStar's political positions.

ROM detected her actions and placed her under surveillance, even assigning a ROM agent as her roommate. After a three-month investigation ROM trapped Gomez and two of her contacts within ComStar. All were tried and sentenced to life imprisonment at the Phoenix Reeducation Center on Terra. The impact of the Gomez case was minimal in terms of damage to ComStar, but, historically, it was the catalyst to persuading Jerome Blake to increase internal security even further, a trend that escalated to new heights during the Toyama regime.

—From *ROM: The Blake Years*, by Jerrold Lewis, ComStar Press, August 3020

All the Capellan assassins were murdered by ROM agents only two days prior to the attempt—a clear message to Chancellor Liao. To underscore his contempt for her audacity, Blake sent a personal message to Ilsa Liao, subtly reinforcing the fact that ComStar now had the means to defend itself against all threats and had eliminated the current perceived threat to its personnel. Shortly thereafter, intercepted coded transmissions revealed the Chancellor's orders to her Maskirovka agents to cease attempts to lure technicians away from ComStar and to scrap plans to gain control of HPG stations in the Confederation.

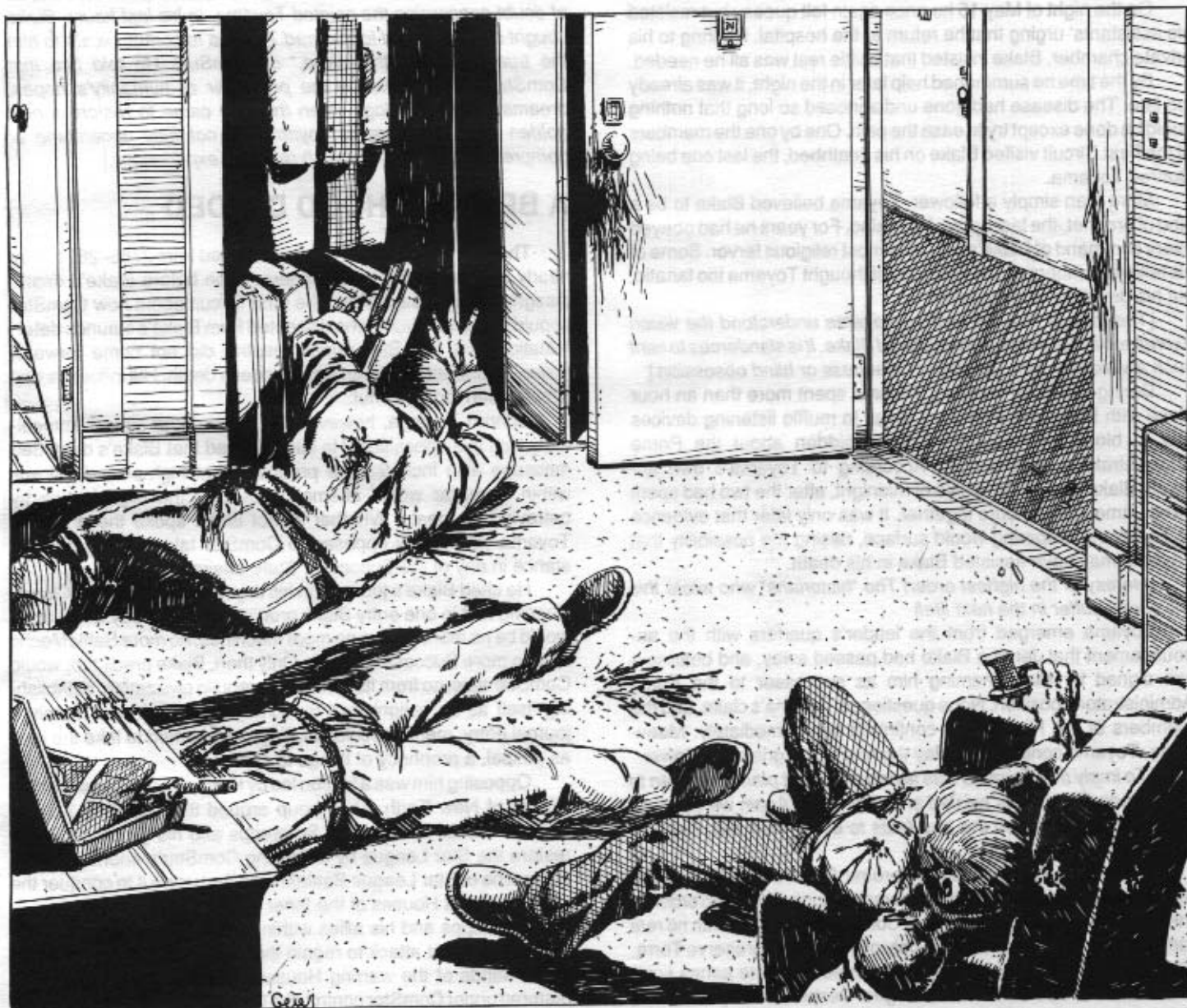
Though this incident never occurred "officially," ComStar had proof that the new weapon in its arsenal was deadly. Word of the episode was leaked to the leaders of the other Houses so that they, too, would understand that ComStar was prepared to deal swiftly and effectively with any threat.

As an internal security organization ROM also proved useful in locating weak links within the ranks of ComStar. Any corruption was dealt with summarily, the guilty individuals placed on trial and sentenced to reformatory/re-education camps (prisons) on Terra.

As time began to take its toll on Jerome Blake, he occasionally hinted that he might retire from service to ComStar and become a simple private citizen. But with no family ties, ComStar was all that Jerome Blake had.

[And all he ever needed or wanted.]

As the years passed Blake began to devote more time to writing than to the routine daily affairs of the First Circuit. He often spent months in a private retreat in the foothills of the Green Mountains. He was attended by many devoted followers, among whom was Conrad Toyama. Until his death, however, Jerome Blake remained active in the administration of his vast creation.





A N E W O R D E R

DEATH OF BLAKE

Jerome Blake collapsed and fell unconscious during a meeting of the First Circuit on May 11, 2819. For several years he had been having occasional seizures, believed to be related to his injuries during his years working with the SLDF, but this attack was by far the worst.

He was immediately rushed to the Hilton Head medical facility, where he seemed to recover several hours later. The doctors held him for observation, diagnosing his condition as symptomatic of a 24-hour virus. He was released the next day. What no one detected or suspected was that Blake carried a strain of Ultorson's disease, an incurable illness that was almost always fatal.

On the night of May 15 he once again felt queasy but resisted his assistants' urging that he return to the hospital. Retiring to his private chamber, Blake insisted that a little rest was all he needed.

By the time he summoned help later in the night, it was already too late. The disease had gone undiagnosed so long that nothing could be done except try to ease the pain. One by one the members of the First Circuit visited Blake on his deathbed, the last one being Conrad Toyama.

More than simply a follower, Toyama believed Blake to be a kind of prophet, the last hope of mankind. For years he had obeyed every command of Blake's with an almost religious fervor. Some of his fellow members on the First Circuit thought Toyama too fanatic, but his devotion never swayed.

[The truth is that the sainted Toyama understood the vision expressed in the words of the blessed Blake. It is slanderous to taint such a visionary with the stain of madness or blind obsession.]

During their final meeting, Toyama spent more than an hour alone with Blake. He even took steps to muffle listening devices and to block the security cameras hidden about the Prime Administrator's bedchamber. According to Toyama's own account, Blake died at the stroke of midnight, after the two had spent three unmonitored hours together. It was only later that evidence of Toyama's tampering would surface, raising the possibility that Toyama may have assisted Blake in his death.

[Heresy of the highest order! The "historians" who wrote this will surely suffer in the next life!]

Toyama emerged from the leader's quarters with the announcement that Jerome Blake had passed away, and bearing a writ signed by Blake naming him as successor to the Prime Administrator's position. None questioned Toyama's claim, and the members of the First Circuit confirmed him immediately. Meanwhile, Toyama continued to play the role of the grieving follower.

[To imply that Toyama was laying any great plan other than to strengthen ComStar is twisted and perverted. Again we see how ComStar has rewritten the true facts to cover their own lies with even more lies.]

Conrad Toyama had all of Jerome Blake's private journals moved to a secure area under his personal control. He also ordered the immediate reading of the will of ComStar's founder. With no real family, Blake's testament spoke only of the need to preserve Terra. His will specified that his body be cremated and the ashes scattered over the Court of the Star League. Despite this express wish, Toyama announced to the startled First Circuit that he intended to

preserve Jerome Blake's body in a specially designed tomb on Hilton Head Island, saying that "he must be displayed as a shining light to all in our ranks."

Conrad Toyama was a crafty individual who many ComStar historians now believe carefully and meticulously plotted to gain control of ComStar. None were present in Blake's bedchamber to witness Blake passing on the baton of leadership to Toyama, and none could confirm what might have been Blake's last words to him. It remains a matter of contention to this day, with the strong possibility that Conrad Toyama managed to pull off a nearly perfect coup d'état, with little or no opposition.

[How sickening to hear historians working for Mori and Focht speak of coups d'état. Note the way the heretics plant their seeds of doubt concerning the sainted Toyama. In his last hours, Blake sought out and called for Conrad Toyama to communicate to him the true meaning, "the Word," of ComStar. He told him that ComStar alone would be the preserver of humanity's hopes, dreams, and technology when the time came to restore a new golden age. Doubters of Toyama do not fully understand or comprehend the depth of such religious experiences.]

A BROTHERHOOD DIVIDED

The First Succession War, which lasted from 2786–2821, very nearly consumed the Inner Sphere. Even before Blake's death, disagreement existed within the First Circuit about how ComStar should respond. Those who dissented from Blake's staunch determination that ComStar remain neutral did not come forward, however, until after our blessed founder's death. His influence had simply been too powerful.

Conrad Toyama, however, had to contend almost immediately with this opposition. He later claimed that Blake's deathbed message also included the prophecy that high-placed officials within ComStar would attempt to destroy the organization by betraying its ideals. Whether or not Blake spoke these words, Toyama was utterly opposed to ComStar taking an aggressive stance in any of the Successor State affairs.

He cited Blake's journals in his arguments to the First Circuit, claiming that in one entry Blake predicted a future day when there would be no more power, no more machines, no more BattleMechs and no more Succession Wars. Only then, Blake predicted, would ComStar emerge from its isolation to rebuild civilization, establishing itself as an enlightened theocracy. Though it was merely a journal entry, mere speculation, Toyama seemed to take the idea as gospel, a prophecy of things to come.

Opposing him was a faction led by Herman Schwepps, Administrator of New Earth. This group argued that ComStar had remained neutral for too long. Schwepps and his group wished to restore the Star League by deploying ComStar's enormous, hidden cache of Star League BattleMechs and using it to conquer the war-torn Great Houses of the Inner Sphere.

Schwepps and his allies within the First Circuit proposed to launch an all-out attack to regain the Hegemony worlds currently in the hands of the warring Houses. With the Hegemony again restored under ComStar control, the ComStar forces would regroup and strike once more, this time to beat the Great Houses into

submission. Knowing Jerome Blake's vehement position against such an interpretation of ComStar's role, the Schwepps group had seen Blake's death as a good time to come forward. If they could not persuade Toyama to the wisdom of their position, then they would seize power for themselves.

By July 2819, Schwepps had drafted his plan in a proposal to the members of the First Circuit and Conrad Toyama. The faction also called for the activities of ROM to be brought under control of the First Circuit rather than being directed by the Prime Administrator.

In reply Conrad Toyama announced that in Blake's journals and in their long final conversation, Jerome Blake had prophesied that the Inner Sphere would be consumed in generations of war, unprecedented in horror. As Prime Administrator, Blake had for years made numerous similar statements to the First Circuit. Blake had told Toyama that he had forged ComStar to be the savior of mankind, the preserver and holder of technology. Once the corrupted Great Houses of the Inner Sphere had destroyed themselves and their civilization, ComStar would rise from the ashes to reestablish the glorious Star League.

According to Toyama, Blake had told him that the mission of ComStar was a sacred one, a divine trust that only true believers were worthy to hold. In an impassioned speech, Toyama said that Blake had entrusted him with the destiny of ComStar as the savior of mankind. As further proof, Toyama would publish Blake's journals for all to read, going so far as to say that these writings of the former Prime Administrator would serve as a new bible for the true followers of ComStar's hallowed mission. He ended his long rhetoric with a call for Schwepps' resignation from the First Circuit.

In his own account of the occasion, Toyama claimed that for a five full minutes no one spoke in the First Circuit Chamber, or raised their eyes from the golden star inlaid in the huge room's alabaster floor. He claimed it was because it was the first time the First Circuit had been exposed to the true divinity of Blake's plans for ComStar. In reality they must have wondered at the true designs, indeed, even questioned the mental state of the man now in charge of ComStar.

[In truth the misguided followers of Schwepps must have realized that their time, the time of those who refused to believe, was drawing to a close, and that the corrupted future that they sought was neither attainable or possible. They must have seen their foul plans burning to a cinder in the holy light of our mission.]

Before anyone could mount a serious rebuttal, Toyama adjourned the meeting, saying they would re-convene two days later to discuss what steps the First Circuit would take to carry out the will and testament of Jerome Blake.

The truth is that Conrad Toyama had no intention of reconvening the members of this First Circuit. Within the hour he had summoned Michelle Dupreas, head of ROM, to a meeting. Dupreas, like Toyama, was a devoted follower of Jerome Blake, and quickly fell under the spell of Toyama's interpretation of Blake's words.

[Michelle Dupreas was one of the first to accept the true divinity of the word of Blake. To paint her as a simple-minded follower distorts her key role in protecting the future of ComStar. Her actions in the first hours of the Purification prove that her heart was untainted and that she was truly guided by the same vision that had inspired Blake.]

Michelle quickly organized her loyal ROM operatives to carry out the most important mission the secret group had ever undertaken.

THE PURIFICATION

Having unleashed the tremendous (and largely unseen) power of ROM, Toyama triggered a purge on a scale never before witnessed anywhere or at any time in the history of the Inner Sphere. Within 48 hours ROM agents had assassinated four of the six members of the First Circuit. The last to die was Herman Schwepps, from whom ROM interrogators pried the names of many of his supporters and allies before he was shot in an attempt to escape from his captors.

[Our heretic kin called this a "purge," but the truth is that this was a purification, a time of cleansing. Primus Toyama understood that if he did not purify ComStar's leaders, the organization would rot from within. This he could not permit, for only through ComStar could Blake's holy dream be fulfilled. Though violent, the Purification gave ComStar a more righteous order for future growth.]

Toyama's purge did not stop with the First Circuit but penetrated throughout every level of ComStar. Anyone who ROM or Toyama considered even remotely suspicious or untrustworthy became potential targets. Technicians who had signed on to work for ComStar merely to earn money were suddenly transferred to "re-education camps" located in isolated areas of Terra. These were gulags of torture and slow death for many.

[As with much of this alleged history, this claim is heavily tainted. In almost all cases, those who died in the Purification did so while attempting to escape. Many members interned in these camps were released after they had rediscovered the true meaning of Blake's word and will. To call these re-education centers death camps is irresponsible and deprives history of the knowledge of their true purpose.]

Many others who had even casually questioned the goals of ComStar, Blake, or Toyama's interpretation of Blake's ComStar ideals were assassinated outright. At the end of the purge, a full 20 percent of ComStar's technicians were either dead or imprisoned for life. The entire operation took place in less than a week, far too swiftly for anyone either inside or outside ComStar to do anything about it.

Toyama appointed his own supporters—all trusted members of ROM—to replace the vanished members of the First Circuit. In a matter of mere hours and days, ComStar had completely transformed, and the rest of the Inner Sphere remained ignorant of the unfolding events. Toyama convened a meeting of the new First Circuit on July 26, 2819, and announced changes to the structure of ComStar to be implemented immediately. With all opposition imprisoned or dead, no one opposed Toyama's bold reformation measures.

Stating that Blake's prophecy would become the focus of the new ComStar, Toyama announced the dismantling of ComStar's corporate hierarchy and the creation of a more plutocratic structure to be known as the ComStar Order. Trainees of "the Order" would now be known as acolytes, and technicians as adepts. The position of Prime Administrator was renamed Primus, and the planetary administrators became Precentors, with their support staffs known as Demi-Precentors. Pervading all levels of the organization (and responsible only to the Primus himself) was ROM, helping to ensure total obedience to the dictates of the First Circuit.

Perhaps the most revolutionary of all these sweeping changes was the requirement that membership in ComStar become a life-long commitment. Having joined ComStar, the individual would die

as a member. Given the ever-present threat of ROM after the purge, none dared raise a voice in disagreement.

[ROM is not a force of death and destruction, as implied here, but instead is exactly what Blake intended it to be: an internal security force for the protection of our blessed Order. ROM is no cult of assassins. We rely on its agents to preserve our blessed Order, to keep the peace, and to maintain our security.]

Following Blake's precedent, Toyama continued to hold First Circuit meetings in strict secrecy. These meetings created an air of internal paranoia within ComStar, but added a layer of mysticism to the organization's public image.

Toyama had laid his groundwork well. When the leaders of the Inner Sphere learned of the purge, some, such as House Davion, offered sanctuary to any technicians wishing to escape the long arm of ROM. Primus Toyama contacted Prince Paul Davion and informed him that any action on the part of House Davion to shelter the "renegades" from ComStar's "internal investigation" would result in a complete shutdown of communications services for that state. Within 72 hours the refugees were returned to the ComStar Precursor of Caph. When the other Houses learned of the incident, none of their leaders dared to interfere in ComStar's internal affairs, unwilling to risk the loss of communications in the midst of interstellar war.

The seemingly overnight transformation of ComStar was not without risks. Toyama knew that the key to ComStar's power was maintaining control over technology and communication. Through ROM he tracked and killed anyone who attempted to "escape their holy obligations" to the Order.

THE WORD OF BLAKE

Secure in his power, the Primus now saw a way to give the loyal disciples of Blake a true direction. Poring through the journals of Jerome Blake, he culled and published what he believed was the essence of the founder's thought and vision. Four months after the purge, Primus Toyama presented the First Circuit with the first copies of *The Word of Blake*, published excerpts from Blake's journals selected, annotated, and interpreted by Toyama himself. These writings he presented as proof of Blake's vision of the future of the Inner Sphere.

The Word of Blake spread throughout ComStar and served Toyama's purpose in providing the Order with a clear path and direct guidance. The book became required reading for all members of ComStar. In its long and sometimes rambling passages, Blake seemed to indicate that he had conceived of ComStar as a religious order years earlier, an idea that was consistent with Toyama's vision of the organization as the salvation of humankind, the keeper of truth and knowledge.

It is interesting to note that it was only a year ago, in 3052, that the original journals of Jerome Blake were unsealed for the first time since the era of Primus Toyama, upon the mysterious death of Primus Myndo Waterly. The originals reveal that Toyama distorted or completely corrupted the true meaning of Blake's words. Indeed, entire passages, including some revealing Blake's impressions of Toyama, are missing or so badly damaged as to be incomprehensible. We must now conclude that *The Word of Blake* is nothing more than a collection of half-truths and exaggerations put together by Conrad Toyama.

[They lie in the smallest and largest details in their quest to twist the facts to their own ends. The heretic Focht murdered Primus Waterly—there is no mystery about her death. And how quaint that Focht's demons have sought to rewrite history as far back as tainting the word of our blessed founder. Anyone who has read *The Word of Blake* must recognize it as an insightful and deeply religious tome that reveals the true destiny of the Inner Sphere. Some have compared this holy book to the prophecies of Nostradamus, a guiding light in the darkness of the Inner Sphere. Any other implication by ComStar's so-called "historians" is rubbish.]

By 2820 Primus Toyama had full control of ComStar. Under Dupreas, ROM had extended the purge to its own ranks, further solidifying its power and fearsomeness. Toyama had also deepened the Order's mystical trappings; his great love of ceremony led him to develop elaborate rituals for important events and contacts with the outside, from initiating a new acolyte to interdicting a world or state from ComStar services. In 2820, the Primus embarked on a tour of the capitals of the Great Houses to meet with each of the Inner Sphere leaders. The publicly announced goal of this diplomatic mission was to explain ComStar's new organization and structure. In reality, Toyama wished to explain personally to each House Lord how he had prevented a "renegade" First Circuit (under Schwepps) from attacking the Inner Sphere, supposedly using mercenary troops.

In light of the good tidings he carried, Toyama levied a 15 percent increase in transmission costs, claiming it was needed to "rebuild" ComStar's damaged infrastructure. The various lords of the Great Houses gave this "good news/bad news" approach a rather cold reception, but offered only token resistance. The only House leader who balked overtly at the price increase was Archon Richard Steiner of the Lyran Commonwealth. He would not make public appearances with the Primus, and only agreed to the new terms after what Richard claimed was "nothing short of diplomatic blackmail."


The Lyran Commonwealth remained a constant thorn in the side of Toyama's public image in the Inner Sphere. Archon Richard Steiner often questioned ComStar's motives in barely veiled criticisms, at times even hinting that he suspected the organization was a front for an eventual attempt to take over the Inner Sphere. Archon Richard Steiner was the only House Lord to ever publicly speak out against ComStar or to deduce Toyama's true motivations.

[Nowhere did Toyama state that he sought to take over the Commonwealth. Again ComStar's heretic historians have tainted the truth. Any ills that the Commonwealth suffered during this period were brought about by their own lust and greed.]

Matters boiled over when the Archon persuaded the Estates General to pass the Reclamation Act of 2823, requiring that ComStar's profits and property be taxed the same as any other "business" operating in the Commonwealth. The Primus knew he must react swiftly and decisively before any other House leader decided to follow suit.

The Primus called a special session of the First Circuit when the first of the Commonwealth's tax bills was due, the fall of 2823.

Toyama persuaded the First Circuit to pass the Exclusion of Tharkad Act, which called for ComStar's first Communications Interdiction against one of the Successor Houses. On October 3, 2823, a copy of the Act was transmitted to Tharkad and delivered to the Archon. Immediately afterward, the Tharkad Precursor shut down the capital's hyperpulse generator while ROM operatives removed and concealed the station's vital communications cir-



cuits. Adepts and other support personnel were evacuated off-world by a DropShip before the Archon could respond.

The impact and message of the Exclusion of Tharkad Act were loud and clear. Primus Toyama had, in one swoop, shown the House leaders that he was not afraid to use ComStar's power.

The Interdiction lasted almost a full year with little, if any, diplomatic communication taking place between the Commonwealth and Toyama's ComStar. Richard Steiner eventually bowed to public pressure in early fall 2824 and asked the Estates General to rescind the Reclamation Act. Within 72 hours of the announcement, the Tharkad HPG was reactivated and once again processing messages.

In the fall of 2824 the Primus undertook another series of diplomatic visits to the governments of the Inner Sphere, basking in the success of his political showdown with the Commonwealth. The goal of this mission was much simpler: recruitment. When ComStar became a quasi-religious organization, applications for membership dropped to a virtual trickle. Many war-weary civilians were unwilling to make a lifelong commitment to the Order or simply did not accept the Word of Blake, viewing ComStar as some sort of mystic cult. Even on Terra, where ComStar had controlled the civilian government since 2788, the ranks had diminished since Toyama's rise to power.

Several members of the First Circuit accompanied the Primus,

OUR MASTER'S VOICE?

The following passages present direct quotes from Blake's journals, followed by sections beginning with an asterisk (*), that indicate interpretations and in-depth explanations added by Primus Toyama.

On the Fate of Mankind

The war of succession that has consumed the fallen Star League is more horrible than any other before...A new Dark Age will descend on the Inner Sphere if this war continues for any length of time, people will be scattered on hundreds of isolated worlds and left to the fates, our priceless technology become no more than impotent magic in their hands...This endless war has no winner, with all of mankind the loser in the dark and dismal end. [The Fall 1:1-13]

*The blessed Blake sees the raging tide of war as one that will consume mankind, bringing about an age of darkness and despair. Technology will become worthless, as the factories and required skills disappear in the holocaust of this ongoing conflict.

On the Mission of ComStar

Terra's neutrality under our control guarantees that no matter what the leaders of the Inner Sphere do, something of the Star League and mankind will survive. Once the Great Houses have beaten themselves senseless and bloody, we can emerge, offering a new chance to recover what they have tried so hard to destroy.

All that saved mankind during its last so-called Dark Age were the churches and religions. These were havens for humanity's learning and they stood alone as beacons in the darkness and foulness that humankind had become, to preserve the history and knowledge...If ComStar is to survive into the future, it must look to these religions as a blueprint for surviving the wars that are unfolding around us. [Salvation 4:18-24]

*In this one passage, Blake has laid the foundation for the mission of ComStar, to thrive and to survive to re-light the lamp of civilization for mankind. Blake also foresees that by creating an oligarchy as the basis for ComStar, the organization's

survival is guaranteed during the war of succession that the House Lords currently wage. Only by patterning ourselves after those religions that survived in the past will ComStar live on to the future.

On the Operation of ComStar

The ideals of my followers must be higher than the petty, greedy politics of the House Lords. Politics is a game best played by madmen, and I am not mad...To use information to manipulate politics is tempting and, in many cases, justified...ComStar has one edge over the Great Houses: we control information and communication, tools more powerful even than an army of BattleMechs. There is a time to fight—to use some of the force we have accumulated—but this is tempered by the knowledge that it is better to allow our foes to pummel each other silly rather than be forced to attack them directly. Better to dance with the devils (House Lords) than to stoop to their level. [Salvation 4:1-17]

*Blake has outlined how ComStar is to respond. Use information and other ploys to manipulate our foes. Force is a last resort. He also indicates that it is better to deal with the House Lords through guile than to lay all our cards on the table. It will be ComStar's goal never to take part directly in conflict, but to make use of our greatest tool, information, to wage our wars. There will be times to use force, but those are the exception rather than the rule.

On the Future of ComStar

I believe a day will come when the fighting ends and we can emerge as the saviors...The victories will come for us one world at a time—then one House at a time—until we control everything. Mankind will not resist but will invite us to help rebuild, as we have done with blessed Terra. [Salvation 4:61-70]

*Blake has foreseen the day when ComStar will rule the worlds of the Inner Sphere. Mankind will openly invite us to rule because we have, by divine foresight, saved all knowledge for the time of the great rebuilding.

—From *The Word of Blake*, First Edition, ComStar Press, 2820



but this time the itinerary took them to the worlds of the Periphery rather than to the capitals of the Inner Sphere. On those planets Toyama found many recruits willing to join ComStar and support his cause, if only to improve their lot in life. The trip lasted a year and a half and was a great success.

[The Word of Blake offers much more than a means to improve one's material well-being; it provides direction and purpose. Yes, it is true that we seek to enhance the lot of the less fortunate, but there is more to it than that. Seek the inner peace that only the Word of Blake represents.]

In 2825 Precentor Judy Cheny of Barnard proposed a startling new concept to her fellow First Circuit members. She suggested that ComStar develop its own news-gathering and dissemination service to supplement its communications services. If the masses received their news from ComStar, the Order could easily use information to sway public opinion. Though the idea was originally proposed as another recruiting tool, the Primus recognized it as a powerful new resource for ComStar. By 2826 the ComStar News Bureau was in operation, with Precentor Cheny as its first head.

Primus Toyama seemed to hold the Inner Sphere firmly in his grasp when a threat to his dreams suddenly appeared from beyond the Periphery. The attack of the Minnesota Tribe on the Combine worlds of Svelvik and Trondheim in 2825 shook ComStar as much as the Draconis Combine. Proceedings of the First Circuit indicate that Toyama believed the attack was the vanguard of Kerensky's return with the Star League Army, a belief supported by reports that this unknown military unit possessed brand-new BattleMechs and used combat tactics similar to those of the SLDF. If the self-exiled

Star League troops had returned, it would spell an end to the prophesy of Blake and the future of ComStar.

The First Circuit responded by dispatching a dozen diplomatic envoy vessels to the Periphery area surrounding the Combine. These ships were charged with the mission of establishing and opening diplomatic relations with the mysterious Minnesota Tribe. For four months the JumpShips scoured the stars searching for some trace of the unit. They were able to follow the trail of the mysterious attackers into the deep Periphery toward the Federated Suns, but then all trace seemed to disappear near Valentina. Subsequent investigations by ROM failed to uncover further information on the attackers.

The First Succession War had wound down by 2821, more from exhaustion than any true reconciliation. By as early as 2815, near the end of this brutal conflict that spanned more than 30 years, the warring states had lost most of their FTL shipbuilding capacity. Each House concentrated economic resources into military production so intensely that they forced a major drop in the production of consumer goods, creating a severe decline in trade. This proved

ORIGIN OF THE COMSTAR LOGO


The design for the famous symbol of ComStar, a circle star with two downward-pointing beams, was commissioned by Primus Conrad Toyama in 2823. Knowing the value of a visual symbol to unify any organization, he announced a competition to choose an emblem for ComStar. More than 800 entries were submitted, and the Primus judged them personally.

The winning entry was submitted by Adept Stanfield K'wani. In his own words, the dark outer circle represents the dark times prophesied by Jerome Blake. The original drawing showed a star within the dark circle but the Primus modified it, removing all but two star points, leaving the rest as spokes circled in black. According to Toyama the star represents the light of mankind—technology and the enlightenment of Blake's words. Once the prophecies of Blake had been fulfilled the image would reclaim its star points.

The most striking aspect of the ComStar logo are the two star points. On the original design these were as they are now, elongated and pointing downward. According to the designer Adept K'wani, "the point on the right of the image represents communications and the other represents technology, the two bases of ComStar's true source of power in the Inner Sphere."

[It is a shame that such a symbol of purity has become tainted by the likes of Anastasius Focht and the bitch-Primus Mori. They defile the image. We of the Word of Blake maintain the symbol's true meaning by placing it in the hilt of our broadsword. In this way, we remember our common origins and the common destiny that we will one day share.]

—Adept Sheila Sooter, ComStar Archives File 7760356-OGDN, April 2825



particularly disastrous for those worlds relying on high-tech water purification equipment. Without proper maintenance or spare parts, many of these facilities began to fail, forcing populations to abandon the worlds or return to iceship technologies. By the war's end in 2821, water-rich planets had again become as strategically valuable as they had been 400 years before.

Only rumblings of armed conflict remained between the Houses. Without a raging war in the Inner Sphere, Toyama saw no way for ComStar to achieve its full zenith of power. Indeed, he sought to reignite the flames by ordering the ComStar News Service to

sensationalize the damages and losses from Jinjiro Kurita's infamous "Chain Gang" raids, so christened because House Kurita recruited the raiders who fought them from the ranks of disgraced warriors and the criminal class. Promising rich rewards, Jinjiro gave his three regiments of social misfits rudimentary BattleMech training, dropped them on target worlds in 'Mechs one step from the junk heap and left them to fend for themselves. Though many Chain Gang units surrendered at the first hint of battle, some fought ferociously, laying waste to towns and industries in their path. Primus Toyama believed that exaggerating the damage might help rally public support for retaliation.

Toyama relaxed somewhat when Chancellor Ilsa Liao led a driving attack into the Federated Suns, but her strike failed, costing Ilsa Liao her life. Apparently the leaders of the Great Houses were not yet ready to plunge once more into all-out war. In the years 2821-27, each attempted to rebuild his military, assigning the surviving scientists and engineers to those few worlds whose industrial capacity had not been destroyed. Tensions were again beginning to build along the borders of each rival state, but Primus Toyama could not wait any longer. Deciding to move matters along according to his own agenda, he conceived Operation Divine Intervention and proposed it to the First Circuit in early 2827.

One part of this plan would play off the emotions of Jinjiro Kurita to lure the Draconis Combine into reigniting war in the Inner Sphere. Using the vast resources of ROM, ComStar began to filter information about the composition and movements of the Draconis Combine Military Forces and the inner workings of its Internal Security Force to the Lyran Commonwealth's Loki agents. At the same time, the ComStar News Bureau played up the raids and border tensions between the Free Worlds League and the Commonwealth.

By 2830 Jinjiro Kurita was on the verge of madness, infuriated at being constantly outmaneuvered by the Commonwealth during his raids. He never realized that his military failures were due to ROM agents leaking troop movements to the Commonwealth. In 2830 Jinjiro launched an all-out offensive to restore the honor of his troops and his realm. Combine forces also struck at the Federated Suns, which was still attempting to recover from the Capellan Confederation's last offensive.

Primus Toyama was still not satisfied, however, because the Free Worlds League had managed to stay out of the fray. He wanted all the Houses at each other's throats. Even more tempting was the idea that if Toyama's plan to lure the League into the fight was successful, that fractured realm would eventually be ripe to become a ComStar state!

By the time Toyama's reign ended, the rigidity of the ComStar structure, the wide-ranging authority of the renamed Primus and Precursors of the First Circuit, and the all-pervasiveness of ROM had proved to be an effective combination. More and more of the litany and ritual of ComStar ceremonies became necessary for the accomplishment of ComStar operations. During Toyama's primacy, a ComStar acolyte might have uttered the "necessary" invocation prior to activating an HPG only because he feared a ROM agent would call him out if he did not. Less than 50 years later, a less sophisticated acolyte might utter the same invocation because he believed that the HPG would simply not function if he did not. The rituals created by Toyama took less than two generations to become ritual magic, in the shadow of the saintly figure of the blessed Blake.

WHO WERE THOSE MASKED MEN?

Our operatives on Richmond managed to penetrate the Combine's investigation team studying the attacks by the so-called Minnesota Tribe. The only concrete evidence recovered thus far has been the body of one of the MechWarriors of the Tribe. The pilot was using a *Lancelot* BattleMech of exceptionally high quality.

Of great interest was the MechWarrior's uniform. The coolant suit was an enhanced version of an SLDF prototype that had yet to reach production when Kerensky's Exodus jumped from the Inner Sphere. Naturally, our agent sabotaged the suit so that its design would not fall into Combine hands.

Though the warrior carried no personal effects, his suit displayed two interesting patches. One was the outline of the former North American state of Minnesota, with the numbers "331" faintly stitched on it. Our own archives indicate that the number and the symbol are similar to those used by the SLDF's 331st Royal BattleMech Division (The North American Division) that left the Inner Sphere with General Kerensky. The resemblance is strong but the symbols are not identical, indicating that the patch was new rather than an old one reworked.

The second patch was also revealing. It depicted a Terran wolverine, white in color, with bloodied fangs. Our searches have revealed no correlation or connection to the designation of any known military unit, meaning that it is a new or reorganized unit.

We conclude that this unit is indeed a surviving element of Kerensky's Exodus. Though we cannot substantiate this with physical evidence, the above items recovered point to a strong connection with the Exodus fleet. It can also be assumed that this unit has an existing technological and manufacturing base. Unfortunately, it has been impossible to determine either the current location or the destination of these raiders.

—From a summary report to the First Circuit by ROM Precursor Emilio Travis, Minnesota Tribe Investigation, Archive File 222-802, ComStar Archives



THE COMSTAR WAR

PUPPET OF THE PRIMUS

In June of 2821 Primus Toyama received word from the Precentor of Atreus that Jeannette Marik, sister of Captain-General Charles Marik, wished to join ComStar. The Primus was jubilant, for this opportunity was the chance he had been waiting for to penetrate to the inner circle of one of the Inner Sphere's Great Houses. The Primus himself attended Jeannette's indoctrination and training sessions to determine whether her intentions were indeed sincere.

Under orders from Toyama, Jeannette Marik received indoctrination far beyond the standard and was brainwashed by the Order. The Primus assigned various ROM agents to her training, and they regularly dosed her with dilcostat, a Star League-era drug used for mind control. Under the influence of dilcostat, Jeannette Marik's mind became so impressionable as to be a virtual sponge to absorb the ComStar doctrines pumped into her for weeks and months on end. Having genuinely desired to join the Order, she was even more susceptible to the conditioning.

[More lies. The truth is that Charles Marik sent his sister to join ComStar in hopes of using her to obtain intelligence on our Order. The Primus saw the very real need to purge her mind of misguided ways of thinking and false loyalties to the Free Worlds League. This tale of mind-control drugs is best left to mystery writers or the sick imaginations of ComStar's current historians—which ever is more twisted.]

An extended period of such mental manipulation transformed Jeannette Marik into an ultra-advocate of ComStar and the teachings of Blake. She often accompanied the Primus during his trips through the Free Worlds League, acting as a recruiter. Toyama allowed her to continue to visit freely with her family, then carefully extracted information from her after such contacts.

Though the Free Worlds League acquired considerable territory at the expense of the Capellan Confederation during the First Succession War, losses and destruction of worlds on its border with the Lyran Commonwealth more than offset its gains. Desperate for new materiel as the war decimated his industrial base, Thaddeus Marik had stripped SAFE, House Marik's intelligence agency, of funds to finance the manufacture of machines and ordnance. The ferocity of the fighting against Houses Steiner and Liao had cost the lives of Marik agents on countless planets, leaving Captain-General Charles Marik, successor to Thaddeus, with a badly shattered intelligence network. Only a handful of SAFE agents remained on most Lyran and Capellan worlds, and it proved

much more difficult for agents to infiltrate governments than it ever had in the pre-war era. Unable to rebuild his network, Charles turned to the only organization whose access to the entire Inner Sphere was virtually unrestricted—ComStar.

In February 2830 Charles Marik met privately with Jeannette on Irian during one of her many trips to the Free Worlds League. He asked her to use her ComStar connections to intercept communications regarding the military intentions of the Lyran Commonwealth and the Capellan Confederation. Adept Jeannette agreed to do so, then immediately brought the request to the attention of the Primus. Toyama finally had the tool he needed to bring the Free Worlds League into the Second Succession War.

The Primus told Jeannette that her brother's request was treasonous to ComStar and that Charles was only seeking a pretext for a war with the Lyran Commonwealth.

To prove it, he asked Jeannette to give her brother a document purporting to be a message from the Lyran court to the commander of the Skye Rangers. The message contained plans for an invasion of the Free Worlds League, with detailed orders to the Skye Rangers to strike against the worlds of Graham IV, Castor, and Callison. Ever-obedient to Primus Toyama, Jeannette passed the seemingly important transmission on to her brother on June 13, 2830. In the Primus' own words, "the fish has taken the bait."

[This "re-written" history paints Jeannette Marik as an innocent lured into the clutches of an evil ComStar and manipulated by a diabolical Primus bent on conquest. The reality is less exciting and more accurate. Our own historians have found evidence that it was Jeannette Marik, rather than the sainted Toyama, who developed the plan to deceive her brother. Even if ComStar's account of the matter were true, not all the blame can be laid on the shoulders of Conrad Toyama. Surely Jeannette must share some blame for the affair.]

Charles never questioned the authenticity of the smuggled message. After the savagery of Marik's conflict with the Lyrans in the First Succession War, he had no reason to believe House Steiner's denials that they planned to attack. Rather than be caught unprepared, Charles ordered his troops into a state of full readiness and developed his own plan of attack, hoping to preempt the supposed Steiner invasion. Marik also tried to open diplomatic channels, but it was too late. Both sides had become too wary, Marik of the supposed Steiner threat and Steiner of Marik's military build-up. As Primus Toyama had hoped, Marik's orders to beef up his border with the Commonwealth forced the Commonwealth to do the same. Neither side suspected the hidden hand of ComStar in this carefully manipulated dance leading to the brink of war.



DANCE OF DEATH

The Free Worlds League entered the Second Succession War when Charles Marik ordered his troops to attack Zwenkau and Senftenberg along the Marik-Steiner border. The order for the offensive of August 2830 was based almost solely on the intelligence information provided by Jeannette Marik and her contacts within ComStar—intelligence that was totally fictitious. Within a matter of weeks the border between the Free Worlds League and the Lyran Commonwealth was ablaze with attacks, counterattacks, and lightning raids.

Primus Toyama was thrilled by the success of his plot. Using Jeannette Marik as a pawn, ComStar had been able to directly manipulate a state of war between two major Houses of the Inner Sphere. The Primus, in his meetings with the First Circuit, began to further explore the use of this newfound power. Comparing the Free Worlds League to a drug addict, Toyama believed he could hook Marik on the information that ComStar provided, to the point that the Captain-General would do almost anything to maintain that source. Primus Toyama postulated that if House Marik became heavily dependent on ComStar information to wage its war, it would be possible to trick the FWL forces into a series of grave military failures. Seeing the war effort failing, the people of the Free Worlds League would call for a change in leaders, putting Jeannette in line to assume the Captain-Generalcy. In essence, the Free Worlds League would become a ComStar protectorate state.

[ComStar's historians write as if this were a solid plan that Primus Toyama laid out step by step. However, the meetings referred to barely touched on the subject. Many of the Primus' comments were merely hypothetical speculations, rather than a plan of action. This is pure fantasy on the part of Focht and his heretics, yet another attempt to undermine the historical foundation of The Word of Blake and the memory of the sainted Toyama.]

Between 2831 and 2836 House Marik won a series of grand military campaigns thanks to information fed them by ComStar. Communications on House Liao and House Steiner troop dispositions and movements proved to be extraordinarily accurate and contributed greatly to many of the Free Worlds' most spectacular successes, including the renowned 2832 offensive in which the Fusiliers of Oriente spearheaded a drive through the Commonality of Sarna, seizing the worlds of Berenson, Zion, and Kyrkbacker, and doing extensive damage to the defenders of two other worlds before being driven back by a desperate counterattack. Marik enjoyed similar successful incursions into the Lyran Commonwealth, again because of intelligence provided by Jeannette and her allies. As the Marik juggernaut came to seem unstoppable, the leaders of the other Great Houses began to suspect complicity between ComStar and the Free Worlds League.

To conceal her role as a secret agent of ComStar, Jeannette often assigned other adepts to carry her messages. This was the key factor that prevented SAFE from ever discovering whether Jeannette was acting on her own or as part of an overall ComStar conspiracy. Jeannette acted, of course, with the secret blessing of the Primus.

[Most of the files in ComStar archives from this period are incomplete at best. It is known that Adept Jeannette Marik did (directly and indirectly) pass some military intelligence on to the Free Worlds League government. No solid evidence exists to

prove that this was part of some alleged master plan on the part of Primus Toyama, however. It is just another of the smear tactics being used to undermine the authority of the man to whom we owe our current formation and organization. The truth is that ROM identified at least six ComStar adepts who passed military information to the Free Worlds League, all with the aid or prompting of Jeannette Marik. Any one of these could have played the role of grand saboteur, but no known evidence exists to link them to any plan or operation devised by the sainted Toyama.]

DARK HOURS, DARK DEEDS

Despite his success, Charles Marik was growing increasingly uneasy. Though his campaigns had produced some impressive gains, League forces had suffered their share of setbacks too, often under circumstances suggesting that the enemy had obtained advance information on Marik movements. After a time Charles began to perceive a pattern in these events, and became convinced that the source of those intelligence leaks was none other than ComStar itself. ROM operatives on Atreus secretly taped meetings in which Charles expressed his belief that ComStar was guilty of duplicity. He even went so far as to postulate that ComStar might be trying to cripple the League so they would be forced to beg for direct military assistance.

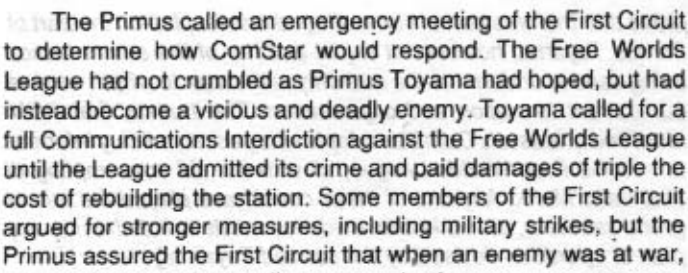
Charles did not, however, have tangible proof. To get the evidence he needed, the Captain-General devised a top-secret plan to expose ComStar once and for all. Only a handful of personally selected SAFE agents and the Captain-General himself were privy to the plans for Operation Cookie Jar.

In February 2837, Marik visited with his sister at her posting on Oriente, at which time he told her that his troops had recently discovered a lost Star League military warehouse on Cursa. He secretly ordered the Marshall of Oriente to transmit the same information to Atreus using an older military security code that was known only to ComStar.

Cookie Jar culminated on March 13 when House Liao struck at Cursa with three regiments of crack troops. Instead of capturing an SLDF warehouse, they hit a virtually abandoned world. Charles Marik had confirmed his suspicions; someone within the ranks of ComStar was selling out the Free Worlds League by passing its military intelligence to its enemies. Worse, he must have realized then that his own sister was involved in the betrayal, whether alone or with accomplices.

In a rage he ordered his strike fleet, the last combat JumpShips in the Free Worlds League, to the Class A station on Oriente. Their orders were specific: to destroy the hyperpulse generator and kill all ComStar personnel. When he issued the order, Charles Marik knew that his sister Jeannette was stationed there and that she too would die. The attack and the massacre that followed caught ROM completely off guard.

The massive Oriente HPG station had a working staff of more than 230 people, as well as an adjacent training center, community center, and hospice. On the morning of March 22 the foggy air around the station was abruptly filled with a seemingly endless barrage of missiles and PPC fire. The attackers gave no warning and hit with such ferocity that more than 132 civilians in the surrounding buildings also died. No ComStar personnel survived the attack that left the HPG facility a pile of scorched rubble and cinders.



The Primus called an emergency meeting of the First Circuit to determine how ComStar would respond. The Free Worlds League had not crumbled as Primus Toyama had hoped, but had instead become a vicious and deadly enemy. Toyama called for a full Communications Interdiction against the Free Worlds League until the League admitted its crime and paid damages of triple the cost of rebuilding the station. Some members of the First Circuit argued for stronger measures, including military strikes, but the Primus assured the First Circuit that when an enemy was at war, an interdiction on interstellar communications was an even more devastating tool and cost no innocent lives.

Toyama broadcast a simple message to every station in the Free Worlds League. In that message, he said: "The Free Worlds League has been placed under a full Communications Interdiction for violating the terms and agreements of the Communications Protocol of 2787. Until the League admits its violation and makes proper reparation to ComStar, in an amount equal to treble the cost of rebuilding the Oriente relay station, all communications into or out of the Free Worlds territories or protectorates are hereby suspended. So it is done in the name of the blessed Blake."

The Primus followed the public transmission with one to the ComStar Precentors operating within the Free Worlds League. It was an emotional message, transmitted via a fully holographic image of Primus Toyama seated behind his desk and with a portrait of Jerome Blake hanging behind him.

"This is a dark hour to test our souls and belief in our blessed Order," he said. "All ComStar personnel in the Free Worlds League are ordered to shut down HPG transmissions immediately. Remove all key holy software and data dumps and extract the principal communications code boards from their transmitters. These devices and software will be passed on to Precentors, who will assign the proper agents to conceal the items. All personnel will abandon their stations and travel to the appointed safe houses established in Emergency Protocol 201 A. Remain hidden until further notice. Consult the Word of Blake and seek his divine guidance against any evil that seeks to corrupt and destroy our Order. The Peace of Blake be with you."

Throughout the Free Worlds League ComStar personnel became the focus of a witch-hunt by the weak but ever-present SAFE agency. Rewards for the apprehension of ComStar adepts and acolytes were posted within the civilian community, while SAFE agents hunted down any suspect like a rabid animal. Soon there was no place safe for ComStar personnel within the Free Worlds League.

MARIK GIVES IN

During the first six months of the "ComStar War," ROM and SAFE squared off in a covert war of assassinations and terrorist acts while Houses Liao and Steiner mounted full offensives against the Free Worlds League. The secret war between the intelligence agencies was, for the most part, inconclusive. Both sides lost operatives and other personnel, though SAFE suffered the heaviest losses.

ComStar HPG compounds became islands for their inhabitants, cut off from external supplies and communications. ComStar personnel at first enjoyed some support among the civilian community, but soon each compound was systematically surrounded by Free Worlds League troops. The message that Charles Marik sent

COMSTAR COMPOUNDS

One of the most impressive achievements of Jerome Blake was his concept of integrating hyperpulse generators into a compound. During the Star League era, HPGs were installed in semi-fortified structures that usually formed part of a normal community. Prime Administrator Blake noted that the vital HPG stations had been nearly defenseless against the Amaris forces, most of them falling easily into the hands of the Usurper. In contrast, ComStar's new HPG compounds would be micro-fortresses, difficult to capture and capable of sustaining the occupants without outside contact for prolonged periods.

Even today most of ComStar's compounds follow some (if not all) of Blake's earlier specifications. Rather than rely on local power, each HPG is equipped with its own fusion reactor (a dramatic shift from the Star League era). The reactor and the HPG housing are encased in blast-proof concrete and steel. Each compound also includes housing for all staff, and is fully stocked with food, water, and other supplies to last up to a year and a half. The entire complex can be sealed for security and environmental defenses.

The outer grounds are usually protected by a ferrocrete wall with high-tech Star League-era surveillance scanners and equipment. Some compounds even deploy small, carefully concealed minefields on the grounds.

Under each HPG is a network of tunnels for storing supplies, spare parts, and so on. Some even support on-site medical facilities, complete with surgery. Escape tunnels into the nearby community and/or countryside also exist, totally concealed from view or detection. Adepts may use these tunnel systems to gather food, intelligence, or even to conceal some of their HPG equipment during an interdiction. ROM apparently maintains safe houses near almost all compounds, and many of these can be accessed via these elaborate tunnel networks.

Some of these tunnels were designed to house BattleMech-size equipment, hinting that Jerome Blake foresaw the possibility that ComStar might one day need to arm itself. Almost every compound also has a storage facility, including some so large that they can serve to repair and house BattleMechs.

Despite the obvious sturdiness and military layout of these compounds, their exterior architecture is designed to be both pleasing to the eye and to conceal some of their fortifications and complexity.

—Morgan Levaux, "ComStar Compounds and Layout," *Engineering Times*, Toman Press, New Avalon, 2899

was clear: the Captain-General was willing to use force to protect the League, even against ComStar.

The military war had a more defined winner. Neither the Liao nor the Steiner forces suffered from the lack of communications and intelligence that suddenly plagued the Free Worlds League. More than a dozen League-held worlds fell within six months. Without firing a shot, House Liao regained every world it lost in the previous seven years of fighting as the Free Worlds League army pulled back its perimeter and abandoned its conquests. Both House Davion and House Kurita sent troops to take advantage of the situation, lured like sharks to the bleeding carcass of the Free Worlds League. They hoped to dismantle House Marik's domain, removing at least one player from contention for the leadership of a new Star League.

Charles Marik saw that without communications to coordinate a counteroffensive, he would have to fight a standing defensive war. Stripping entire worlds of their defenses, he redeployed troops to key strategic worlds. This consolidation of troops and BattleMechs forestalled any quick victory by an enemy, but the Free Worlds League was still crumbling.

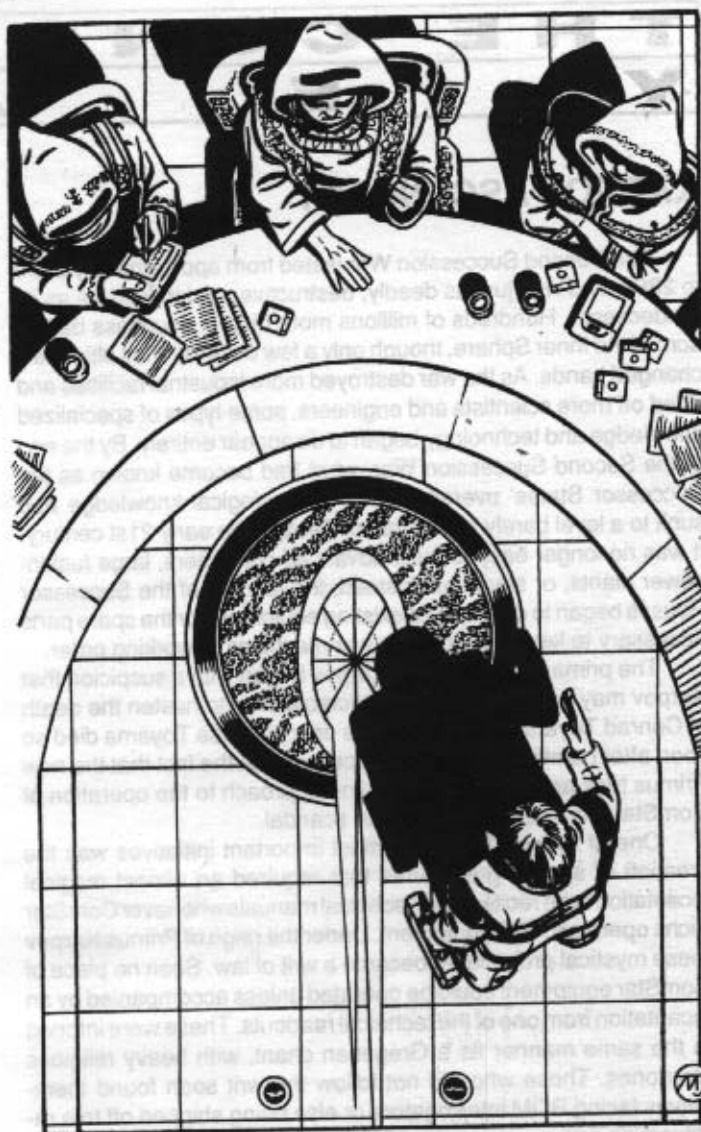
The proverbial straw that broke the camel's back was a renewed Lyran Commonwealth offensive in August 2838. With support for Charles failing throughout the League, the new offensive quickly consumed Shiloh's defenders, and there was evidence that the Commonwealth was readying itself for one massive push. The Captain-General saw little hope of sustaining another two years of strictly defensive operations and knew that it would be next to impossible to mount an offense without communications. Finally forced to admit defeat, he sent his youngest son Garth to Terra aboard the JumpShip *Dark Regret*. The ship traveled under the white flag of truce.

Garth Marik's mission was to accede to the terms of the Communications Protocol of 2787. He arrived in late September and immediately met with the Primus and the First Circuit to discuss the terms of truce. Toyama had hoped that the Free Worlds would be so weakened by the consequences of the Interdiction that Charles would instruct Garth to request ComStar's direct intervention to save the League. To Toyama's surprise, Garth Marik simply communicated that Charles was ready to accept the responsibility for destroying the Oriente HPG and pay the damages.

Despite his disappointment at failing to achieve his ultimate goal with the Interdiction, Toyama pressed for damages above and beyond the original terms, asking compensation for the loss of life during the covert war between ROM and SAFE. Garth Marik was not negotiating from a position of strength for the League, but he rejected the Primus' additional terms, saying that House Marik could never accept them. The tone of the negotiations remained tense throughout, but by the middle of October the two sides had come to terms. Primus Toyama dispatched his JumpShips throughout the Free Worlds League to deliver the message that peace was restored to his adepts and acolytes.

On November 9, 2838, the First Circuit communications relay once again was in operation throughout the Free Worlds League, with almost 70 percent of the League's HPGs already up and running. The others, with the exception of the Oriente HPG, were on-line by the end of the year. The devastated Oriente station was rebuilt some 20 kilometers from the original site and was completed in 2841.

[The site of the original HPG compound became a "peace park" maintained by ComStar until 3052, when the caretaker operations were assumed by the Word of Blake.]



Although Conrad Toyama had been successful in bringing ComStar closer to meeting his vision of Blake's prophecies, he failed in his dream of driving the Free Worlds League into such total submission that it would become a ComStar protectorate/state.

[But let no one forget that Toyama taught the whole Inner Sphere the power of ComStar—an even greater victory. The Exclusion of Tharkad did not have nearly the impact of the Interdiction of the Free Worlds League.]

Realizing that some of his own base of support in the First Circuit was weakened by the compromising end of the conflict with the Free Worlds League, the Primus began to think of retiring. Handpicking his successor, he named Precentor Raymond Karpov of Alpha C as the heir to his post. Toyama did not step down, however, until April 2837, when he suffered a massive stroke and died in his bed. The man who had denied the deathbed wish of his predecessor succeeded in having his own ashes stored in the abandoned Court of the Star League.

The first act of Primus Karpov was to name Conrad Toyama a saint in the blessed ComStar Order.



THE CONSOLIDATION YEAR

KARPOV ASCENDANT

The Second Succession War lasted from approximately 2830 to 2864, and was just as deadly, destructive, and indecisive as its predecessor. Hundreds of millions more died in countless battles across the Inner Sphere, though only a few dozen worlds ultimately changed hands. As the war destroyed more industrial facilities and killed off more scientists and engineers, some types of specialized knowledge and technology began to disappear entirely. By the end of the Second Succession War, what had become known as the Successor States' overall level of technological knowledge had sunk to a level barely above that of Terra in the early 21st century. It was no longer easy to build advanced computers, large fusion-power plants, or starships. Instead, the leaders of the Successor Houses began to cannibalize existing equipment for the spare parts necessary to keep their current war machines in working order.

The primacy of Raymond Karpov began with a suspicion that Karpov may have used an undetectable drug to hasten the death of Conrad Toyama. Perhaps it was only because Toyama died so soon after naming Karpov his successor, but the fact that the new Primus took an even more hard-line approach to the operation of ComStar than Toyama fueled the scandal.

One of Primus Toyama's most important initiatives was the creation of special procedures that required an almost magical incantation to be recited from technical manuals whenever ComStar techs operated HPG equipment. Under the reign of Primus Karpov these mystical procedures became a writ of law. Soon no piece of ComStar equipment could be operated unless accompanied by an incantation from one of the technical readouts. These were intoned in the same manner as a Gregorian chant, with heavy religious overtones. Those who did not follow the writ soon found themselves facing ROM interrogators or else being shipped off to a re-education camp.

[Again our errant brothers have misunderstood the intention of this writ. Primus Karpov knew that in the dark years to come mankind would lose almost all its knowledge of high technology, as predicted by the Word of Blake. Karpov took a lesson from the history of Terra, where religious orders had used chants to carry on their work even through the darkest of times. These chants and prayers were the means he used to preserve and to pass on this precious technology. The chants took on religious tones because ComStar IS a religion—the religion of preserving mankind.]

Primus Karpov pushed Toyama's radical interpretations of the Word of Blake even further, envisioning ComStar as a theocracy. Though some of his changes were minor, they endured for nearly two centuries and had a powerful symbolic impact. Karpov insisted, for example, that all members of ComStar wear white robes instead of the gray jumpsuits used by techs since the Blake era. In his own words, "white represents the purity of Blake's vision and of ComStar's intent." Often these robes were adorned with mathematical symbols taken from the holy "scriptures" of a physics book or technical readout.

Other changes were more subtle, including the establishment of nightly indoctrination sessions at each HPG to discuss the theology of ComStar and its role in the fate of the Inner Sphere. The First Circuit initially resisted the changes, wondering how anyone could be even more extreme than Toyama. Two members of the First Circuit stepped down in protest after the first of Karpov's

CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

One of the most startling incidents neatly buried in the history of ROM relates to Michelle Dupreas, the first head of the clandestine organization. She was one of the driving forces in the creation of ROM and built up the intelligence agency almost from scratch. Her successes during the ComStar War and the Second Succession War were unparalleled, yet her career ended in mystery and disgrace.

After her formal resignation from ComStar and ROM, Dupreas traveled to Italy, seeking reflection and quiet. Five days after her arrival her hovercar was involved in a high-speed accident outside Milan, killing her and burning her remains in the wreck.

ROM investigators ruled that Dupreas had lost control of the vehicle and crashed, but a detailed investigation of the local records revealed that several key factors were dismissed by the agents assigned to the case. The accident has marked parallels to other ROM-related assassinations as well.

These inconsistencies are as follows:

1. There is a distinct laser hole in the rear of the hovercar. Tests of the residue confirmed that some weapon had been fired at the Dupreas vehicle within the week prior to the crash, if not during the wreck itself.

2. The Dupreas itinerary for that day did not take her to the vicinity of the crash. According to two witnesses, she received a message to meet with a former co-worker at an abandoned factory near Milan.

3. The autopsy of Dupreas' body revealed normal burns from a crash at high speeds, but also evidence of a laser burn near the base of the neck against the bone itself.

The conclusion of my thesis is as follows: Michelle Dupreas, the first head of ROM, was assassinated on orders of then Primus Raymond Karpov and Janice Laidlaw.

—Professor Shantilly Westbury, "ROM and Its Founders," Ph.D. dissertation, Tharkad University, 3002. ComStar Historical Archives, File 300-255-09AJD

reforms, but this simply allowed him to solidify his majority with new appointments to the First Circuit.

Michelle Dupreas of ROM had been a long-time friend and associate of Karpov's, but the two found themselves on a collision course shortly after Karpov assumed the primacy. In the summer of 2838 Primus Karpov instituted Organizational Edict 3056, which called for the expansion of ROM. He planned to change the scope of ROM's mission from internal security to becoming a weapon against the technical experts of the Inner Sphere houses.

As the Second Succession War progressed, scientists, engineers, and industrial facilities became increasingly favored targets. By the end of the war, several specialized technologies had disappeared, and the Successor States' overall technological level had sunk to nearly the same level as that of Terra nearly eight centuries before. Unable to easily build starships, advanced computers, or similarly complex machinery, the leaders of the Successor Houses resorted to cannibalizing existing equipment for the spare parts necessary to keep their current war machines in working order. In the process, some within the Successor States acquired just enough knowledge of how their machines worked to make them—in Karpov's mind—dangerous to ComStar.

In his presentation of Edict 3056, the Primus cited several research projects within the Federated Suns, whose existence ROM had uncovered in coded transmissions sent from the bases. These transcripts indicated that the Federated Suns was making groping efforts to research hyperpulse technology for FTL message transmissions—a direct threat to ComStar's monopoly on interstellar communications. ROM also reported that the Lyran Commonwealth was carrying out similar attempts to recover the technology of ferro-fibrous armor construction, which had not been in use for more than 20 years because the wars had destroyed both the factories and the scientists and technicians who understood the manufacturing process.

Primus Karpov believed that all such technological research posed a direct threat to ComStar—not only to the organization's position in the Inner Sphere, but to the Word of Jerome Blake, who had foreseen that the Great Houses would ultimately destroy themselves. Karpov easily persuaded the First Circuit to his viewpoint, and they approved the edict almost without discussion.

Dupreas, however, believed that such blatant use of power was a direct violation of Blake's word, which emphasized that ComStar not interfere directly in the affairs of the Inner Sphere states. She appeared before the First Circuit to challenge the edict, but the Precentors would not support her against their extremist Primus. Karpov was so shocked by Dupreas' defiance that he called her a heretic to the true word of Blake, and demanded her immediate resignation. As the discussion escalated into argument, Dupreas finally called in two of her own ROM agents to escort her from the First Circuit Chamber. Within 24 hours she had tendered her resignation, not just from her post but from ComStar.

Primus Karpov named Janice Laidlaw, a staunch supporter of his policies, as the new head of ROM. She immediately laid the groundwork for implementing Organizational Edict 3056. She drew up a list of more than a hundred key researchers and scientists in the Inner Sphere who she and Karpov agreed should be considered "threats" to Jerome Blake's prophesy that the Inner Sphere would descend into a technological dark age. Precentor Laidlaw ordered ROM to begin planning covert assassinations of these individuals.

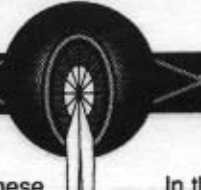


COMSTAR STRIKES

Under the free reign that the First Circuit now extended to ROM, its agents began to systematically assassinate the best scientific minds of the Inner Sphere. The plan was named Operation Holy Shroud and lasted for almost five years. During that time more than 300 scientists and researchers in the Inner Sphere perished. ROM made sure that none of these deaths could ever be traced back to ComStar, in most cases making them appear to be accidents. Fires, freak accidents, car wrecks, all took their toll on the great minds of the age. The House Lords suspected a plot, but each one believed the threat came from another rival House Lord, never suspecting ComStar.

Operation Holy Shroud spilled over into a number of other areas. Universities also became targets, especially those equipped with extensive research laboratories. On the Steiner world of Olympia, for example, Tharkad University's Hayden Medical Research Building was burned to the ground, but an investigation turned up only a faulty Bunsen burner left unattended as the cause. In the Federated Commonwealth the University of Saso's McGinnis Engineering/Science Lab suffered an explosion in the stored chemical facility that killed 20 people and leveled the lab. Taken separately, these acts of sabotage seemed unrelated and no one suspected more than bad luck.

A little-known element of Operation Holy Shroud dealt with an ongoing threat to ComStar, the continual discovery of Star League



caches left behind by the long-departed SLDF. Many of these caches were worthless stockpiles of ammunition that had long since outlived their usefulness. Others consisted of perishables or other expendable items. The caches that caused the greatest problems for ComStar were those containing stockpiles of weapons, technology, or even functional BattleMechs. Though some of the caches were small, others were vast treasure houses of tech and materiel. In reading ROM reports of cache recoveries, Primus Karpov grew fearful that one of these stockpiles might provide one or more House governments with HPG technology or allow them to recover some other lost technological marvel.

Special ROM teams were assigned throughout the Inner Sphere to track down possible Star League caches and to remove the technology before anyone else could find it. Other teams were assigned to infiltrate the Great Houses and to sabotage any efforts at recovering technology from the caches that ComStar could not prevent being discovered.

Karpov himself had been a Precentor during the Toyama regime and had taken part in the covert struggle between ComStar and the Free Worlds League. He considered the outcome of the ComStar War a lesson learned rather than a failure. In 2854 he persuaded the First Circuit to formally approve making a fixed number of acolyte positions available to the scions of the most powerful Inner Sphere families, namely those related to the ruling House lines or to prominent MechWarrior families.

Though the First Circuit members were apprehensive at first about opening the door of ComStar to the outside world, these new acolytes gave the Primus exactly what he had hoped to gain—detailed insights into the current status of the Great Houses and their levels of technology.

In the late 2850s problems began to surface in the one area where ComStar was assured control, within the HPG network itself. ComStar's efforts to strengthen and expand the vast communications network had succeeded too well. With the Terra HPG on Hilton Head acting as the main control system for the entire network via the First Circuit Class A transmitters, the increased communications load had dramatically slowed transmission time. As part of his reforms, Karpov increased the First Circuit to ten stations in 2857. The newest members were Precentors Arcturus, Oriente, Altair, and Capella. This massive upgrade of these HPG transmitters supported the new message load and left plenty of room for future growth.

With ROM sweeping the Inner Sphere's technology base free of competition, Primus Karpov turned his attention to the burgeoning organizational structure of ComStar. With more than a dozen new HPG stations recently opened in the Periphery, Karpov could see that structural problems were beginning to emerge within the organization. In an auditor's report on the status of the Order, he found that each HPG station had begun to "customize" its management structure. In some places five layers of management existed between the Precentor and acolyte levels.

Karpov recognized that this made it more difficult to control ComStar, for the key to his own power as Primus was tied to his ability to communicate directly with even the lowest-ranking members of the Order. With the proliferation of management levels, such direct contact often became impossible. In addition, doctrinal edicts now had to filter through so many levels that their intent was often garbled, if not completely lost.

Karpov addressed the problem by issuing the Doctrinal Edict of 2861, which formalized the process of naming a Primus. The current Primus would choose his/her successor, who would then

THE LOPEZ INCIDENT

Transmission Code: Velvet Level Access Only

Date: August 12, 2853

TO: Precentor ROM

FROM: Agent Fleeting Mirage

RE: Operation Holy Shroud, File 5001RAM, Lopez

Per our standing operating orders, I wish to report to you our success at infiltrating the Free Worlds League Delta Recovery unit at the digging site in the Foghorn Highlands on Lopez.

I and two other operatives have been assigned jobs as common diggers at the site, which appears to be a former Star League Defense Force training depot. The underground facility is in fair condition, and most of the excavation work is at the former entrance to the site, which is now buried under several tons of dirt seeded with mines—a legacy from Kerensky's departure.

Our probes indicate that at least 24 BattleMechs are buried inside and at least as many vehicles. The site also has storage containers of undetermined content. I fear that recovery of this lost technology may pose a direct threat to ComStar's position.

Per our previous discussion I recommend that news of this recovery be leaked to the Capellan Confederation as soon as possible. I have no doubt that this will make Lopez a target for a raid. In the confusion of the firefight, my agents and I will set off explosive devices to collapse the tunnel and destroy the contents.

Given the fact that the SLDF heavily mined the exterior and that it will take at least four weeks before any equipment can be removed, it is vital that Capellan forces be notified as soon as possible of this find. We can slow efforts by sabotaging equipment, but this may place our end plans in jeopardy.

The Peace of Blake be with you.

—Transcript from ROM File 90210-FWL: Star League Cache

[EDITOR'S NOTE: No record exists of any communications between the Precentor, ROM, or the Capellan Confederation during this period, but within three weeks of this report Lopez was attacked by a BattleMech assault battalion. There were neither survivors nor recovered technology left at the Foghorn Highlands digging site. All records of the site were destroyed in the battle as well.]

KARPOV'S IRON CURTAIN

Primus Raymond Karpov carried the religious direction of ComStar to lengths that shocked many both within and outside of the Order. His changes set the stage, in his own words, "for the preservation of our blessed Order. The Word of Blake states that only the great religions survive the darkest of wars, and my mission is to ensure that ComStar survives the dark age of mankind that is unfolding." His reforms were dramatic and his use of ROM was precedent-setting, especially his covert war against the technology being developed by the scientists and engineers of the Great Houses.

Other changes within ComStar under Karpov were more subtle. In order to protect his adepts from corruption by locals, the Primus instituted a rotational posting system. No ComStar personnel would remain on a given assignment or world for more than two years, and it became virtually impossible to infiltrate the ranks of ComStar.

—From *The Primacy of ComStar: Mad Rulers, Mad Times*, by Alexa Shao, New Wilde Press, March 2990

be confirmed by the First Circuit. The only formal organization recognized below the Primus was the position of Precentor of each world. The Precentor controlled the ranks of the adepts, the working technicians. Finally, at the lowest level of the hierarchy were the acolytes. Though this three-tiered structure already existed in many places, established in the time of Blake and Toyama, Karpov made it official.

THE VEDDAR AFFAIR

Primus Karpov formalized even more procedures following one of the most shocking incidents of his primacy, the successful penetration of ComStar by an agent of Loki, the Lyrans Commonwealth's intelligence organization. Working undercover, Rosemary Veddard rose undetected through the ranks of ComStar for three years, becoming an adept while passing vital information to the Commonwealth. She was discovered only after one of ROM's intensive sweeps through the ranks, but committed suicide before she could be interrogated. The Veddard Affair, as it became known, shook the halls of Hilton Head and the First Circuit as the first external threat in years to their power.

Karpov's response was to increase ROM's role in detecting outside agents. Using lie detection equipment and even drugs dating back to the Star League era, ROM began to test current members of the Order as well as subtly checking potential acolytes who wished to join. Those who did not pass the tests were either not admitted, or allowed to join and tailed by ROM to expose their contacts in the Great House governments. A review of the records from the first few years after the Veddard Affair show that ROM discovered and killed more than three dozen House agents as a result of these stringent measures.



W A R R E N E W E D

The Second Succession War had nearly run itself out by 2864, but Primus Karpov was still facing some of the same difficulties that Conrad Toyama had confronted earlier in the century. The leaders of the Great Houses had all but abandoned the conflict in an effort to rebuild their war-weary states. To Primus Karpov, as to Primus Toyama before him, the cessation of hostilities was the worst possible threat to ComStar. Should peace prevail for long in the Inner Sphere, the prophecies of Jerome Blake might not be fulfilled.

Karpov and the rest of the First Circuit feared that a prolonged

THE KARPOV LEGACY

Raymond André Karpov is one of the most misunderstood leaders of ComStar. Some historians consider him a religious zealot, blinded by the sudden power thrust into his hands. Others characterize him as a tool of the conservatives of the First Circuit.

The truth probably falls somewhere between. Karpov was neither charismatic nor cultivated, and so had little success as a diplomat. Everyone close to him considered him abrasive as well as extremist in his views. He was also a person of little mercy, the first Primus to make use of ROM as a tool of assassination and death.

Karpov, for all of his own personal flaws, understood human greed and arrogance. He played on these by sending information about the Shadow War raging covertly in the Combine to the Lyran Commonwealth, knowing that the egotistical Kuritans would punish all outsiders who learned of their difficulties in order to save face. As Karpov expected, the full force of the shamed Kuritans' wrath fell upon the Lyran Commonwealth. Not only did Miyogi Kurita need to save face in the aftermath of the Shadow War, but he also wanted to punish the audacity of Lyran traders attempting to expand their influence deep into the Rasalhague Military District. In 2866, the Draconis Combine launched an offensive against the Commonwealth worlds of Chateau, Icar, and Steelton that touched off the Third Succession War.

Despite the success of maintaining Blake's predictions about the fragmentation of human society through war, Raymond Karpov was growing disenchanted with the politics of the First Circuit. The conservatives wanted him to go even further in his theocratic reforms, while the liberals complained that he carried the word of Blake too far. Growing despondent and depressed, in 2874 he simply stopped attending meetings of the First Circuit for three months, instead spending his time at a ComStar hospice some three hundred kilometers from Hilton Head.

—From *The Karpov Years*, Precentor Meryl Gellman, ComStar Archives, 2883

peace would also spell the end of ComStar's monopoly on technology. Rumors that both House Kurita and Davion had approved research projects in an attempt to recover some of the technology lost in two centuries of ongoing war filtered in from ROM agents, this despite that organization's success in eliminating many Inner Sphere scientists and engineers. Similar rumblings emerged from the Commonwealth, the Free Worlds League, and, to a minor extent, from the Capellan Confederation. During his State of the Inner Sphere Report to the First Circuit in 2866, the Precentor ROM predicted that the Inner Sphere would be likely to recover all the lost technology within three decades.

The Primus reacted quickly. Following the example of his predecessor, Karpov used ComStar to filter information to the Lyran Commonwealth about the power struggle that had begun within the ranks of the Draconis Combine Internal Security Force, a conflict the people of the Combine dubbed the Shadow War. When Yoguchi Kurita, Coordinator Miyogi's predecessor, had placed the ISF under the command of the Kurita military, Miyogi's astute sister Roweena had stepped in to soothe the ruffled egos of the insulted ISF elite, and allowed the ISF to use her People's Reconstruction Effort to gain access to all portions of Kurita society. Miyogi, fearing his sister's growing power after the end of the Second Succession War, ordered the ISF to spy on her alleged "un-Combine" activities, not knowing how deeply Roweena had sunk her claws into the intelligence agency. The ISF split into pro-Roweena and pro-Miyogi factions. Rajiv Sulevani, an ISF agent fanatically loyal to the Coordinator, began a secret assassination campaign to rid the ISF of pro-Roweena operatives. Roweena's faction retaliated in kind. By 2865, more than a thousand *metsuke* had been killed in the Shadow War. ComStar "shared" this and other, deceptive information with the House Lords. To avenge this shame Miyogi attacked the Lyrans, drawing the Inner Sphere into war once more—the Third Succession War.

From the Combine's invasion of the Lyran Commonwealth's coreward territory, war soon spread across the Inner Sphere. In the years that followed, combat became such a fact of everyday life that the period has become known simply as "the Succession Wars." Nonetheless, campaigns during this period never matched the violence of the previous two wars.

At first the decrease in destruction and bloodshed appeared to be more a function of each army's reduced resources than a philosophical change in tactics. As time passed, however, and the exigencies of a scavenger economy took hold, each of the Houses realized it could ill afford further losses of vital resources. Gradually an informal set of rules of war evolved, similar to the Ares Conventions. Mech units and armies still fought over possession of operational factories, but neither side attempted to harm the facility itself. (The losers simply consoled themselves with the idea that they would win the planet in the next war.) Major Mech battles, especially between mercenary units, were often fought in stages, with both sides allowing enemy Techs to enter the battlefield during periods of truce to attend to damaged Mechs. Other Mech units, again especially mercenaries, revived the old tradition of surrendering to a superior force and paying a ransom to obtain their off-world release. Most important, everyone recognized the sanctity of

any side's JumpShips and strictly obeyed the prohibition against attacking such craft. Without JumpShips, the war for supremacy could not be waged at all.

A second outgrowth of the destructiveness of the Succession Wars was the rise of feudalism throughout the Inner Sphere. The central governments of the ruling Houses no longer possessed either the administrative machinery or absolute military resources to maintain centralized control over their territories. Instead, each House Lord ruled a hierarchy of planetary nobles. These nobles were often drawn from the leadership of the Lord's most elite 'Mech units, having won full authority over worlds in exchange for the pledged service of their BattleMechs.

Indeed, the years of conflict wreaked havoc beyond Primus Karpov's wildest dreams. He felt, however, that the obstructionist policies of an increasingly hostile First Circuit prevented him from exploiting the violence to its fullest.

Raymond Karpov stepped down as Primus in 2875, citing failing health as the reason. Most historians agree, however, that it was not his health but his weakened popularity that prompted him to step down. His decades as Primus had transformed ComStar into an organization of dark mysteries in which every member must constantly look over his or her shoulder for ROM.

[It should be noted that former Primus Karpov remained active within our blessed Order until his death in 2880. His humanitarian work in administering the Blake Medical Center in Europe earned him distinction and honor in his later years. He was canonized during the primacy of Yin Takami—a testimony to his legacy.]



SLOW CHANGE

In his later years Karpov may have had second thoughts about some of his more extreme reforms. As a compromise with his critics he had named the more liberal Andrea Marteen, Precentor Arcturus, as his successor several years earlier. Marteen enjoyed a wider base of support among the First Circuit and often moderated some of the high-pressure rhetoric of the former Primus.

Marteen's first three years as Primus were difficult, for the citizens of Terra had begun to chafe under ComStar's rule. Though ComStar had begun to rebuild and restore Terra from the devastation of the Amaris years, many still remembered the glorious history of the Hegemony. Several radical political groups began to agitate for the idea of a Terra independent even from ComStar, and those radicals built a following.

Though somewhat less harsh than Karpov, Andrea Marteen still recognized the groups as a threat to ComStar. When they stepped up their efforts to include terrorist-style bombings of ComStar re-education camps and other facilities, Primus Marteen organized her counterattack.

In a speech at Harvard University, Primus Marteen pledged to support a "Terra First" policy. Proposing an all-out effort to improve the life of the average Terran, she called for the construction of twelve massive arcologies in various parts of Terra. These megacomplexes would employ millions and would raise the standard of living for millions more. More important, they would provide the people of Terra with a concrete symbol of ComStar's commitment to the planet, which she hoped would eliminate rebellious thoughts of independence from their minds.

[To read this history one might get the impression that ComStar was against independent thought or reason. Nothing could be further from the truth. However, ideas that contradict the blessed Jerome Blake are inherently evil and dangerous. These were the types of corrupting thoughts that Primus Marteen hoped to eradicate.]

Primus Marteen also pressed for a massive recovery effort in the ruins of Unity City, capital of the former Star League. The goal was to recover some of the Star League technology as well as to prepare the site for the eventual reconstruction. She called for similar efforts on the terraformed worlds of Venus and Mars, where war damage still remained. Her impassioned speech drew some support away from the militant political groups, but others believed it was no more than political rhetoric.

The tables turned fully when the Black December group exploded a bomb in the Euro-English Channel Tunnel in the summer of 2877. Jerrold Komandi, the Precentor visiting from New Earth, was scheduled to traverse the tunnel for a speech in London at the time of the explosion, but a simple traffic delay saved him from his date with destiny. More than a thousand civilians were killed instantly in the bombing. Black December sent out several messages claiming responsibility for the incident and calling the Precentor of New Earth a liar and puppet of the Primus. ComStar immediately sent in huge numbers of rescue teams and relief equipment, but only a handful of lives could be saved. Black December found it had lost whatever support it might once have enjoyed.

The incident proved to be a turning point for Primus Marteen. The people of Terra were outraged at Black December's use of random violence to strike at ComStar. The civilians wanted more

freedom, but not at the price the terrorists asked. Too many innocent lives had been lost.

Marteen turned the terrorist issue into a propaganda bonanza. She called for a full investigation of the attack and demanded that the members of Black December be caught and put on trial. News broadcasts throughout Terra and the rest of the Inner Sphere kept the story alive. The scenes of dead children being hauled out of the ruins by ComStar relief workers were compelling and appalling.

ROM operatives allegedly discovered the hideout of Black December three months later, killing all the terrorists in the shoot-out that erupted as they tried to capture the members. The public was satisfied with the results, and even more so when construction began on the massive Kishmir Arcology, the first of the projected megacomplexes. Dissatisfaction with ComStar had all but evaporated.

Two centuries would pass before the truth would emerge from the sealed files of the ComStar Archives. Under orders from Primus Marteen it was ROM who had staged the so-called "terrorist attack." Only after Primus Waterly stepped down were the files opened and the truth revealed for the first time.

[Primus Waterly did not "step down"; she was assassinated. No new facts have emerged—this is just another attempt by ComStar to revise history to show that ours was not a benevolent religion, but

BEHIND THE SCENES

TO: Precentor ROM Joleen Weber

FROM: Primus Andrea Marteen

DATE: March 3, 2877

Karma Level Alpha Priority

I greet you, my sister in Blake. [EDITOR'S NOTE: The following classified record has only recently been unsealed.]

The recent protests by the civilians of Terra pose a direct threat to ComStar's future in the Inner Sphere. Such resistance by a few militants could spread out of control and soon threaten the very foundation of the will of Blake. As head of ROM, it is your responsibility to suppress this independence movement using whatever means necessary.

Having reviewed your original proposal, I believe that an "incident" resulting in massive destruction and even a great loss of civilian life may be effective in eroding this movement if the blame can be laid on one of the terrorist organizations. I recommend targeting Black December or the Terran Liberation Front (TLF).

No trace that might link your efforts to ComStar must remain. The alleged terrorists cannot come to trial—only pure justice need be administered, as Blake would have deemed necessary.

This matter and all documentation concerning it will be sealed permanently under my orders for Primus Level Authorization. No one involved can risk exposure in our lifetime. Assure your operatives that they will be protected by the Word of Blake.



rather a cutthroat band of killers. This "new evidence" is most likely a public relations gimmick on their part, designed to stir new interest in their waning organization. No physical evidence implicates ROM in the bombing. The memo they present as evidence most likely never reached the proper hands, and Black December probably acted on its own volition. The lack of any other supporting documentation dramatically weakens this alleged evidence.]

Like her predecessors, Primus Marteen often had to struggle with the disagreements among the First Circuit. Following the Black December incident several members accused her of complicity in the event. The economic downturn of 2878 created by the Primus' massive funding of the arcology construction projects made matters worse. With each passing month Primus Marteen found her support dwindling further.

Matters reached a head in 2882 when Primus Marteen proposed raising transmission rates to all of the Great Houses to help stabilize the C-bill exchange rate. A conservative element in the First Circuit used the opportunity as a wedge against the Primus, refusing to support this or any other economic reforms. The Primus met with the opposing Precentors privately and three days later announced that her successor to the primacy would be one of these conservatives, Dwight Kurstin, Precentor Caph. To no one's surprise the Primus' proposed rate increase passed within a month.

KURSTIN THE MAD

In his journals Jerome Blake had written that, "the greatest threat to the mission of ComStar will most likely come from within. Even the strongest oak tree can succumb to a disease that rots it from the inside out."

[ComStar quotes Blake correctly, but they fail to see that their abandonment of his word is one and the same disease.]

Such an internal threat surfaced in January 2901 when Primus Marteen suffered a fatal accident while she and Precentor Kurstin were touring the capital of Caph. The two were riding in her hover limo when the vehicle swerved to avoid hitting some refugees crossing the road. The hover car plowed into a building, exploding only moments later and killing the Primus. Stunned but not hurt, Precentor Kurstin had managed to crawl free just prior to the explosion.

A second car full of ROM security immediately secured the area and tried to rescue the Primus, but it was too late. As the successor to the Primus, Dwight Kurstin was swiftly whisked away to Terra for his own protection. Within a month he was confirmed the fifth Primus of ComStar.

In the meantime, ComStar had been investigating the somewhat strange coroner's report that the Primus had died as the result of a sharp blow that broke her neck. From what could be deduced from the remains of the heavily padded interior of the limo, the shock-cushioning material did not appear to have been breached. The results of the investigation were inconclusive at best, but the new Primus believed that it was an attempt to implicate him in the death of his predecessor.

Outraged, Primus Kurstin publicly denied any involvement in the accident, then ordered that the two investigators responsible for the case be arrested for contempt of his office; he later had them executed by a firing squad.

[Primus Kurstin was a sad man, driven to extremes. None can argue that he lost his senses later in his reign, but he would never have attempted to assassinate Marteen. The accident that cut short her regime was tragic, but not a sinister one.]

With each passing week Primus Kurstin became more convinced that the members of the First Circuit secretly accused him of complicity in the death of his predecessor. In reaction to his own paranoia, he ordered ROM to investigate several members of the Circuit for their possible involvement in the incident. From scrawled notes recovered after his death, it is now obvious that Primus Kurstin saw plots against him everywhere. Perhaps the stress of being thrust into a position of such power triggered a mental instability that had previously been latent.

Matters became even worse when the Primus made his first appointment to fill a vacancy on the First Circuit. It was customary for the First Circuit to confirm all appointments to their inner circle, but in the entire history of ComStar they had never vetoed an appointment to the First Circuit. When Primus Kurstin appointed Dana Kurstin, his first cousin, to the Precentor's seat for Barnard, all that changed.

Dana Kurstin had been an acolyte for a mere ten months when she suddenly became the center of controversy. The Primus claimed

that he was appointing her strictly on the merits of her skills and abilities, but the First Circuit argued that the young woman was too inexperienced for such a position of prestige and power. Several members of the Circuit, led by Precentor Marshall, implied that the young woman's appointment was based not on her skills but rather on her family ties to the Primus. The Primus took the failure of his candidate as a personal challenge to his authority by the First Circuit.

When word of these difficulties leaked somehow to the outside world, several leaders of the Great Houses also began to wonder if, in fact, the new Primus had plotted the death of Marteen. Both Elizabeth Marik and Joseph Davion II refused to attend Primus Marteen's state funeral because of the rumors and suspicions. A public snubbing by two House leaders proved to be too much for Kurstin. He began to see enemies everywhere, both within and outside of ComStar. When he learned that two young adepts were responsible for leaking the rumor, he ordered them executed without trial, which further eroded his already failing support.

In one particularly stormy session of the First Circuit, Kurstin called Precentor Kohler to the floor and accused him baldly of plotting against him. Kohler flatly denied the charge. Proclaiming Kohler a heretic and a traitor, the enraged Primus dismissed the First Circuit and ordered ROM to take the Precentor into custody. Within three hours of the end of the session all members of the First Circuit received a message from the Primus that Precentor Kohler had died of natural causes while still in custody.

No one believed it, of course, and they knew that the Primus had gone too far. If they wondered at the paranoia that made him see plots everywhere, now they realized for the first time that they had confirmed a madman to assume the primacy.

[Kurstin never ordered the death of Kohler, nor is there any proof that Kohler died by torture. The fact is that Kohler was so panicked that he might be tortured by ROM that he suffered a massive heart attack. Primus Kurstin was innocent.]

The Precentor of Procyon, Gregori Hartford, called for a secret meeting of the surviving First Circuit members. They met in the one secure place on all of Terra where no one from ROM or ComStar was likely to follow them, the empty halls of the Court of the Star League. Only there were they safe in the knowledge that the Primus could not overhear their conversations.

Gregori Hartford carefully laid out the options as he saw them to the other members of the First Circuit. ComStar law made no legal provision for the First Circuit removing a Primus from office, regardless of his/her mental or physical state. Besides, with ROM reporting directly to the Primus, there was no way to physically remove him from office. Their best hope was to leave Terra to see how the Primus would react, but at the same time ensuring that no hint of his mental condition leaked out, for fear one of the Inner Sphere leaders might try to seize ComStar's assets during this time of disadvantage. Despite her political differences with Hartford, Precentor Marshall gave her crucial support to the proposal.

Primus Kurstin was infuriated when he learned that the First Circuit members had left Terra. Ten days after their departure he sent a message to all First Circuit HPGs that he intended to be broadcast to every ComStar HPG, but the watchful First Circuit managed to intercept it.

This one-minute speech (later known as the Witch-Hunt Transmission) was all the proof that the First Circuit needed that their leader was indeed mad. Precentor Hartford had foreseen the Primus' move, however, and simply ordered the First Circuit to operate without central coordination from the Terran HPG. In other words, the First Circuit was imposing a communications interdiction against Terra itself.

The result of that action would cut off the Primus from the ability to rally ROM. Carrying it out required the Class A stations to manually manipulate the equipment, which meant running triple or quadruple shifts to keep up the transmission flow. Though messages moved more slowly, the Inner Sphere never realized that Terra and the Primus of ComStar were incommunicado. Nor did their intelligence services learn that a civil war raged within ComStar, tribute to the skill and speed of Precentor Hartford's plans.

When Primus Kurstin realized that Terra was under a semi-interdiction, he immediately ordered five ComStar JumpShips to take his edict to the rest of the Inner Sphere. He ordered ROM to assassinate the "renegades" of the First Circuit by burning them at the stake. Driven over the edge, Kurstin unleashed an internal purge reminiscent of Primus Toyama's Purification. Many innocent adepts and acolytes were systematically rounded up and summarily killed by ROM on orders of the "Mad Primus," as he later became known.

Kurstin (and some 100 ROM bodyguards) left Hilton Head Island for the Court of the Star League. Having learned of Gregori

Hartford's clandestine meeting there, he declared the building to be the seat of his new ComStar Order. The age-old halls echoed with the same madness that had consumed Stefan Amaris centuries earlier as Primus Kurstin unsealed the throne room and assumed the First Lord's throne as his own seat of power. Seeing their leader so mentally incapacitated prompted several of his bodyguards to attempt to desert. He had their bodies drawn and quartered as a lesson to any others who might attempt to break faith with the Primus.

Recordings made via the security systems still operating in the Court showed how insane Dwight Kurstin had become. He had the ashes of Conrad Toyama exhumed and set them before the throne, carrying on conversations with the former Primus. Tapes of these conversations were recovered after his death and are now stored in the ComStar Archives. To date they have never been made public.

In one of his more daring moves Primus Kurstin contracted the services of three regiments of mercenaries that happened to be on Terra at the time seeking new employment. Kurstin offered them triple pay to work for ComStar in the "defense of Terra." Unaware that the Primus had virtually no support outside of Terra and that he was quite mad, they accepted the offer.

Loyalists in ROM managed to carry the Primus' message to several worlds of the Inner Sphere, but even ROM was split in its loyalties. In the end, however, neither the Primus nor the First Circuit had enough support with ROM to give either side a decisive edge. Many in ROM simply laid low during the year-long crisis, trying not to take any side in the conflict. Most of ROM was still with the Primus, but both sides were so permeated by double agents that any serious attempt at waging an intelligence war was difficult.

The members of the First Circuit had gone into hiding, but other Precentors offered them both assistance and support by providing sanctuary and maintaining information networks. Some hint of the ComStar civil war almost became public when ROM agents opened fire on the offices of Federated Suns Precentor Kintos on Elbar, killing the Precentor and three of his adepts. Several civilians who happened to be near the HPG compound witnessed the incident, but Gregori Hartford's supporters suppressed the news, denying that the incident ever happened.

Primus Kurstin realized that he was isolated on Terra, unable to communicate with members of the Order without using JumpShips to physically carry his message. By the fall of 2901 he initiated the first stages of Operation Winged Crusader, in which he assigned vintage Star League equipment to the mercenary forces under his command. These troops would assault the First Circuit's HPGs, retaking them and returning them to the primacy's control. Kurstin would then be able to spread his word and will to all the worlds of the Inner Sphere and initiate a new purge within the ranks of ComStar.

Word of Winged Crusader leaked to the First Circuit in exile. Such a blatant use of military force was obviously contradictory to the will of Blake, which drew even more supporters to their side and away from the Primus. Precentor Hartford knew that if the Primus' plan were successful, all resistance would be crushed and ComStar would be totally under the thumb of the mad Kurstin. Fearing that the true will of Blake was endangered, Precentor Hartford smuggled a message back to Terra to a ROM agent known only as Saber.

Prior to his departure from Terra earlier that year, Gregori Hartford had suspected that this moment might arrive, all the while hoping it would not. Now the Primus was forcing his hand. The message was a code order to the mysterious Saber to assassinate the Primus.

TO REIGN IN HELL

<<<<<Message to All ComStar Personnel
FLASHDUMP>>>>>

<<<<<Terra HPG, ComStar TransCode 203.01.000A,
Alpha Priority, 30 April 2901>>>>>

I, Primus of ComStar Dwight Kurstin, call upon the support of all members of our blessed Order. By the right of rule passed down by the blessed Blake, I hereby dissolve the current First Circuit and name all its members as heretics. I will announce the names of their replacements in the First Circuit in the coming days.

I now order the immediate apprehension of these renegade individuals. They have broken faith with their bond and oath to support both the Word of Blake and ComStar. They have conspired against me personally as well as against all true and loyal members of our Order. They seek to destroy me and this office, and such disobedience cannot be tolerated.

I decree that, like the heretics of old, they will be punished by burning at the stake for their heresy against the will of Blake and my command of this Order. Any persons who associate with or assist or aid them in any way are also traitors to ComStar and will be held for trial.

May these heretics and their allies find no solace or rest. May they beware and ever watch their backs. The will of Blake shall haunt them into the darkest of nights.

On January 3, 2902, an assassin shot Primus Dwight Kurstin through the head with a laser at point-blank range while the Primus was sitting on the massive throne of the First Lord. All security systems were shut off at the time and the assassin escaped the scene without detection. The only tangible clue was a copy of *The Word of Blake* left lying on the marble floor of the throne room, a mute commentary on the end of the ComStar civil war.

The loyalists of the First Circuit were stunned at the audacity of the move, while the mercenary troops hired by the Primus found themselves leaderless before Operation Winged Crusader even got off the ground. The exiled First Circuit called for an immediate end to the hostilities by all parties and requested a summit on Terra.

The summit was short. The First Circuit dictated the terms of surrender to the loyalists who had sided with Kurstin, then unanimously elected Gregori Hartford as Primus of ComStar.

Under the rule of Primus Hartford, ComStar orchestrated the most intricate cover-up operation ever carried out by ROM. No evidence of the ComStar civil war was ever allowed to leak out to the intelligence communities of the rest of the Inner Sphere. False supporting documentation was forged to make it appear that Primus

SWORD OF JUSTICE

The identity of the ROM operative known as Saber was known to only two people. One was Primus Gregori Hartford and the other was the courier who carried Primus Dwight Kurstin's death warrant to Saber from the future Primus. Primus Hartford always denied knowing who killed his predecessor, however, and the courier was never found.

What is known is that Saber somehow overpowered the two guards stationed in the throne room, incapacitating them with a silencer-equipped weapon. Saber then disabled the Star League Court's security system, still operational after so many years. However he managed to do it, Saber was standing directly in front of Primus Kurstin at a range of less than eight meters when he or she fired the lethal shot.

Evidence uncovered by ComStar archivists some five years after the affair indicates that Saber may have been Julia Hartford, sister of Gregori. Julia was known to be a ROM operative, and extensive evidence places her on Terra during the days when Primus Kurstin seized power. As kin to a member of the First Circuit she would have been a high-priority target for Kurstin's purges, but no records exist of either her arrest or questioning.

The truth may never be known. Adept Julia Hartford was transferred to the recently completed HPG station in the Magistracy of Canopus. Both she and her brother refused ever to comment on the incident, and many of the files relating to Saber have been destroyed or conveniently "misplaced."

—From *The Tracking of Saber*, Adept Richard Burbage, ComStar Press, June 2906



Kurstin had simply resigned office, but with no reference to his mental state. The Court of the Star League was once again sealed, and a much heavier guard placed on the facility. As far as official ComStar history was concerned, the entire civil war never occurred.

[Indeed, much of what has been presented here is conjecture. We of the Word of Blake believe that this portion of the new ComStar history has been included to justify drawing parallels to our current schism with ComStar. Our evidence shows that though Primus Kurstin did lose contact with reality, the transition of power was smooth; no all-out civil war took place. The First Circuit never endured a self-imposed exile, and no physical copy of the alleged "Witch-Hunt" transmission survives. Reader beware! There is little correlation between the false "history" of this minor event and the current debates between our two visions of Blake's will.]

Gregori Hartford remained Primus until late 2910. During his short tenure he passed several reforms that permitted the First Circuit to name a successor to the Primus or to remove a Primus from power on a full vote of all Precentors. The measures also called for at least three members of the First Circuit to be informed in writing of all major ROM operations. Though seemingly minor, these changes were intended to prevent another interior struggle within ComStar.

In December of 2910 Kari Marie Marshall, Precentor of Procyon, succeeded Gregori Hartford as Primus. Being a senior member of the First Circuit, she was skilled at navigating the political intrigues of Hilton Head. Her greatest weakness was that she did not enjoy the same support as Primus Hartford and was forced to take a harder stand on several issues.

Primus Marshall took a special interest in the Periphery. In 2920 she made a year-long tour of several Periphery kingdoms and was stunned at the poverty and despair she encountered there. In the Taurian Concordat, for example, she pushed for construction of a new Class B station to link this isolated kingdom with the rest of the Inner Sphere. Some of the Periphery worlds saw her as a savior of sorts, while others wanted nothing to do with ComStar or the technology following in its wake.

COMSTAR, GO HOME

Our delegation arrived on Dante in the Outworlds Alliance today and I must admit that I was stunned at the greeting committee.

On other worlds in the Alliance we have been met by dignitaries, local leaders, and afforded full diplomatic courtesies. Such was not the case today.

The locals apparently have initiated a ban on technology and have reverted to a more primitive means of survival. The "greeting committee" consisted of several dozen local peasants who showered our DropShip with spoiled fruits and eggs. From my viewing port I actually witnessed a gesture known as "moon-ing," crude in nature and intent. Many of these people were obvious refugees from the Combine who cursed us as we watched from our viewing ports. As I re-read the words of the blessed Blake in the afternoon, I remembered their mockery and drew great strength from his wisdom.

These are the very people that Blake sent us to serve, those who turn their backs on truth purely because of ignorance. Blake wrote of a new Dark Age overtaking mankind, and now, for the first time, I witnessed the embodiment of those words. I wept then in the knowledge that someday the whole Inner Sphere would fall to the same fate, and that only ComStar would survive. Such was the vision of Blake, and for the first time I have seen it myself.

—From the journals of Primus Kari Marie Marshall, September 25, 2920. ComStar Archive File 2001-ABB-JAP Karma Level Access

Primus Marshall named Hollings York, Precentor of New Earth, as her successor in 2922. Though he was only 22 years old at the time, the Primus took the young man under her tutelage, carefully grooming him for the day when he would succeed her.

Despite the difference in their ages, York became a trusted confidant of Primus Marshall, representing her on several diplomatic missions to both the Lyran Commonwealth and the Draconis Combine. Some members of the First Circuit balked at this young upstart suddenly rising into the spotlight, but the Primus believed that the will of Blake was well-served by the talents of the young Precentor.


The aging Primus no doubt had her own agenda in choosing York. By 2921 her health had begun to fail and she was confined to a wheelchair. By placing Hollings York in line for the primacy, she could make him her puppet, controlling him even late into her retirement.

[Slander against the dead is an unspeakable crime. Only slight evidence indicates that Primus Marshall had anything other than the interests of our blessed Order in her heart when she chose Hollings York as her successor. York's later achievements and his appalling death have made him something of a mythical figure within the history of our Order. The thought of such a great leader starting out as the puppet of a distinguished elder statesperson is absurd.]

If Primus Kari Marie Marshall did have a secret plan in mind, it would never reach fruition. She died from a stroke in November 2930, at which time the First Circuit confirmed Hollings York as the eighth Primus of the ComStar Order. At the age of 29 he was the youngest ever to hold the office.

After Marshall's state funeral, Hollings took the time to meet personally with the leaders of the Inner Sphere. The only one who did not accept the invitation to a private meeting was Hugai Kurita, the Coordinator of the Draconis Combine. Indeed, it would not be long before the two leaders would be on a collision course that would lead ComStar and the Combine to the brink of all-out war.





A G E O F E N L I G H T E N M E N T

One of the greatest leaders of ComStar came to his destiny as the charismatic young Precentor of New Earth. For the first time ComStar would have at the helm an individual of strong personal magnetism and appeal to the general public, not just within the Order. Hollings York was a dynamic speaker who captivated others through his words as well as his idealism, boldness, and innovativeness. Few leaders of ComStar up to this time had possessed such natural talents.

[There is no doubt that Primus York is one of our greatest leaders, but even though others were far from charismatic (especially the stone-faced Karpov), all possessed extraordinary skills and abilities. ComStar is using the well-known public image of Hollings York, the man, on its recruitment poster. In truth all the Primuses were gifted in one way or another.]

Primus York had barely assumed office when serious political turmoil confronted him. Necess Kurita, sister to Coordinator Hugai Kurita, had asked to join ComStar. For years ComStar had hoped to recruit a scion of the Kuritas into the Order, and it appeared they had finally succeeded in attracting a high-ranking member of the family.

Coordinator Hugai Kurita sent several terse messages to the new Primus, warning York that he considered such recruitment efforts to be akin to ComStar meddling in the internal affairs of the Draconis Combine. In curt rebuttal Primus York sent back a transmission warning the Coordinator that ComStar did not appreciate the Combine interfering in its internal affairs.

Primus York ordered the Precentor of Luthien, Stephanie Hendriks, to personally verify and investigate Necess Kurita's calling to join ComStar. Necess underwent the usual battery of ROM tests, passing easily. Though pleased that Necess wished to join ComStar, the Primus was not anxious to alienate the Coordinator. Despite his fears of creating tensions between the two governments, York approved Kurita's appointment as an acolyte.

Primus York sent a cordial message to the Coordinator explaining that he would waive the usual transfer of acolytes in the case of Necess, keeping her stationed on Luthien for two rotations. York hoped that this compromise would mollify the Coordinator.

Though some members of the First Circuit pressed to use the "Kurita defection" as propaganda, Primus York chose instead for Necess to join ComStar under a veil of secrecy, with no public announcement. He hoped to avoid further confrontation with the Coordinator by making what he believed was a show of good faith.

The Coordinator was furious at what he claimed was ComStar's audacity. In mid-November he dispatched a squad of six ISF agents with express orders to return his sister to him. At the time, Necess Kurita was serving as an acolyte at the ComStar hospice on Luthien, just outside the Imperial City proper. Precentor Hendriks had assigned two of her best ROM operatives to protect the acolyte on the hunch that the Combine leader might try such a ploy.

The ROM agents assigned to Necess spotted the ISF agents posing as civilian orderlies as they tailed Necess in the hospice. When the ROM guards attempted to arrest them, the ISF operatives opened fire. A gun battle swept through the hospice, killing four ISF agents, both ROM agents, and one civilian. The surviving ISF

agents managed to seize Necess and return her to Imperial City.

Necess was taken to the palace and locked away in a distant wing on orders of her brother. Two dozen ISF agents were posted as guards to prevent a ROM rescue attempt. Necess protested her kidnapping and imprisonment, but her arguments fell on deaf ears.

When the First Circuit received Precentor Hendriks' priority transmission of the news, they had only two choices: either they would not contest the kidnapping of an acolyte or they must escalate the conflict. The debate lasted only 15 minutes, and the First Circuit decided to support Primus York's hard-line stance. He ordered Precentor Hendriks to make the standard formal protest to the Coordinator while ComStar organized its response. Hugai Kurita retorted that ComStar had used brainwashing and drugs to corrupt his sister's mind and to turn her against her family. He warned that any efforts to recover her would only lead to more deaths and possible military action against ComStar's facilities in the Combine.


Primus York had been in power only a few short months, and suddenly ComStar was poised on the brink of war with one of the Great Houses of the Inner Sphere. Members of the First Circuit called for an immediate Interdiction of the Draconis Combine. York resisted, saying that "the will of the Combine and House Kurita is not the same as the Free Worlds' defiance. The Kuritas would resist such an action out of honor and pride, and if any House could survive an Interdiction it would be Kurita. We would gain nothing." Deferring to his leadership, the First Circuit voted down an Interdiction.

Precentor Dieron, William Fullerton, pointed out that the only force or persuasion that could satisfy the Combine's sense of honor was that of the military. Primus York supported the proposal to use military force to back the will of ComStar, even though the Order did not field any military units of its own. Reluctantly the First Circuit agreed to the proposal, though most members believed the matter would never reach that stage.

ComStar was in the midst of negotiating five major mercenary contracts and dozens of smaller ones in its capacity as the Mercenary Review Board, and so Primus York authorized full payment plus 20 percent on all open contracts. The mercenaries accepted work for ComStar. Overnight ComStar had at its command six regiments, hardly enough to bring down the Combine but enough to persuade the Coordinator that he might be facing an assault on a new front while he was also at war with his neighbors.

Two days into the crisis the contract of another mercenary unit within the Combine ran out. The unit was the Bandersnatches, an assault battalion that had fought well along the Federated Suns front but which the Coordinator was not interested in continuing to employ. ComStar quickly picked up their contract at twice their normal rates. Given their proximity to Luthien, the Bandersnatches offered ComStar a unique opportunity to force the Coordinator's hand.

In a series of vital communiqués Primus York contacted Precentor Hendriks on Luthien. The Primus officially evoked the Emergency Powers Act of the Communications Protocol of 2787. Under this never-before-used provision, the Primus could grant a Precentor special command powers to operate independently during an emergency, without direct orders from the First Circuit.



York knew that the success of his confrontation with the Combine depended on not interfering and attempting to control events from Terra, but to allow Precentor Hendriks to call her shots locally. With surprising candor he informed the Precentor that ComStar could not accept the kidnapping of Necess Kurita, an acolyte of the Order, regardless of her former family background and name.

Meanwhile, York had ordered the Bandersnatches to divert to Luthien aboard the ComStar jump transport *Eyes of Blake*. The Bandersnatch BattleMechs would be stripped of their identification en route and marked with the ComStar logo. Their DropShips were also repainted to make them appear to be a new military unit, unknown to the Combine.

The Bandersnatches would operate under the direct control of Precentor Hendriks, as would all ROM operatives currently on Luthien. Primus York informed her that he would be arriving from Terra with a military force of six regiments for support. The Precentor would use the surprise military presence arriving at Luthien as a wedge to force the Coordinator to surrender Necess. Failing that, the Precentor would use "whatever force necessary to enforce the will of Blake and ComStar." If she met stiff resistance, ComStar was prepared to initiate its "military option" against the Combine.

Hendriks conveyed her plan for using the Bandersnatches back to the Primus, who gave it his full support. The First Circuit placed all Combine HPG staffs on alert status, unsure of how the Combine would react. For the first time since Operation Silver Shield, ComStar stood poised on the brink of war.

According to Precentor Hendrik's plan, the Bandersnatches would begin their descent over Imperial City under the guise of a routine run by ComStar supply DropShips. Hendriks was in full communication with the Bandersnatches at all times via a personal transmitting device worn on her robe. She hoped to meet with the Coordinator and persuade him to release Necess. If he did not, the Bandersnatches would drop directly onto Unity Palace and attempt to rescue Necess. There was little hope of getting the young Kurita acolyte out alive, but it was unlikely that the Coordinator would survive the attempt either.

Unaware of the slow approach of the Bandersnatches, the Coordinator refused to give Precentor Hendriks an audience. After two more weeks of diplomatic efforts, the Precentor finally shut down the Luthien HPG until the Coordinator was willing to discuss matters with her face-to-face. After twelve hours without outside communication, the Coordinator invited Precentor Hendriks to come to the Grand Hall of Unity Palace to discuss "a number of open issues."

Politely but firmly, Precentor Hendriks laid out the terms that Primus York had demanded. The Coordinator would release Necess Kurita and allow her to make her own decision about joining ComStar. If she opted to depart Luthien, neither the Coordinator nor his forces were to interfere. Hugai barely reacted to her initial demands, ending the session almost immediately.

Precentor Hendriks then upped the ante by informing the Coordinator that if he did not comply, ComStar would impose a Communications Interdiction over the entire Draconis Combine. Despite the nearly disastrous losses that the Free Worlds League had suffered under such a restriction, the Coordinator did not seem cowed by the threat, just as Primus York had predicted. Instead Hugai informed the Precentor that he and his people would prevail despite such an act by ComStar.

Hendriks finally played her last card. She presented the Coordinator with a small portable holoivid linked to the Bandersnatches. Colonel Dietrikson, commander of the unit, informed the Coordinator that his assault battalion was less than ten minutes from executing a combat drop on Unity Palace. Their mission was to rescue the Precentor and "the hostage" Necess Kurita and to lay waste to as much of the palace and Imperial City as possible before evacuation.

Coordinator Hugai was stunned. Precentor Hendriks also informed him that Primus York had already dispatched six elite regiments of troops into the Combine with orders to strike at a number of key worlds. The Coordinator realized that despite his immense military power, there was little he could do to stop the Bandersnatches or ComStar from crippling the Combine.

The Coordinator consented to the terms proposed by Precentor Hendriks. He would release Necess to her custody and allowed her to leave Luthien if she desired. After calling off the strike by the Bandersnatches, the Precentor and her ROM escort walked away from Unity Palace with the sister of the Coordinator.

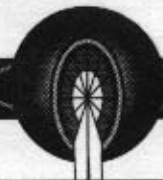
Both the Draconis Combine and ComStar stood down from the brink of war. Though a ComStar strike would have been costly in the short run, the Combine might have survived such an attack. The affair was hushed up within the Combine, and the average citizen never heard a whisper of it.

Within ComStar, however, Primus York publicized the incident to good effect. His personal zeal and charisma, combined with the success of the confrontation, raised his stature almost to that of Jerome Blake within the ranks of the Order. In a series of parades and speeches, Primus Hollings York appeared with Necess Kurita and with Colonel Dietrikson, himself something of a hero. A year after the affair, Primus York named Stephanie Hendriks as Precentor of Dieron, making her a member of the First Circuit. This was a reward for her handling of the affair as well as a means of replacing one of the Primus' fiercest antagonists.

[We have not commented in the text concerning Primus Hollings York because we believe that this is a fair representation of the facts, a rarity in this document as a whole. Students of politics will note the level of strategy and grace that Primus York used in his dealings. He delegated to Precentor Hendriks full responsibility for the Luthien confrontation. If it had been a failure for ComStar, she would have been the one to bear the brunt. As it was, York's handling of the affair allowed the Primus to capitalize on its stunning success.]

[What Primus York taught us in this affair was how to handle the governments of the Inner Sphere. Minimum force applied in the right place at the right time is the most effective way to succeed in such confrontations. The current caretakers of ComStar failed miserably to heed this tenet in their affairs with the Clans. We of the Word of Blake see the true contribution of such leaders as Hollings York and seek to learn from their successes.]

During a meeting with the First Circuit in 2933 the Primus proposed the formation of a standing military for ComStar. This military, to be called the ComStar Guards and Militia, would be a rapid-deployment, light infantry force constantly on call for emergencies such as the one presented by the abduction of Necess Kurita two years earlier. ComStar would have the ability to respond quickly with some degree of military force in times of need. Fifty years later, building from this foundation, the reigning Primus and First Circuit would begin an ambitious MechWarrior training program. By 3005, the ComStar Guards would have evolved from mere light infantry to a 50-regiment-strong army of Star League-era BattleMechs.



OUTFOXING THE DRAGON

HENDRIKS: I thank you for taking the time to meet with me, Coordinator Hugai. I hope that you are well; my five-hour wait in the alcove made me concerned for your health.

HUGAI: The wait was good for your temperament, Precentor. You deliberately cut off my capital from the rest of the Inner Sphere and yet come in expecting gracious treatment.

HENDRIKS: I had hoped that your sister Necess would be joining us in this meeting.

HUGAI: Listen carefully to me, ComStar witch. My sister will not be meeting with you or anyone else in your cult. She remains with me, where she belongs, at the side of the Dragon. You will not manipulate her in my presence, not in the palace.

HENDRIKS: I see. Primus York has been in contact with you, sir. You know ComStar's position in this matter. Your sister is part of our Order and we protect that which is ours. If we allow you to simply ignore our wishes, you place all of ComStar at risk. This is not permissible.

HUGAI: Indeed. Again, I refuse to submit to your orders and demands.

HENDRIKS: Need I remind you of the power of ComStar, Coordinator? Primus York has informed me that he stands ready to initiate a full Communications Interdiction of the Combine. Your worlds will fall prey to the Commonwealth and the Federated Suns because you will be unable to coordinate your military.

HUGAI: If your precious Primus threatens Interdiction, then so be it. The Dragon will survive. I have already planned for such a move and have positioned JumpShips accordingly to carry out my orders. Your idle threats carry no weight here, witch. I can place you under house arrest as well. Remember that when you make your threats.

HENDRIKS: Very well, then, you have left me with little option. This holo-link is tied to Colonel Dietrikson of a ComStar assault battalion. I had hoped to avoid reaching this point, Coordinator.

DIETRIKSON: (On holo-link communicator) Coordinator Hugai, my troops and I are currently positioned ten minutes from our drop window over Unity Palace. We are under direct orders from the Precentor and the Primus to initiate a rescue attempt of Acolyte Necess Kurita. If we encounter opposition our estimates show that half of our assault 'Mechs will still successfully land on the palace. If unable to execute a rescue we are ordered to lay waste to the palace and Imperial City until our DropShips pick us up.

HUGAI: (To Warlord Sharet) Is this true? Are their ships poised over us?

SHARET: (Pause) We have them scanned now. They are officially listed as ComStar freighters. I can dispatch air support immediately, but I believe that Colonel Dietrikson's

estimate is accurate. We are at risk, Coordinator.

HUGAI: Witch! You do not think that I will let you live now, after you threaten the very heart of the Dragon? I ought to shoot you now—and my sister as well for her betrayal! Guards! Secure her immediately....

HENDRIKS: I was prepared to die as soon as I was given audience with you, Coordinator. Such is my devotion to ComStar and the Word of Blake. The question you should ponder is not whether I am ready to die, but whether you or the Combine are ready to perish?

Consider this carefully. If you kill me there is no one to countermand the Colonel's orders to lay waste to you and the palace. And there is more, Coordinator. Rimus York has six regiments' worth of troops positioned within striking distance of two of your prefecture and district capital worlds. While we can easily take them, you have the might to slowly drive our troops out. But the cost will be great. You will be forced to pull troops from both the Federated Suns and Lyran Commonwealth fronts. This will cost you dozens of worlds falling into the hands of your foes, and perhaps even more if you lose the ability to communicate with your forces and coordinate a counterattack.

As I see it, you face a simple decision. You can surrender your sister to me and allow us to leave peacefully. Publicly you may claim whatever victory you wish, though I do not recommend you do so.

Or you can resist. If you do, you will most likely be killed. The Combine will find itself surrounded by enemies baying like hungry wolves. Your people will suffer and many will die.

I ask you, where is the true wisdom of the Kurita Dragon? Is it centered in egotistical pride or in the service of its people?

HUGAI: ComStar has consorted with mercenary scum to plot the destruction of me and my people. There is a certain irony in that. I have no desire to wage a war against your brotherhood, not at this time. I will release my sister as a token of esteem to ComStar and your Primus.

But heed my words, Precentor Hendriks, and carry them back to Primus York. For the first time in its history, ComStar has threatened to use military force. I wonder what your precious Blake would think of what you have made of ComStar? He is probably already turning in his grave.

—Transcript of a conversation between Precentor Hendriks and Coordinator Hugai Kurita on December 13, 2931, 1442 hours, Unity Palace, Luthien. ComStar Archive File 2011-BLP-Karma Level Security Access Required.

The original proposal called for the creation of eight regiments, but the Primus settled for five regiments of full-time troops as a compromise with a liberal faction of the First Circuit. The ComStar Guards and Militia would be based in the Sol system and would remain under the combined control of the Primus and the First Circuit. To fund the creation of a standing military, Hollings tapped the vast resources of ROM, pointing out that ROM would have less need for the money now that ComStar would have a military force.

The core of the Guards and Militia was the former mercenary Bandersnatches. Their contract was dissolved and they accepted full-time permanent employment with ComStar. The Guards and Militia would have the best equipment possible, vintage Star League Defense Forces gear left behind after the Exodus.

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the formation of the ComStar Guards and Militia was the revitalization of the Sandhurst Royal Military College in Berkshire, England. The site had originally served as a training school for ROM. York convinced the First Circuit to relocate the ROM training center and to approve millions of C-bills for Sandhurst's renovation. The old military academy was converted into a modern military complex, complete with BattleMech and aerospace fighter facilities and training grounds.

Primus York knew that the creation of a military force by the neutral ComStar would stun the leaders of the Inner Sphere. In his messages announcing the formation of the ComStar Guards and Militia, he told the leaders that these troops were strictly for the defense of Terra and would train only in defensive operations. The House Lords apparently accepted his word.

Despite his personal magnetism and successes in dealing with the House Lords, Hollings York could never be sure of his support within the First Circuit. Some members resented his age, while others saw him as brash and reckless. In 2939 his primacy was

assailed with accusations that he was having an affair with Carrisa Sanders, a well-known holovid actress. Despite overwhelming evidence, including several highly publicized interviews with Ms. Sanders, Primus York always maintained an air of being above such scandals. He claimed that the two had met only once during a state diplomatic function and had never been involved romantically.

[This "overwhelming evidence" is no more than gossip and innuendo. It refers no doubt to alleged photos of the Primus and Ms. Sanders leaving the posh Hilton Head Hotel. A number of individuals claimed to have seen copies of these photos (including two members of the First Circuit), but the original negatives disappeared. Scandal mongers say that ROM stole the negatives, but the fact remains that they are nowhere to be found in the ComStar archives.]

One of the Primus' chief detractors was the Precentor of Oriente, Adrienne Sims. In heated debates over the funding of the new ComStar Guards and Militia, Sims pressed the Primus for heavy concessions. The two butted heads constantly on the floor of the First Circuit. It was Precentor Sims who called for his resignation after the scandal with Ms. Sanders "soiled his holy office."

The Primus had no intention of stepping down from his office merely because of some gossip. Instead he placated Sims by naming her as his successor for the primacy. The move was typical of York, designed to keep his opposition off guard. If Precentor Sims continued to press for his resignation, it would look as though she was merely attempting to further her own status.

York's daring move did catch Adrienne Sims off guard; she accepted the post and ceased her verbal attacks. The entire affair eventually blew over.

[This interpretation is more than likely a fiction created by the current leaders of ComStar. The truth is that Primus York knew that Adrienne Sims would one day make important contributions to the



Order as Primus and that she remained true to the vision of our Order. He merely sought to present her with the opportunity to fulfill Blake's prophecies.]

ROM remained a constant source of problems for Primus York. Precentor Gilbert, his hand-picked leader of ROM, believed that the true power of ROM was a thing of the past and that the future of the organization lay with the ComStar Guard and Militia. Several members of the First Circuit went so far as to claim that Gilbert had been appointed to dismantle ROM once and for all, but both the Precentor and the Primus denied these accusations.

Each passing budget left less and less credit in the coffers of ROM, however, funds that were diverted to the ComStar Guard and Militia. ROM field operatives found their missions understaffed and underfinanced, and in many cases they were unable to complete investigations. Several of the House governments pressed this disadvantage and used the sudden weakness of ROM to boost their own intelligence organizations. In the Federated Suns alone six ROM agents were exposed by the MIO in the years between 2935 and 2940. Similar incidents occurred within the Free Worlds League and the Capellan Confederation. ROM agents became easy targets in hostile countries, with little or no support from the First Circuit.

What hurt ROM most was Primus York's refusal to answer their calls for help. In his own speeches the Primus seemed to indicate that ROM was a "slipshod organization...often reckless and acting on its own accord, using the Word of Blake for justification." The same Primus who had almost pushed ComStar to the brink of war to rescue a lone acolyte was unwilling to lift a finger to help ROM agents in prisons throughout the Inner Sphere. It was clear that Primus York was carefully moving to dismantle ROM entirely.

[This analysis is taken totally out of context. Every Primus has had some degree of difficulty with ROM, which by its very nature often moves outside the law. Yet it remains a potent enforcement tool for the blessed Word of Blake. To accuse Primus York of conspiring to destroy such a potent weapon in his own arsenal is sheer folly. Instead he sought to re-shape ROM as a new organization within the ComStar Guards. Had that been allowed to happen, ROM would have experienced a glorious rebirth, and perhaps all of ComStar would have known a brighter era. However, fate intervened.]

In the spring of 2947 Primus York shook ComStar with his proposal to formally do away with ROM, re-assigning intelligence-gathering and security to his relatively new ComStar Guards. The announcement was made to a full gathering of all Precentors on Terra. For the first time the Primus was making his plans known to the entire Order at once. At his side stood Precentor Gilbert, head of ROM. It was obvious to everyone present that ROM no longer enjoyed support within the leadership of ComStar.

Two months after his history-making speech Primus York paid a visit to the Sandhurst Royal Military College to participate in its cornerstone-laying ceremony. He was accompanied by more than half the First Circuit. After a jubilant motorcade, the Primus delivered a ringing speech before a crowd composed of ComStar adepts and civilian construction workers who had worked on the Sandhurst project.

Suddenly the speech was interrupted by a series of laser blasts spraying out from the crowd. The Primus was hit three times and the Precentor ROM and Precentor Alpha C were also wounded. York hung onto life for an hour, but even ComStar's advanced medical technology could not save him.

The known lone assassin was an adept named Dodge Currier. Dodge had been one of the first volunteers to the new ComStar

Guards and Militia and had been assigned to perimeter security. In the panic that broke out after he fired his shots, he managed to escape the security dragnet that came down on Sandhurst immediately following the assassination.

When Currier was eventually apprehended, he chose to battle it out rather than be taken. He was mortally wounded before anyone could question him further about why he had killed the Primus. A zealot to the end, Currier would not confess to his crime before he died from his wounds in a local hospital. Instead, he only fueled the fires of mystery by claiming that he was innocent but knew who the guilty parties were.

Many believe that Currier was a ROM agent attempting to prevent the dismantling of that organization. Other investigations pointed to a House Kurita connection, begun when Currier made contact with high-ranking Kurita officials during his previous tour of duty on Pesht. Another theory linked Currier with members of the First Circuit, including Adrienne Sims, who wanted to get rid of the Primus to further their own plans for the Order. The official investigation did not totally rule out a conspiracy, only adding fuel to this fire.

[ROM is a covert organization, but to imply that it had part in this heinous deed is ludicrous. At best the accused Currier was a madman who acted alone. It was a tragedy, made worse by those who continue to search for a hidden conspiracy—even to this day and age.]

Eight days after the death of Primus York, the new Primus, Adrienne Sims, announced that instead of dismantling ROM, she would restore funding to the organization and enlarge its scope.

Many mysteries still surround Hollings York's death. Immediately following the moment when the Primus was hit while standing at the podium, witnesses reported a total of eight laser bursts spraying from the general direction of adept Currier's position. The official ComStar investigation states that only five shots were fired, which is supported by the discharge level on the weapon Currier used. Yet holovid shot during the event supports the firing of at least six, if not eight, bursts. Why, despite the evidence and statements, would the official investigation show fewer shots being fired?

The shot that wounded Precentor ROM Gilbert could only have been fired by a fully charged laser rifle, yet he was hit by the last shot fired. Does this indicate more than one gunman?

When the mortally wounded Primus was taken from the podium to his limousine, the vehicle was inoperative due to some sort of engine failure. It took an additional five precious minutes to move the Primus to a police vehicle for transportation. Was the limo sabotaged? The vehicle had been fully checked only two days prior to the incident. A week after the assassination it was again checked out and repaired, but never fully tested by the investigation team. Was key evidence removed or tampered with?

A check by investigators showed that Adept Dodge Currier had received several deposits of cash in his name from an untraceable source within the Draconis Combine. Was this a red herring to make investigators suspect Combine involvement or did House Kurita support the assassination directly?

Did Dodge Currier act on his own or was he a pawn? Several handwriting experts indicate that his alleged journals were not penned by his hand. Were they planted to hide whoever had ordered the deed? As in other infamous assassinations such as that of Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, and Simon Cameron, the answers to most of these questions may never be known.



C A L M B E F O R E T H E S T O R M

THE EXPLORER PRIMUS

Six hours after the death of Hollings York, Adrienne Sims was confirmed the ninth Primus of ComStar. Her first act was to proclaim seven days of mourning for the fallen leader. Hollings York had been the first leader of the ComStar Order to enjoy public support beyond the organization itself, and flags hung at half-mast throughout the Inner Sphere. All five leaders of the warring Great Houses attended the funeral, testimony to their respect for the fallen York. Though none met together privately, each spent some of their time on Terra with the new Primus and the First Circuit. Primus Sims used these meetings to confirm that under her rule ComStar would assist the leaders in finding a means of peaceful coexistence. Though the Third Succession War had, by this time, settled into a state of permanent, low-level siege punctuated by occasional, furious attacks and counterattacks, the conflict was 80 years old and showed no signs of ending. The House Lords gave Primus Sims' assurances careful attention, but kept any hope they felt for a resolution to themselves.

Despite her public stance as a peacemaker, Primus Sims informed the First Circuit privately that she had no intention of dismantling ROM, which she considered the core and essence of preserving ComStar. Precentor ROM Gilbert still lay in the hospital recovering from his wounds when the Primus dismissed him from office, appointing her own brother Karl Sims in his place. She then began to push almost immediately for more funding of ROM to "protect the sanctity of ComStar." The First Circuit, still dismayed over the assassination of York, quickly approved her request.

Primus Sims knew that she stood in the shadow of a great and charismatic leader. Rather than fight it, she capitalized on York's image. When she called for the canonization of Hollings York as a

ComStar saint, the move endeared her to the rank and file of the Order, who still grieved over his tragic death. Sims also proposed that Saint York be buried in the church floor of Sandhurst, his beloved special project. Numerous parks, streets, spaceports, and buildings throughout the Inner Sphere and especially on Terra took the name York in honor of the fallen Primus.

The early years of the Sims primacy were uneventful, allowing her to concentrate on the rebuilding of ROM. Outwardly all was well, but in 2959 the Primus began to suffer from horrific nightmares and possible delusions.


In a sealed session of the First Circuit, Primus Sims revealed that one night she had fallen asleep at her desk and was awakened by the ghostly figure of Jerome Blake. The apparition stood next to a map of the Inner Sphere and pointed to the mysterious space beyond the territories of the current governments. In a chilling voice he warned her that the only true threat to ComStar lay far beyond the borders of the Inner Sphere.

The members of the First Circuit were distressed about the Primus' state of mind, urging her to take a six-month leave while receiving professional help, and choosing Precentor Stephanie Hendriks to act as Primus. The nightmares and apparitions did not cease even after Sims returned.

She documented the most striking nightmare, and again confided it to the First Circuit. Sims said that this time it was Conrad Toyama who appeared to her in a dream, also pointing to a map of the Inner Sphere. Suddenly the borders seemed to burst into flames, and strange monsters and beings leapt out at her from the flames until the whole map of the Inner Sphere had been burned to mere ashes. The Primus insisted that the visions were prophecies of the future.

When opponents of the Primus leaked word of her "visions" to





other members of the Order, they hoped to use the information to weaken her position. Instead, the rank and file adepts and acolytes were fascinated by the tales of these visions. Many believed they were signs from Blake himself, pointing to a new destiny for ComStar. Instead of undermining Primus Sims, her opponents succeeded in solidifying her power base within the Order.

It was these images and visions that motivated Primus Sims to propose the formation of a new branch of ComStar, the Explorer Corps. This branch would consist of JumpShips and personnel assigned to the task of scouting and mapping the worlds beyond the Periphery. Sims did not cite her dreams in seeking approval of funding from the First Circuit, but instead harked back to the mystery of the long-departed Kerensky Exodus fleet. The Primus pointed out

REASONABLE FORCE

I will gladly tell you what happened to us, Brother. We landed on the planet Trentwash II, near what looked like the remains of a city. A committee of local inhabitants met our DropShips, but nothing in their manner or appearance showed them capable of having built a city of the type we had scanned. Their technology seemed simple, almost barbaric. We didn't feel threatened at all.

Their leader, Northup, told us that his people had lived there for 300 years. They were descendants of a Rim Worlds colony established by Cynthia Amaris, the mother of the most heinous murderer of all time. They seemed proud of their ties to the Inner Sphere. That was when we realized that they had not been in contact with anyone for three centuries.

That first night around a campfire we told Northup and his people what had befallen Stefan Amaris and the Star League. We also told them of our Order and our holy mission. They listened intently, asked few questions, and left. We thought nothing of it.

The next night more than a hundred of them attempted to seize our vessel, fifteen making it aboard. Some carried antique weapons of vintage precision, and in many cases the fighting was hand to hand. Our crew of 20 had only three survivors.

As the senior adept I failed in what the will of Blake would have demanded. I felt so sorry for those that had fallen, my friends, that I turned our ship's weapons on their aged city and on them.

When we left I knew that only a handful survived. The city from the past was burning. I accept whatever punishment the Order wishes to levy against me for my stupid act of violence. I took more than lives; I destroyed a link to the past. And I did it in the name of peace.

—Excerpt from ROM Investigation 22031-J; transcript of report by Adept Antonian Nokaj, Explorer Corps Vessel *Divine Providence*, regarding incident on Trentwash II (Beyond the Elysian Field), November 2973

that the will of Jerome Blake and the foundations of ComStar would be shattered should the Exodus fleet ever return.

The ostensible goals of the new Explorer Corps were to chart and catalog far-distant Periphery worlds. Their DropShips were only lightly armed, as were the crews. If an Explorer mission happened upon a still-functional but forgotten Star League base or Exodus colony, their task was diplomacy rather than conquest. ComStar would eventually notify the rest of the Inner Sphere governments of any discoveries, but not before ComStar had examined the technological base of any new find. Prime on the list of long-term objectives of the Explorer Corps was to learn the fate of Kerensky's Exodus and to ensure that any survivors who returned to the Inner Sphere made their first contact through ComStar.

The Explorer Corps also gave ComStar a means for removing undesirables from the Order. Individuals who showed an inability to yield to the will of Blake often found themselves charting deep space, far from where they could instigate trouble. The Corps also became a haven for aging ROM agents who knew too much but who had served with too much distinction to be locked away.

[This material is obscene in its distortions. The Explorer Corps was not a dumping ground for the waste and refuse of the Order. The exact opposite is true, for the Explorer Corps offered our blessed Order's best and brightest a way to help spread the will of blessed Blake among the stars.]

By 2961 the first ships of the Explorer Corps began to make their way through the vast Periphery. Though they did not find the trail of the Kerensky fleet, they did locate a number of isolated and forgotten colonies. Some of the colonists had never learned of the fall of the Star League. Others had been formed by civilians fleeing the horrors of the First Succession War. Sometimes the Explorers had disastrous contacts with pirates, new diseases, or deadly plants and animals, but such risks seemed to make the Explorer Corps all the more romantic for recruiting purposes. The work of the Explorer Corps also helped to improve the Order's relations with the House leaders when ComStar informed the Periphery and House Governments of the discovery of some of these lost settlements.

Contemporary ComStar historians view the dreams and visions of Adrienne Sims in a different light. Indeed the images and creatures described in her writings and personal letters are almost uncanny descriptions of the Clan invaders—"the metallic viper" (Clan Steel Wiper), for example, or the "emerald birds of death" (Clan Jade Falcon). Whether visions or coincidences, her dreams led to the founding of the Explorer Corps, one of our Order's greatest achievements.

Perhaps the most stunning irony of the Primus' visions is that it was an Explorer Corps vessel that eventually led the Clans to invade the Inner Sphere. If these visions were real, Adrienne Sims was instrumental in creating the means for the destruction she hoped to prevent.

[Blame not the sainted Sims, ComStar. If you seek to find the root of the evil of the Clan invasion, look only into the eyes of the grand heretic Focht.]

Primus Sims did not, of course, live to learn the truth of her nightmarish prophecies or to discover the location of the Exodus fleet. In 2979 she died in her sleep of natural causes. She had never named a successor to her office, leaving the task to the First Circuit. Even to the end she was tormented by her nightmarish visions. The First Circuit ordered the body of Sims cremated and her ashes scattered in deep space by one of her Explorer JumpShips.

THE TRIPITZ AFFAIR

The First Circuit named Yin Takami, Precentor of New Earth, as the tenth Primus of the Order. With the ongoing Third Succession War entering a flare-up, Primus Takami had to deal almost immediately with a wide range of problems and opportunities.

Ten days after Takami assumed the mantle of Primus, Precentor ROM Karl Sims informed him and the rest of the First Circuit of a possible threat. In a routine survey of an empty star system near New Vandenburg, forces of the Taurian Concordat had discovered a long-abandoned *Black Lion* Class battlecruiser, the *Tripitz*, orbiting one of the planets. The ship was more than likely a relic left behind generations ago during the Amaris crisis, but the Taurians believed they could recover the vessel and possibly even repair it.

Because one of the most serious results of the Succession Wars was the loss of almost all existing combat JumpShips, the discovery of a *Black Lion* battlecruiser and the possibility that it could enter active duty could upset the current balance of power in the region. Adding to the problem, Maskirovka agents of the Capellan Confederation also learned of the discovery and planned to stage their own recovery mission.

In response, Primus Takami ordered the First Division of the ComStar Guards and Militia to the star system with orders to destroy the *Tripitz* rather than risk it falling into the hands of either the Taurians or the Capellans. To disguise ComStar's complicity, the Primus ordered that the ships and fighters be painted white but given no identifying markings that might link them to the Order.

When the Taurians learned of an unknown JumpShip in the system, they immediately launched four lances of fighters, which the ComStar aerospace fighters quickly engaged. The advanced technology of the Star League equipment used by our forces more than made up for their lack of practical combat experience, especially against the low-technology aerofighters of the Taurians. The Taurians, however, put up a determined fight. The pitched battle lasted just under an hour, with only three deaths in the ComStar Guard force. The Taurians sent several messages requesting that the mysterious white attackers identify themselves, but the ComStar commander ignored the attempts at communication. He quickly recovered the dead pilots and turned his attention to the true target—the battlecruiser.

The remaining fighters strafed and bombed the antique *Tripitz*, blasting the ship until it was no more than a charred hulk in a decaying orbit. After recharging their JumpShip, the ComStar Guards departed the isolated system, leaving only the Taurian recovery crew as witnesses to the entire event.

The Taurians eventually released a statement indicating that a mysterious group of white ships had appeared and attacked their forces in an uncharted star system. No mention was ever made of the battlecruiser. Many people speculated that the attackers might be part of Kerensky's Exodus fleet, never suspecting ComStar's involvement in the destruction of the ship. This incident may be the source for the legend of the Vandenburg White Wings in Periphery folklore. Consistent with the origin of many legends, an actual report may have been repeatedly exaggerated and garbled into the current version of events.


[Some within our Order have criticized Primus Takami for deploying the ComStar Guards in this incident. They argue that his use of power and force contradicted the word of Jerome Blake, who envisioned ComStar as a covert agency working behind the

scenes in the affairs of the Inner Sphere. To this criticism Primus Takami responded that he had fulfilled the divine will of Blake by concealing the identity of ComStar's vessels and fighters.]

It was not long after this incident that Primus Takami began to receive deep intelligence concerning several Inner Sphere governments once again making an effort to recover some of the lost technology of the Star League era. Following in the footsteps of his predecessors, he instructed ROM to initiate what was eventually called Operation Holy Shroud II. Like the original plan, it called for the assassination of the Inner Sphere's greatest scientific and engineering minds and innovators. Again, the justification for such a radical use of ROM was that the Primus and the First Circuit perceived this scientific research as a potential threat to Blake's prophecies. Throughout the history of ComStar, this particular paranoia served as a means to unite the Order and to further solidify the image of Blake as a religious figure.

[Our misguided brethren of ComStar forget that this rise in technology was a real threat to our Order. In the spring of 2987 House Steiner researchers discovered material in an old Star League library that nearly allowed them to recover the operating principles of our precious hyperpulse generators. Fortunately, the information was too fragmented for the scientists to realize what they had discovered and recognize the implications. If not for Primus Takami's decisive actions, our Order's most basic strength, exclusive possession of technology, could have been destroyed. The loss of the researchers and their documentation in a laboratory "accident," while regrettable, was necessary.]





Unlike the original Operation Holy Shroud, the results of Primus Takami's plan were only mediocre. The Combine's elite Internal Security Force as well as House Davion's MIO managed to thwart several assassination attempts by ROM, having uncovered the plots through their own operatives. Neither of the targeted House governments ever learned that the order for the assassinations had come from ComStar, however. They were misled into believing that the assassins worked for one of the other Inner Sphere intelligence organizations.

Perhaps the greatest legacy of the primacy of Yin Takami was the revision of the First Circuit. Until Takami's reign, the First Circuit had always been composed of the Precentors of the first communications circuit of HPG transmitters in the Inner Sphere. Primus Takami believed that the First Circuit members had become more like politicians than technocrats, which was no longer faithful to Jerome Blake's original vision.

Primus Takami stunned the First Circuit by proposing to name four new members to that exclusive body, one for each of the capital worlds of the House governments not already represented. These Advocate-Precentors were to speak for all of the ComStar installations within their given realms. When the Primus first announced his proposal for this radical reformation of the First Circuit, he met with stiff opposition in the Circuit. Takami called in all of his political favors, however, and ultimately succeeded in passing his reform.

[The advocate seats proved to be a double-edged sword. In Primus Takami's time they were useful in providing ComStar with insights into the thinking of the various House governments. Over time, these Advocate-Precentors created a majority power base for themselves through their ties to the ruling Houses of each Successor State. As the Precentors not associated with a House found themselves gradually losing their voice in the direction of ComStar, they eventually stopped attending First Circuit meetings, leaving only the core of House-aligned Precentors in power. Officially, all Precentors administering the First Circuit HPGs are still members of the First Circuit. In our own day, these advocacy seats played a role in the betrayal of our Order.]

The primacy of Yin Takami ended abruptly in disaster in late 2994. The *Pride of Blake*, the Primus' private JumpShip, experienced a full engine-core overload and meltdown at the Sol nadir jump point while the Primus and two members of the First Circuit were aboard. The Primus' DropShip managed to disengage its docking collar, but too late to escape the disaster. The explosion eventually consumed the ship. Only ten persons out of the total crew and entourage of 82 survived the accident. Among the dead were Primus Takami and both accompanying members of the First Circuit.

Primus Takami died without naming a successor, which left the task to the First Circuit's surviving members. Their choice was an apparently quiet and timid Precentor from Alpha C named Allen Rusenstein. Having risen through the ranks of the Order mostly on the basis of his administrative skills rather than his political ambitions, Rusenstein seemed like a safe choice.

What the First Circuit did not anticipate was that this new, seemingly mild-mannered Primus was actually more political than many of the members of the First Circuit at the time. In appointing replacements for the First Circuit seats suddenly made vacant by the JumpShip explosion, Primus Rusenstein named two extreme conservatives, totally consumed by their passion for the Word of Blake. These men had always been an outspoken minority within the Order, but now the Primus had placed them in positions of

THE ACTIVIST FIRST CIRCUIT

The motion I place before you, esteemed members of the First Circuit, is to realign ourselves that we may better fulfill the will of blessed Blake.

The First Circuit faces a great threat. Not from the weak House Lords, but rather from within. We have deluded ourselves into believing that all we need do is sit back and wait, and the will of Blake will unfold. That simply is not the case. Our participation in the affairs of the Inner Sphere is required if our Order is to succeed in its holy crusade.

But as it stands now, the First Circuit lacks inspiration and drive. I seek to change that. I propose that we add several new members to our ranks. The new positions I seek are Precentor Tharkad for the Commonwealth, Precentor Sian for the Capellan Confederation, Precentor Atreus for the Free Worlds League, and Precentor New Avalon as the advocate member of the Circuit for the Federated Suns. I propose also making Precentor Dieron the advocate of the Draconis Combine.

The role of the advocate members is to speak as counsels to the First Circuit for each of the realms he or she represents. Thus will this esteemed council act in accordance with the will of Jerome Blake by fully understanding the impact of our decisions on the various Houses of the Inner Sphere.

So it has been proposed....Now I challenge you, the members of the Circuit, to take the risk and make a stand on this issue. The future of our Order is all that is at stake.

—Transcript of Primus Yin Takami's speech to the First Circuit, June 14, 2988

influence, setting the stage for many combative sessions of the First Circuit.

[The ComStar historians fail to point out that it was these very same appointments, only a few years later, that contributed to the fall of Primus Rusenstein. Most concede that the Primus was an excellent tactician and strategist, but a weak leader.]

Primus Rusenstein had a passion for the study of history, especially that of ComStar. He concentrated his private research into the Primuses before the great York, fascinated in particular by Primus Marshall. Rusenstein used Marshall's primacy as a pattern for his own, turning his attention toward the Periphery just as she had decades earlier.

In his only known published work, *Blessed Destiny*, Rusenstein gave his interpretation of ComStar's role in manipulating the players of the Inner Sphere. The Primus quotes several sources, including the writings of Blake, Toyama, and Karpov, to justify his belief that ComStar's role was to play the Great Houses of the Inner Sphere off one another. He believed that this would be accomplished primarily through the communications data to which ComStar had access. Primus Rusenstein also theorized that in the future

ComStar would play a more direct role in the control of the Inner Sphere, including the use of military influence, a precedent neatly set by Primus York. Throughout his text he made it clear that the Order must always conceal such efforts, making one of the other Houses appear as the culprit instead.

[Blessed Destiny is still required reading for the followers of the Word of Blake. Though a short work, it offers deep insights into controlling and manipulating the petty leaders of the Inner Sphere through a variety of means. The document is an inspirational work, a fact that Primus Waterly understood, but that the heretic Focht fails to grasp. In the end it will be the downfall of those who do not heed the true word of Blake.]

By the year 3000 the recruitment of new acolytes had reached an all-time low. As a natural extension of the general attrition of the existing population, ComStar's numbers were diminishing. To solve this problem, the Primus redirected the focus of recruitment to the Periphery, and in the next ten years most new recruits hailed from the primitive backwater worlds of the frontier.

Using the power of the ComStar News Bureau, the Primus made it appear to the public that the Order was investing billions of C-bills in bringing the Periphery into closer communications with the Inner Sphere. In reality, however, this was no more than propaganda. Primus Rusenstein, the passionate historian, knew that the Periphery had often been the source of problems for the rest of humanity, and he convinced the First Circuit that history was destined to repeat itself if full communications were restored to every world of that realm.

[Though the Word of Blake has no formal policy toward the Periphery, we acknowledge that Primus Rusenstein was astute in his analysis and prediction. History has shown that from the Amaris

vipers' nest of Apollo to the bloodied battlefields of New Vandenburg, the Periphery is a hotbed of death and destruction. Ironically, the evil known as the Clans struck there first.]

ComStar's plans for the Periphery were veiled in deceit. While the news broadcasts were featuring the benefits of trade initiated by ComStar negotiators in the Periphery, the truth was that ComStar had deflected resources from all HPG transmitter construction projects and put a permanent freeze on all new construction. The isolated worlds of the Periphery were to remain that way, many having contact with each other only through the passage of JumpShips—and many of those were ComStar vessels. This almost total control of communications and widespread public deception created a dramatic increase in recruits from the Periphery, while at the same time holding their governments in a virtual deadlock.

Another highlight of the Rusenstein primacy came when Thomas Marik, son of Captain-General Janos Marik, asked to join the Order as an acolyte. Thomas Marik was the highest-ranking member of any Great House to join the Order, and it was a propaganda coup. The First Circuit saw Thomas as a particularly useful tool because he was in direct line to inherit power over the Free Worlds League.

Despite his early successes, the end of Rusenstein's primacy was anticlimactic. His appointees to the First Circuit eventually became too independent for him to control, and formed a strong coalition against the Primus. On several occasions his proposals for funding to enlarge the ComStar Guards and Militia were voted down unanimously by the rebellious First Circuit. Tensions increased daily, with Rusenstein becoming more and more isolated from his peers.



THE JOLLY ROGER AFFAIR

By 3001 the First Circuit saw their control of the Periphery as a means of escalating the Third Succession War on the Kurita/Steiner front. Four years earlier, the LCAF high command had requested a slowdown of the Kurita offensive in order to rest their exhausted troops. Though Archon Alessandro Steiner had arrogantly refused, many of his commanders on the Kurita front used the typical snags of communications and supply lines as a pretext to halt the fighting. Meanwhile, under Hohiro Kurita's excessively centralized control, the DCMS could no longer respond quickly and flexibly to enemy attacks. His soldiers, increasingly affected by paranoia in the ranks, lacked the fighting spirit that had characterized the Arm of the Dragon in years past. Apart from a single, failed strike on Hesperus II, home of the Steiner 'Mech facilities, the Draconis Combine was spending all its energies combatting the Federated Suns. The First Circuit wished to see the Successor States fighting each other on more than one front each. In order to create even more hostility between the warring parties, the First Circuit, with only marginal endorsement by Primus Rusenstein, ordered ROM to undertake an action that eventually became known as the Jolly Roger plan. Rusenstein's endorsement was only half-hearted, but it was enough to make him the scapegoat when the operation later went bad.

In this covert plan, ComStar would finance several renegade MechWarriors to set up pirate operations in various isolated parts of the Periphery. The worlds used as bases had been rediscovered by the Explorer Corps years earlier, though their existence was kept concealed from the Great House governments. ComStar provided the pirates with stripped-down BattleMechs, fighters, and DropShips, but neither House Kurita nor House Steiner would ever find the slightest trace linking them to ComStar. The pirates were happy enough to accept the war machines without questioning their source's purpose too closely—they now had the means of waging war against both sides of the conflict and could set themselves up as miniLords.

By the spring of 3002 several of these newly formed Bandit Kings struck along the Periphery borders of the Lyran Commonwealth. Within half a year the same pirates attacked the Draconis Combine. Both sides blamed the other for sponsoring the bandit raids, and as a result escalated their conflict. Such actions fell well within the parameters outlined in the Primus' *Blessed Destiny* and managed to keep the flames of war burning brightly. In the early months, the First Circuit acclaimed the plan as a successful test of their power and ability to manipulate the Inner Sphere from behind the scenes. The Primus joined in taking credit for the success of the operation, a move that further set him up for the disaster to come.

[This was not just a ploy to continue the war, but was intended to force the Inner Sphere leaders away from battering the core worlds of the Inner Sphere and to turn their attention to the Periphery worlds. Jolly Roger forced both the Lyran and the Combine to ship regiments of key troops to the Periphery rather than use them to continue devastating the interior worlds of the old Terran Hegemony. This document overlooks the millions of lives saved by this plan.]

Jolly Roger exploded in 3004 when two of the Bandit Kings, "Black" Jack McGirk and Darleen Dunson, united their forces. Apart, each one fielded only about a battalion of troops. Together, however, they formed almost a regiment of BattleMechs and



support forces. In a lightning-fast series of raids along the Commonwealth border they overstepped the original plans for Jolly Roger and struck out on their own. Other pirates joined forces to assault choicer targets as well.

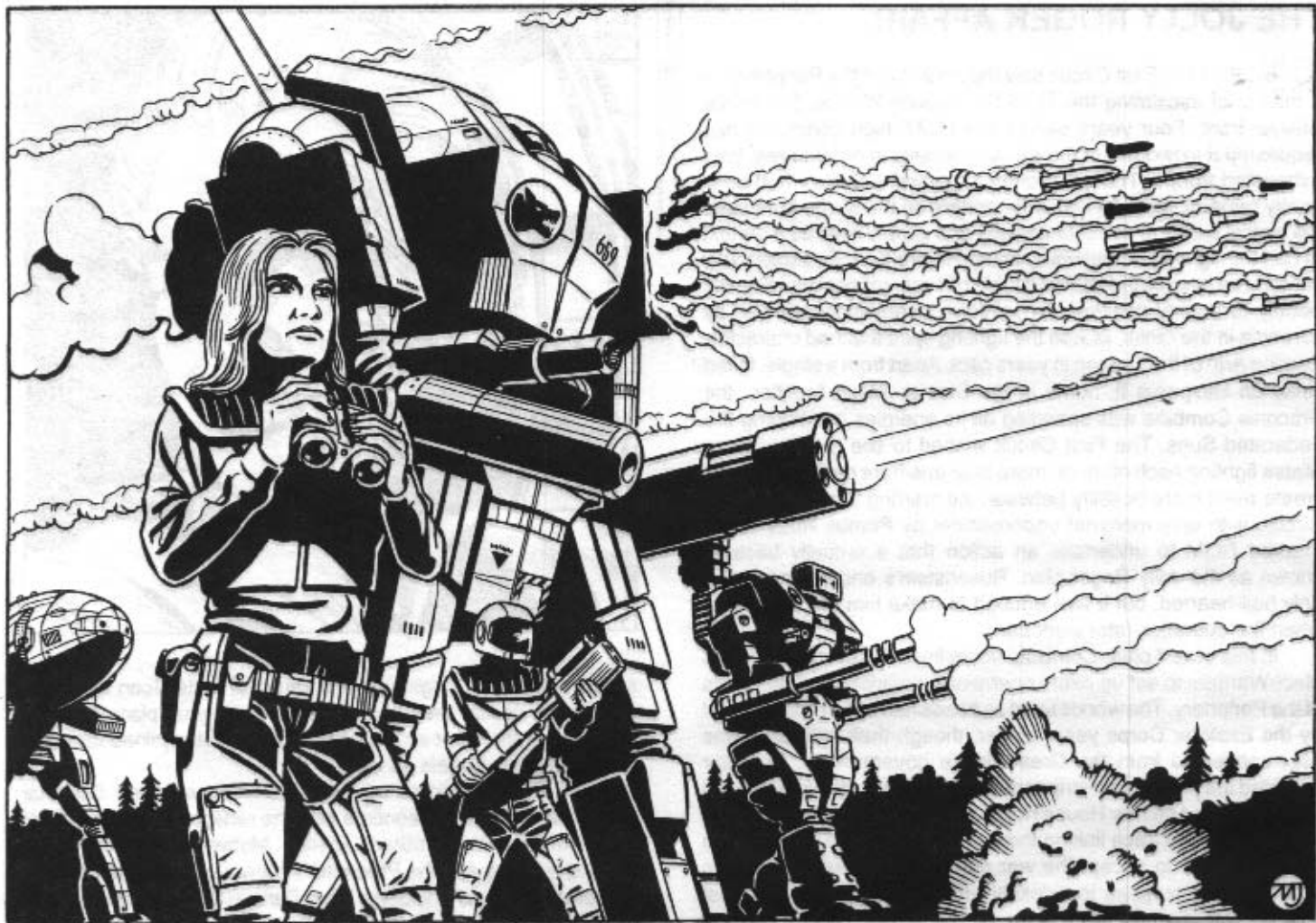
The Primus dispatched Precentor Kintero of the ComStar Guards and Militia to negotiate with the renegades to bring them back into line with ComStar's agenda. Matters boiled over during the first meeting and the Precentor's party was forced to battle its way out of the pirate's holdings, killing Darleen Dunson in the process.

"Black" Jack McGirk was infuriated at the audacity of his former ComStar benefactors. Moreover, the death of Darleen Dunson, his partner and lover, was too much for him to bear. His band of marauders struck at the ComStar HPG compound on the planets of Lost and Canal, laying waste to the buildings and killing dozens of personnel. Suddenly Jolly Roger had gone bad, and ComStar found itself with a military enemy.

McGirk's biggest mistake was underestimating ComStar's military strength. Primus Rusenstein managed to allay the Lyran Commonwealth's suspicions with a cover story claiming that both HPGs had been only slightly damaged by bandit raiders. Then the Primus ordered the First Division of the ComStar Guards and Militia into action again, this time to wipe out the renegade pirates.

The battle lasted for the better part of three days on the isolated, unmapped world of Trisha some eight jumps into the Periphery. In the end, "Black" Jack McGirk's combat experience gave him a greater edge than anticipated. Though his own forces were virtually wiped out, they achieved a 2.3 to 1 kill ratio against the inexperienced ComStar Guards.

The backlash of the Jolly Roger Affair fell not on the sponsors of the plan but on the head of the Primus for supporting the operation. Despite his heartfelt, truthful claims that he bore little responsibility for the Jolly Roger Affair, the First Circuit blamed him for the failure. Within a year's time he would again bear the brunt of the First Circuit's scorn.



THE MYSTERIOUS DRAGOONS

Both ROM and the rest of ComStar were completely surprised by the arrival of Wolf's Dragoons in the Federated Suns in 3005. A furious First Circuit ordered Karl Sims, the aging Precentor ROM, to explain the origin of the five fully armed and equipped BattleMech regiments. When Sim's operatives were unable to penetrate Dagoon security and two agents died in the attempt, he was relieved of his post. Primus Rusenstein hastily appointed Vesar Kristofur as the new Precentor ROM and charged him with the express mission of learning the truth about the mysterious Dragoons.

The members of the First Circuit were most concerned with the fact that Wolf's Dragoons seemed to come out of nowhere equipped with new BattleMechs and ships in pristine condition. Some dated back to the Star League era, but even more stunning were others of totally new design. The thought that any group had the ability to put together five regiments of fully armed and equipped troops without ComStar's knowledge shook the First Circuit chambers, and they demanded quick results from the Primus.

Adding to Primus Rusenstein's problems was the severe beating the C-bill had taken over the previous decade, dropping dramatically in value. As one historian of the period noted, "Primus Rusenstein was an able statesman and politician, but he lacked the

savvy to hold authority with the First Circuit. Coupled with the economic crisis facing ComStar, he became impotent as a leader."

[It must not be forgotten that Primus Rusenstein's appointments to the First Circuit were the foundation of today's ComStar and Word of Blake. Not only did he name former Primus Sims as a saint of the Order, but some of his other appointments (Kristofur, Tiepolo, Vandel) would all play key roles in the direction of both our Orders. Historians of the current ComStar fail to see the true gift that Primus Rusenstein possessed.]

Precentor ROM Kristofur made only slight headway with his assignment, but the Primus would pay the price for ROM's initial failure. In the spring of 3006 the First Circuit met in a private session and voted by a majority to ask the Primus to resign over his failings in both the Dagoon and Jolly Roger affairs.

Though the First Circuit had the legal power to simply remove the Primus from office, they did him the courtesy of allowing him to leave under his own terms. The aging Primus was overwhelmed by such resistance to his authority. Stunned and dejected, Allen Rusenstein resigned as the Primus a week later, allowing the First Circuit to select his replacement. Reduced to a Precentor again, the former Primus accepted the administration of the St. Ives HPG station. He died ten years after stepping down from the primacy, by most accounts a man broken by the shaming he had taken while in high office.



THE TIEPOLO YEARS

OLD BUSINESS

The new Primus inherited the Dragoon problem and the continuing difficulties of manipulating the events of the Third Succession War to ComStar's satisfaction. He also faced a series of critical events during his administration, including the events that led to Archon Katrina Steiner's offer of a cease-fire to every Inner Sphere realm in the form of the Peace Proposal in 3020. In 3022, Hanse Davion and Katrina Steiner signed the Federated-Commonwealth Alliance Document, ending hostilities between the two nations. Aware that the Federated Suns and Lyran Commonwealth were working out a deal, Houses Liao, Marik, and Kurita signed a loose alliance of their own, called the Concord of Kapteyn, in 3022. In this agreement, the three nations arranged mutual military and materiel support in order to coordinate their overt and covert efforts at derailing the Davion-Steiner alliance. Historians now mark the end of the Third Succession War one year later in 3025.

Ironically, it was Archon Steiner's call for lasting peace that marked the end of the relative balance of power among the Great Houses and led to the ferocity of the Fourth Succession War.

The First Circuit chose the middle-aged Julian Tiepolo, the Precentor Atrous, as the new Primus of the Order. Primus Tiepolo was a quiet, unemotional man, and like many who held the primacy before him, he was an artful administrator and planner. Primus Tiepolo represented a compromise between the conservatives and liberals controlling the First Circuit.

The new Primus faced two important problems in his first days in office. One was the ongoing efforts of ROM to infiltrate Wolf's Dragoons and learn their origins. The other, and more pressing, was the deterioration of the C-bill's value compared to the House Bills, especially that of House Marik. Some of the fiscal reforms that Primus Tiepolo pushed through the First Circuit, including a 20 percent rate increase, were little more than stopgap measures.

[It is a sad commentary that former Primus Rusenstein had tried to pass virtually the same bill, but his deteriorating relations with the First Circuit doomed its approval.]

Precentor ROM Kristofur was making little headway in the effort to penetrate the heavy security surrounding Wolf's Dragoons. The few ROM agents who came close to penetrating the Dragoons by being hired through ComStar's Mercenary Review Board were all rejected during the final rounds of negotiations. The Precentor ROM believed that the Dragoons were exposing these operatives with some sort of truth-detection device dating back to the Star League era, but his theory was never substantiated. The most humiliating incident in ComStar's attempts to discover the truth was the Dragoons' disappearance in 3009, followed by their reappearance fully refitted with new BattleMechs, personnel, and equipment.

HOUSE OF CARDS

In 3010 Precentor ROM Kristofur presented a new plan to the Primus and the First Circuit that promised a solution to both outstanding issues. The plan called for ComStar to covertly persuade Duke Anton Marik, brother of Captain-General Janos Marik, to launch an internal rebellion for control of the Free Worlds League. Maximilian Liao would then be forced, according to the Concord of Kapteyn, to lend troops to Anton Marik as part of the operation,

which ComStar could ensure would include the Dragoons. The goal of the entire scheme was simple: to shatter the resurgent House Marik's economy with a full-blown civil war and to cripple the Dragoons enough that they would have to make another supply run—this time trailed by ComStar forces to learn their source of equipment. If Anton's rebellion were successful, it would also give ComStar a firm foothold within the Free Worlds League for future expansion.

Execution of this bold plan involved extreme risks. If ComStar were ever linked to inciting a civil war within the Free Worlds League, every one of the Great Houses would launch intense intelligence operations against ROM, and might even attempt to seize ComStar's communications network. If the plan failed to cripple Wolf's Dragoons, they, too, might recognize ComStar as a potential threat, which could conceivably place Terra itself in danger.

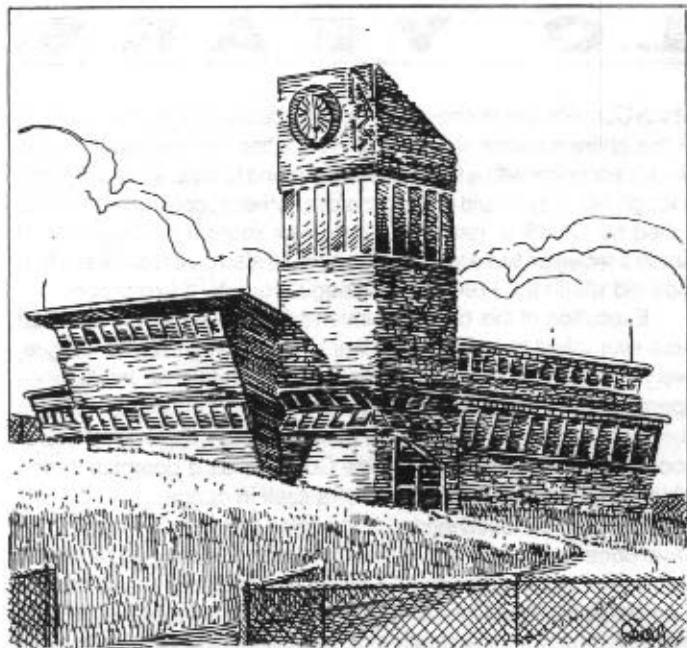
Recently surfaced evidence indicates that Primus Tiepolo may have done more than just support the plan; he may have helped author it. ComStar historians have unearthed solid evidence that the Primus arranged for his Precentor ROM to take the blame if the plan failed (which it eventually did), leaving him in a position to claim whatever successes might arise from the operation. Given this new information, Primus Tiepolo now appears to have been one of the most crafty and dangerous Primuses in the history of ComStar.

[Note that the heretics do not shed any light on this alleged evidence. Primus Tiepolo was simply a genius who dedicated his life to the will of Jerome Blake.]

Long before Anton Marik announced his rebellion against his brother, negotiations between Marik and Maximilian Liao had arranged for Chancellor Liao's daughter Candace to eventually marry Anton Marik, and for the Capellan Confederation to supply military training and intelligence to support Marik's cause. Liao intended to control the Free Worlds League through his daughter. When ComStar began to encourage Anton Marik's ambitions to rule, Precentor ROM Kristofur himself acted as personal liaison between Anton Marik and Maximilian Liao in a meeting in a penthouse of Terra's Kishmir Arcology in 3014. He carefully guided the negotiations for military support to include Wolf's Dragoons. Marik returned to the Free Worlds League with Jaime Wolf, and Precentor Kristofur had all his pieces in position for the grand game he sought to play.

In 3014 Anton Marik declared himself the true Captain-General of the Free Worlds League and openly launched a full-scale rebellion against his brother Janos. Bolstered by the elite troops of Wolf's Dragoons, Duke Anton's forces began the civil war with a steady string of successes, most to the credit of the Dragoons. It looked as though Janos was destined to fall.

Matters took a new and dangerous direction in 3015. During one of his many trips to New Delos, Precentor Kristofur convinced Duke Anton Marik that the best use of the successful Wolf's Dragoons was to place individual units under the control of Marik's commanding officers, thus better distributing their skills and increasing the effectiveness of the entire force. The Precentor ROM knew that Jaime Wolf would reject those terms as a breach of the original contract, which is exactly what happened in a meeting between Marik and Wolf on New Delos several days later. The meeting degenerated into a shouting match, each party accusing the other of violating the contract, and ended abruptly when Wolf stormed out of the room.



Playing on the Duke's ego, Precentor Kristofur fanned Anton's anger at the Wolfs' defiance, encouraging Marik to take the Dragoon families hostage as soon as Jaime Wolf and most of the Dragoon military departed New Delos to ensure the Wolfs' cooperation. This would shatter the backbone of the Dragoons, Duke Anton would get control of their military force, and the Dragoons would be forced to withdraw to their supply source or else accede to Anton's wishes, a no-win situation for the mercenaries.

Duke Anton Marik arrested Joshua Wolf and all the Dragoon staff and their dependents stationed on New Delos, then sent a message to Jaime Wolf issuing an ultimatum: place his troops under the command of Marik's officers, or the hostages would die. He gave Joshua Wolf a mockery of a treason trial, then shot him and had the rest of the Dragoon staff killed. The official version of events implies that Duke Marik himself killed Joshua Wolf, but Precentor Kristofur may have been responsible. When the Dragoons received the message, the Dragoons turned around and headed straight back to New Delos, but when they arrived in-system, Marik informed them the hostages were already dead.

[There is only slim evidence implicating Precentor Kristofur in the death of Joshua Wolf. Two eyewitnesses claim that he fired the shot that killed Wolf, but these individuals also died in the subsequent Dragoons' raid. All the ROM files relating to the investigation of their deaths were accidentally deleted from the ComStar archives, so the truth may never be known. However, Vesar Kristofur was a true follower of the will of Blake, and the Word of Blake honors his memory with the Order of Kristofur medal for our warriors.]

Both Anton Marik and Precentor ROM Kristofur failed to anticipate the depth of anger and loss each member of the Dragoons would feel at this betrayal. They descended on New Delos and Anton Marik's palace like the avenging angels of an angry god. Precentor Kristofur managed to escape the base just as the Dragoons were beginning their attack, but Duke Marik died in the attack on his palace led by Natasha Kerensky. Upon Kristofur's return to Terra, Primus Tiepolo placed him under house arrest for his actions. Kristofur

claimed that he had acted to fulfill the will of Blake, but the Primus needed him as a scapegoat for the failure of the operation.

[This was unjust on the part of the First Circuit. Had all the evidence been brought to bear, Vesar Kristofur would not have been sentenced to isolation but would eventually have become Primus of the Order.]

The plan was not a complete failure. The value of the Marik house currency plummeted as a result of the civil war, but the First Circuit could not forgive ROM's failure to learn the Dragoons' source of supply. Primus Tiepolo stated that Precentor Kristofur's personal involvement in the operation had placed the security of ComStar at risk. In a move that shocked the First Circuit, he called for a full excommunication of the Precentor ROM. In his defense Kristofur could only claim that he was "following the orders of my superiors." He was sentenced to Alpha Hydri, a desolate wasteland rediscovered a year before by the Explorer Corps. He was never seen again.

[Rumors have persisted for years that Vesar Kristofur survived the ordeal on Alpha Hydri. According to the most substantiated theory, he was rescued by a pirate band, eventually becoming the leader of the marauders known as Kelly's Kommandos. Using the identity of Kristopher Kelly, Vesar is said to have died while plotting his return to ComStar.]

The Dragoons held off making another supply run until 3019, following the disastrous campaign they fought in the service of Marik on Hesperus II, but ComStar again failed to learn the origins or supply sources of Wolf's Dragoons, being unable to successfully follow the Dragoons or their trail.

NEW AVALON INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE

While ComStar and ROM focused most of their attention on the events unfolding in the Free Worlds League during the middle to late years of the Third Succession War, they also devoted considerable effort to infiltrating the Federated Suns latest project. In 3015 Hanse Davion, recently become Prince of the Federated Suns, announced that he would begin construction of the New Avalon Institute of Science (NAIS), a university created specifically to recover the lost technology of the Star League. In the years between 3016 and 3025 ROM made several attempts to infiltrate the NAIS, but these ended in failure. The one agent who got past the intense screening was killed in a traffic accident only two weeks into her studies, long before she was in place to gather any useful information. Two other operatives were discovered during the pre-admittance testing, but committed suicide rather than expose their ROM affiliation. Their false identifications led MIIO on a wild goose chase into the Capellan Confederation rather than to ComStar.

Regardless of the threat that NAIS presented to ComStar, the Primus believed that in the end the will of Blake would prevail. If the Third Succession War could be escalated, the Davions would be forced to divert funding to war preparations, and the NAIS would be destined to failure.

[The NAIS was a true child of the cunning Hanse Davion. He well deserved the name of "the Fox," which our Blessed Order would realize too late to avert disaster in the years to come.]

House Steiner and Kurita soon followed suit by creating research facilities of their own, though the NAIS remained head and shoulders above the rest. No other Great House had Davion's resources to invest in such a center of learning, which is why the other House intelligence agencies spent almost as much time trying to infiltrate the NAIS as did the agents of ROM.

CIRCLES WITHIN CIRCLES

Despite the setbacks of the Marik Civil War, Primus Tiepolo began to see the means to escalate the current Inner Sphere conflicts into an even greater state of military crisis. ComStar had traditionally viewed any alliance between the Great Houses as counterproductive to the will of Blake, but Tiepolo began to wonder if there might not be a way to broker such events into even greater opportunities for ComStar to play various sides of the conflict off one another.

His chance to find out presented itself in 3020 when ComStar transmitted a message from Katrina Steiner calling for peace among the Great Houses of the Inner Sphere. Only Hanse Davion of the Federated Suns replied, and Primus Tiepolo quickly moved to take advantage of this stroke of luck. His ambassadors met with both parties and ferried the messages between the two House governments.

To the Primus' delight Prince Davion took the peace proposal a step further and sought an alliance between the Federated Suns and the Lyran Commonwealth to form one great realm—the Federated Commonwealth. To cement the alliance, Hanse Davion proposed marrying Melissa Steiner, the Archon's daughter. Some First Circuit members feared that the unification of the Commonwealth and the Federated Suns would create a star empire so mighty as to be invincible. While the First Circuit continued to hotly debate the possibility, Hanse Davion and Katrina Steiner arrived on Terra to sign a formal treaty document.

The First Circuit members were shocked at the thought that they would be witness to the creation of this powerful alliance. Primus Tiepolo waved off their arguments, however. Only a week before the treaty-signing ceremony, the Primus summed up his reasoning: "We have a choice. Let the unification take place without our involvement, or act as the guiding force behind it. I choose the second option because it gives ComStar a means of control, and the blessed Blake himself realized the value of such control." The historic secret treaty was signed on Hilton Head Island on 3022.

To dispel the First Circuit's fears Primus Tiepolo allowed ROM to leak information of the alliance treaty to the intelligence agencies of the other Houses. Though the rumors could not be confirmed, soon the highest councils of the other Great Houses were abuzz with speculation. It was inevitable that the remaining House leaders would respond by creating their own counter-alliance in self-defense.

In mid-summer of 3022 Subhash Indravar, head of the Draconis Combine's ISF, arranged a meeting with Janos Marik to discuss a mutual defense treaty. When Janos Marik arrived at the Terran Alps retreat of Elmau, he was shocked to find that Takashi Kurita had also invited Maximilian Liao. Janos was furious that the Coordinator would attempt to ally him with House Liao, the people who had helped his own brother launch a civil war against him. In the end, however, Takashi Kurita prevailed. The threat of a monolithic Federated Commonwealth destroying all its enemies persuaded even Janos Marik to finally consider an agreement.

The final treaty was signed on October 13, 3022, and became known as the Concord of Kapteyn. Its provisions called for an end to hostilities between Houses Kurita, Marik, and Liao, and for mutual support in training and intelligence. By all accounts Primus Tiepolo was pleased with the results of his efforts, having carefully turned the Inner Sphere into two armed camps.

Satisfied for the moment that, even though the Third Succession War was clearly ending in a stalemate, both unified factions

were already planning continued hostilities against their enemies, Primus Tiepolo returned his attention to the affairs of the Free Worlds League. His ROM agents there had learned that the mercenary Gray Death Legion's landhold on Helm sat virtually on top of a stockpile of Star League equipment and materiel. Even more significant, Star League documents recovered both on Terra and by ROM agents in the Combine (who had raided Helm two centuries before) indicated that the site might also contain a Star League library. The Primus, with the consent of the First Circuit, ordered ROM to investigate the matter further and to make sure that none of the Great Houses gained control of the stockpile—if one did exist.

[The existence and discovery of the Gray Death library core proved to be one of the worst twists of fate ever to befall our Order. Like a ghost from the past, it haunts us to this day.]

Using Precentor Emilio Rachan as an envoy, ComStar informed House Marik of the suspected existence of the stockpile, securing their cooperation in a plan to recover it. Confident that the Gray Death Legion would not allow ComStar or Marik access to their land for any reason, and afraid that the Legion would discover the cache for itself and make use of its findings, ComStar decided to frame the Gray Death Legion for a minor civilian "incident" that would require their destruction and/or capture. Their landhold would revert to the League, and ComStar would infiltrate the Free Worlds League forces attempting to locate the Star League cache. Once they found it, ComStar would use its own ComStar Guards and Militia to either recover or destroy the stockpile. ComStar placed a full division of the relatively green ComStar Guards and Militia on standby and covertly moved them into the League in case they were needed. Precentor Rachan laid the groundwork for the operation by contacting several of the ever-rebellious lords within the Free Worlds League, promising them a portion of ComStar's secret BattleMech stockpile in exchange for their assistance. Obviously, he did not reveal ComStar's true intentions in seeking the library.

Precentor Rachan overstepped his bounds by modifying the original plan without the permission of the First Circuit or the Primus, however. He made contact with Lord Garth, leader of the rebel Marik lords, with a plan to overthrow Janos Marik. Rachan used rumors of a stockpile of arms in the Star League cache as a lure to draw Garth into the plan. It is now believed that Rachan may have planned to become the prime minister in a newly formed Free Worlds League after fomenting yet another civil war.

[More innuendo on the part of our former brothers in ComStar. No one has ever presented any evidence of Rachan doing anything other than following the orders of the First Circuit and the Primus. He deviated from the original plan only by arranging for the slaughter of the innocents on Siris V, and for that he faces eternal damnation. Destroying technology out of ignorance and fear is evil, and Rachan went far beyond that sin by killing millions and obliterating agrodomes dating back to the glorious Star League era.]

The "minor civilian incident" the Precentor contrived to frame the Gray Death Legion was the wholesale massacre of more than twelve million inhabitants of Siris V. Using BattleMechs and ships painted with the colors and markings of the Gray Death Legion, Lord Garth's forces destroyed the domes that protected the civilians of Siris V from the deadly atmosphere of their world. Word of the massacre did not reach Primus Tiepolo until Rachan's plan was well underway, however. When the First Circuit learned of the Precentor's betrayal, they ordered him excommunicated from ComStar and exterminated by ROM.



The ROM operatives assigned to remove Precentor Rachan never had a chance to fulfill their mission. Colonel Grayson Carlyle of the Gray Death Legion dealt the Free Worlds League military several stunning defeats as they hunted him down as a renegade on Helm. After evading the pursuit of the 'Mech forces of the Twelfth White Sabers, Carlyle uncovered the true prize on Helm, the functioning Star League library core. Precentor Rachan recognized Carlyle's discovery for what it was, but died in a failed attempt to destroy the core rather than let it fall into the hands of the Great House leaders.

Primus Tiepolo was infuriated at Precentor Rachan's failure to capture or destroy the memory core. He was also appalled that one of his followers might so take matters into his own hands, placing all of ComStar at risk. Primus Tiepolo immediately sent a message to Captain-General Marik informing him that Precentor Rachan had been a renegade operating on his own accord. As a "gesture of good will," the Primus authorized a massive compensation to the survivors of the massacre on Siris V.

Despite his public stance of sorrow and grieving, Primus Tiepolo ordered ROM to initiate a wave of terror to retrieve or destroy the copies of the core he knew must exist. His agents reported that the two copies that fell into the hands of House Kurita were destroyed in bombings that ROM agents linked to a Davion MIO operation. An assassin's bullet supposedly prevented a copy being transferred to a Loki agent in the Commonwealth—and the deed was traced back to the Combine's elite ISF. ComStar's greatest fear concerning the core was that a copy would survive and make its way to House Davion's NAIS, where the technology existed to penetrate some, if not all, of its secrets.

ROM's failure to learn of the Gray Death library core copy that eventually made its way to the NAIS, and their mistaken belief that the other copies were destroyed in the strikes ComStar perpetrated against them, has plagued the organization for years. The new

Precentor ROM, Tojo Jarlath, did launch several investigations to track down the library core copies, but the information already had made its way to too many depositories to be completely wiped out. Certainly, the First Circuit did not learn at this time that the NAIS possessed a copy of the core, even though ROM probably knew it existed.

During the recent opening of our archives, ComStar historians have learned that in the early spring of 3029 Precentor Jarlath was on good terms with the new Precentor Dieron, Myndo Waterly. Theorists speculate that Waterly may have suppressed the information about the NAIS copy of the Star League memory core as a tool to gain political advantage over Primus Tiepolo. This is further substantiated by the fact that Precentor Jarlath assisted Precentor Waterly in preparing troops and equipment for her infamous NAIS raid several weeks before the plan ever came to the attention of the First Circuit. Such actions imply that Waterly may have used nefarious means to corrupt the Precentor ROM.

Precentor Waterly was previously involved in a scandal concerning information passed to House Kurita's ISF on Melissa Steiner's secret travels to meet with Hanse Davion. During her preliminary excommunication trial for directly defying the non-intervention policy of the First Circuit she was exonerated of the charges, but suspicion of her involvement still remained.

[This accusation is preposterous. ComStar is a vast organization. ROM gathers terabytes of data daily. What happened in the loss of the information on the Gray Death core was not part of any plan of Precentor Waterly's. Rather it was a simple, and unfortunate, mistake. Furthermore, to say that she still lived under suspicion even after her trial proved her innocent is but one more effort by the heretics to tarnish the reputation of one of our great leaders in their effort to revise history.]

Primus Tiepolo's earlier failures to cripple or destroy Wolf's Dragoons gave him a thirst for revenge against the unit. He created

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

Primus Julian Tiepolo, more than all the Primuses before him, seemed to have a distaste for mercenary troops. This antipathy surfaced many times during his tenure as the leader of our Order, and if Primus Tiepolo had remained in power, it is likely that mercenary units as we know them would have become a thing of the past.

Tiepolo became Primus on the failure of his predecessor to quell the possible threat of Wolf's Dragoons or to discover the truth about their mysterious origins. Yet during his own career he also failed to accomplish those same goals. Though his machinations to turn the Dragoons into Kurita outlaws are well known in the annals of our Order, it can safely be said that, overall, Primus Tiepolo failed on this front.

The bungled affair with the Gray Death Legion and the Star League library core were more blemishes on the record of Primus Julian Tiepolo. Most experts agree that if not for the outbreak of the Fourth Succession War, these two scandals would have destroyed his career. Several retired members of the First Circuit still alive at the time of this writing have implied

that even after it became clear that Rachan was responsible for the debacle with the Gray Death Legion, the Primus still tried to blame the Legion for the destruction on Siris V—and still sought to sabotage their assignments and contract negotiations.

In a speech to the First Circuit only a month before the start of the Fourth Succession War, Primus Tiepolo revealed the depth of his hatred of mercenaries. "Beware the soldiers who sell their services. Some may seem proud and honorable, yet in the end their only true lord is money. Such is the case with mercenaries serving in the Inner Sphere today, and their forces are even larger than before. We may be able to control the Great Houses, but in the end I fear that these independents may serve as wild cards to be played against our blessed Order. In the future we may wish to disband all units over a regiment in size—for the protection of civilians, as well as ourselves."

—From *ComStar and the Mercenaries: In Bed With the Enemy*, by Holly Flannarie, New Avalon Press, May 3036



a new plan to deal with the mercenaries, hoping to manipulate House Kurita's hatred of mercenaries to result in their absorbing the Dragoons into their own military. Tiepolo proceeded very carefully.

With the approval of the First Circuit, Tiepolo authorized his relatively new Precentor Galedon, Alexander Kalafon, to leak information to House Kurita about a known Dagoon defector named Fadre Singh. The Precentor provided the information to Warlord Grieg Samsonov as a gesture of good faith from ComStar, thereby implying that the Order did not fully trust the Dragoons. The message, whether directly stated or implied, was taken seriously by Warlord Samsonov, who decided to use his new ComStar ally against the Dragoons.

Warlord Samsonov's agents had been conducting a campaign of annoyance and inconvenience against the Dragoons, and had recently stepped up their efforts to discredit the mercenaries in the Chancellor's eyes by running a disinformation campaign. Their latest ploy centered on giving the Dragoons a bad name on their Combine base planet of An Ting. As tensions increased between the Dragoons and the local population, Wolf's forces attempted to send out a message to their families to warn them of the growing risks and resentments, and prepare them to leave the system. ComStar personnel, including ROM agents disguised as civilians, refused to transmit the Dragoons' messages via the HPG system. The Precentor of An Ting formally declared Wolf's Dragoons to be outlaws and in violation of their contract terms, despite the fact that the rumored atrocities and other violations attributed to the Dragoons were never taken before the Mercenary Review Board.

In early 3028 the covert war between ComStar and Wolf's Dragoons exploded. Jaime Wolf shocked ROM and the rest of the Order by sending elements of his elite Seventh Kommando to seize

the An Ting HPG. The Seventh Kommando successfully took over the station, killing its staff in the process, and sent out a coded message to the rest of the Dagoon.

Colonel Wolf also devised a plan to distract the Combine's attention away from the departure of the Dagoon families and support personnel. He issued a formal challenge for Kurita to battle the Dragoons on the planet Misery, fully aware that the Coordinator could not refuse. He waited until his contract with the Combine had expired before beginning the assault, however, safe in the knowledge that their services were already contracted to the Federated Suns. The duel began with individual actions, included a week of small skirmishes, and ended with several pitched battles. The Dragoons broke the Kurita defense and won the battle of Misery, but they did not look much like winners when it was all over. The Dragoons suffered devastatingly heavy losses, and it took many months for the troops to again reach full strength.

When Primus Tiepolo saw his efforts to play off the Combine against the mercenary unit crumble, he washed his hands of the affair. Many modern scholars believe that he had finally given up his desire for revenge. Wolf's Dragoons had won a moral victory; the Combine felt it had received a stunning insult. For ComStar, the issue was considered a draw and perhaps best left buried.

WOLF AT THE DOOR

The attached documentation supports several conclusions about the attack by Wolf's Dragoons on the An Ting HPG Compound. Our investigation of the site as well as the security data recovered from the data banks indicate that on January 3, 3028, elements of Wolf's Dagoon's Seventh Kommando infantry penetrated the security protecting the HPG station on An Ting. Thanks to support by Combine military garrison forces we eliminated these forces, but not prior to their use of the HPG.

The most disturbing result of this investigation is that our internal security systems were apparently left operational. The code-encrypting device on the HPG remained intact, but the technicians of the Seventh Kommando somehow rigged a temporary by-pass of the system. Furthermore, these infantry troops successfully aligned the HPG pulse to send the message to the other Dragoons; and then deleted the message from the data banks—all in a short period of time and while under fire from garrison forces.

The conclusion of our investigation is that Wolf's Dragoons must have access to some HPG technology in order to have so quickly overridden our security and to operate so complicated a device as a transmitter.

As a result of this attack we are requesting a full upgrade of all HPG security systems in the Inner Sphere. We also recommend that security be doubled and full audits of security procedures take place daily on any world where Wolf's Dragoons are stationed.

—Cover Sheet, ROM Investigative Report 444032-DC-AT11, An Ting HPG Attack, February 22, 3028

FOURTH SUCCESSION WAR

The start of the Fourth Succession War was announced in the midst of the wedding reception for Hanse Davion and Melissa Steiner in August 3028. ComStar hosted the ceremony and the celebration, which was attended by every House Lord, dignitary, and important MechWarrior family in the Inner Sphere. Primus Tiepolo hoped to use the occasion to further convince the House Lords that ComStar was a neutral agent dedicated to peace.

[Let us never forget that peace often comes at a price, hence this war. Primus Tiepolo saw this truth.]

Despite ROM's meticulous efforts to prevent the presence of weapons at the gathering, Colonel Jaime Wolf arrived at the reception bearing the swords of the late Minobu Tetsuhara, which he delivered to Takashi Kurita along with a dressing down for the waste of a valuable soldier and fine man. Wolf also showed his contempt for our blessed Order with his actions, for weapons had been expressly forbidden at the ceremony.

[Wolf's deviousness should come as no surprise, given his ties to the Clans.]

A number of theories exist to explain how Colonel Wolf managed to smuggle the swords into the wedding party undetected. The Precentor ROM's own conclusion was that Wolf must have used the M-11J, a personal cloaking device. This rare Star League-era device can make scanned objects appear as pre-programmed non-lethal objects. Only two operating PCDs are known to exist, both in the hands of ROM. If Colonel Wolf did use such a device, it only served to fuel the speculation that he was part of the Kerensky fleet returned to the Inner Sphere.

Further complicating the wedding celebration was the fact that part of the House Liao entourage was involved in an assassination attempt against Quintus Allard, the head of House Davion's MIO. It also happened that two ROM security personnel on standard patrol near the Hilton Head deep-underground BattleMech storage facility were killed by forces unknown. A later ROM investigation indicated that the parties most likely involved with the deaths were Daniel Allard or possibly Quintus Allard himself.

Both of these events severely undermined ROM's authority on Terra in the eyes of the First Circuit. Precentor Waterly called for the immediate Interdiction of the Capellan Confederation for violating the terms of the wedding celebration with their assassination attempt. Only Primus Tiepolo's calm voice of reason averted a full-scale Interdiction. He persuaded the First Circuit to allow the incident to pass rather than to disrupt the wedding ceremony and his grand plans to drive the Inner Sphere into all-out war.

What Primus Tiepolo did not know was that Houses Davion and Steiner had their own plans. Raising his glass in a toast before all the leaders of the Inner Sphere at his wedding reception on August 20, 3028, Hanse Davion declared war on House Liao and announced that his forces were already striking at the heart of the Confederation. The Lyran Commonwealth had also opened up a full-scale invasion of the Draconis Combine. The Fourth Succession War had begun, catching ComStar completely unprepared.

The Fourth Succession War was unique in being the first of the Succession Wars to dramatically alter the map of the Inner Sphere. House Davion BattleMech forces poured into the Tikonov Commonality, threatening to cut off the Capellan Confederation from the Terran corridor. The lightning speed of the Davion juggernaut

CAUGHT NAPPING

TIEPOLO: The floor acknowledges Precentor Dieron.
WATERLY: Your plans have gone astray, Primus. As I have stated for the past three years, our very existence is threatened by the union of House Steiner and Davion. While we sit here idle, their BattleMechs are sweeping across the Capellan and Kurita borders.

EVERSON: Our communication intercepts seem to indicate that this plan has been underway for some time. How is this possible, Jarlath? Where were the ever-seeing eyes of ROM during this massive buildup?

JARLATH: It appears that Prince Davion does not fully trust our blessed Order. During his Operation Galahad he used a command circuit of JumpShips rather than relay messages via our HPGs. Similar precautions were taken by House Steiner. Since we have always relied on the use of communications via HPGs to track troops placements, we were blinded to his troop movements. Also our operatives within the two militaries did not realize that they were not simply on their yearly maneuvers but were preparing for a real war.

VANDEL: Indeed, Jarlath, it appears that Hanse Davion is aptly named "the Fox." I trust that you have taken measures to make sure that this breach of security never occurs again.

JARLATH: I assure you that our agents have stepped up operations in all the House sectors. At the request of the Primus, I have also placed our own ComStar Guards on standby status, strictly as a precaution. I doubt that they will be needed, however.

WATERLY: We are wandering from the real issue here—the threat that Hanse Davion and his union to Melissa Steiner poses to the Inner Sphere. Primus, I cannot stress enough that your plan has failed. If we do not intervene soon, House Davion will rule as the First Lord of the Inner Sphere!

TIEPOLO: You overestimate House Davion's capabilities, Precentor Dieron. I see the guiding hand of Blake in this action.

WATERLY: We were caught unaware by this new war! Your plan has failed!

TIEPOLO: Patience is the true weapon of a survivor—such are the words of our blessed Blake, Precentor. What I see is not a failure. I see the success of my plan. Is not the whole of the Inner Sphere consumed in war? Is this not the prophecy that Jerome Blake gave us? Precentor Waterly, I have not failed. I have set the wings of victory in flight. Now it is only a matter of time.

—From transcripts of the First Circuit meeting, August 21, 3028, 1103.022 hours

stunned military experts across the Inner Sphere and within the ranks of our Order. For the first time since the fall of the Star League, it appeared that one House leader might conquer and unite the Inner Sphere, becoming the new First Lord of a new Star League.

Though the two-year-long Fourth Succession War was relatively short, it was a bloody conflict. While the Third Succession War had seen innumerable border conflicts, the borders of the five great star empires changed little in that long conflict. The political and social landscape also changed little during the period. In stark contrast, it would be twenty years before the social, political, and military fallout of the Fourth Succession War was sorted out.

In November 3028 the First Circuit met in a stormy session to discuss the fact that this war might end in total victory for one side. Precentor Waterly pressed for ComStar to create a pretext for imposing a full Communications Interdiction on the Federated Suns. Though the First Circuit approved the proposal, most of its members, including the Primus, believed that the war would eventually grind down into a never-ending slugfest, as had the previous wars.

[It is of note that only Precentor Waterly understood the threat that ComStar faced. If not for her bold actions, our Order might have been decimated, yet the current leaders of ComStar claim that she was mad. Primus Tiepolo's plans were cunning and bold, yet within the traditional role that Blake saw for ComStar. His plans were flawed, though, and Waterly saw that exploited, these flaws could spell the end of our blessed Order.]

In May of the next year House Davion BattleMechs struck at Sarna. In order to give the First Circuit a pretext for an interdiction against the Federated Suns, ROM would set in motion a plan to frame House Davion and the Federated Suns for an attack on the HPG of that world.

To create "proof" a small contingent of the ComStar Guards and Militia were disguised as an exact copy of a Strike Company of the Fifth Syrtis Fusiliers. Using captured quartermaster inventory sheets, their 'Mechs were painted to the exact configurations as those of the Fusiliers, and were quickly transported to the surface of Sarna, smuggled in as "construction supplies." They were then covertly deployed on the Gold Coast only ten kilometers from the HPG station.

The troops were told that the personnel of the HPG station had mutinied against ComStar, and in open defiance of the Word of Blake, were providing House Davion with our holy technology. The ComStar Guards unit was whipped into a battle frenzy and unleashed on the unsuspecting HPG, all the while being filmed by a ROM operative concealed in the nearby hills. The HPG adepts and acolytes never had a chance against the holy warriors of the Guards.

In the end ComStar had its "evidence" against House Davion, and the Federated Suns was officially placed under Interdiction on June 1, 3029. The ComStar Guards were smuggled off-world while House Davion tried to piece together what had happened. ROM operatives planted evidence that another element, House Liao's Maskirovka, was involved in implicating the Federated Suns.

[There are two versions of what occurred in the setup of the Sarna HPG. The version described above is the new ComStar's official history. The truth is that the attack never took place. The entire incident was filmed on Terra using a mockup of the Sarna HPG transmitter. The Word of Blake acknowledges that some lives were, unfortunately, lost, but they were volunteers who offered to serve Blake's holy will with their sacrifice. The deeds described here are far too cold-blooded to be the work of our Order.]



Precentor Dieron, Myndo Waterly, was determined to ascend to the Primacy of ComStar. Three weeks prior to her explosive call for Tiepolo's expulsion, she (along with the Precentor ROM) ordered a battalion-size strike force assembled. As in the Sarna framing, the ComStar Guards and Militia forces were repainted and reconfigured. This time they were made to resemble the elite forces of the House Liao Death Commandos in order to throw any MIIO agents attempting to trace their origins off the scent.

All troops for the mission volunteered. They knew that the mission was a one-way attack and that under no circumstances must they be taken prisoner. The Precentor ROM provided all the ComStar MechWarriors with a quick-acting poison to use if they were captured by the opposing forces. Their mission was clearly defined: it was either death or success. No middle ground was acceptable. The fanatics who volunteered were more than willing to fight under such terms.

[As well they should. Those brave men and women who died on New Avalon proved that they had the true will of Blake in their hearts. They did not fight for foolish political reasons, but for the greater glory of our Order.]

The interdiction of the Federated Suns slowed the Davion war machine, but failed to stop it. With Tikonov completely under the thumb of the Federated Suns, House Liao was nearly crushed. Meanwhile, in mid-August 3029, Precentor Waterly dropped a bombshell on the First Circuit. She had received evidence that a copy of the Star League memory core recovered by the Gray Death Legion had found its way to the NAIS. With the precious information in the hands of the great minds gathered there, ComStar faced an unparalleled threat—the loss of its technological superiority.

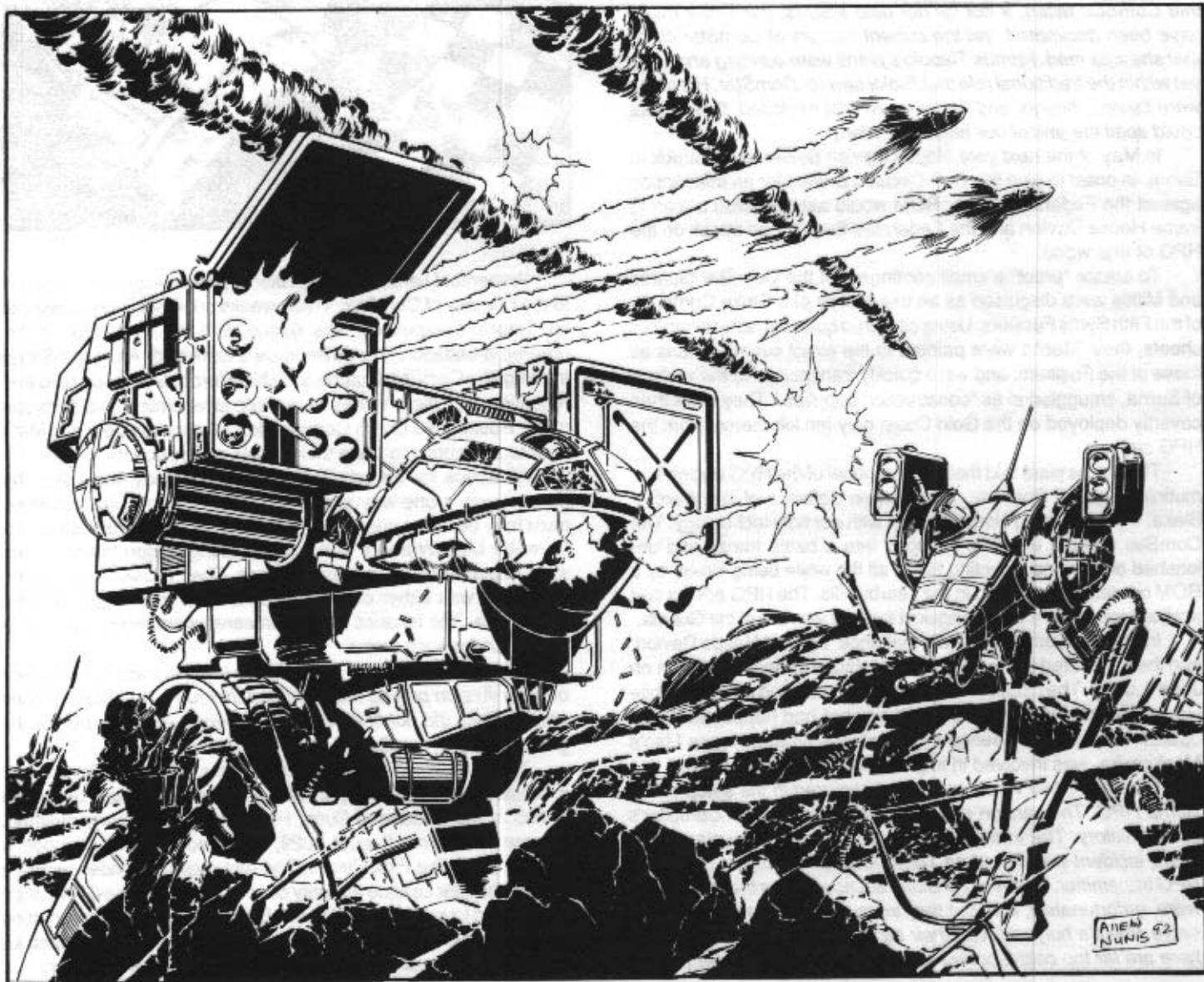
Precentor Waterly pressed for an attack against the NAIS to destroy or capture the core. She also used the incident to call for the First Circuit to expel Primus Tiepolo. In the middle of the expulsion debate the Primus suffered a heart attack and was rushed to the Hilton Head medical center. The First Circuit agreed to Waterly's proposed attack on the NAIS, as long as ComStar could not be blamed for the incident. Two days later Primus Tiepolo suffered a massive stroke and was kept alive only on life support systems in the hospital.

[This military operation proved to be an historic turning point for ComStar. In the past we had used only token military force, and always covertly. Then-Precentor Waterly understood that the military option long held in check by the First Circuit was a weapon whose time had come to combat the horrors that House Davion threatened to unleash on the Inner Sphere.]

Having readied her troops weeks earlier, Precentor Waterly was able to strike quickly against the NAIS. On September 10, 3029, the ComStar "Death Commandos" attacked the New Avalon

Institute of Science. Dropping onto the campus proper they expected only light resistance but were shocked that Team Banzai managed to rally a stern defense. Even Prince Davion himself waded into the fray in his *BattleMaster*. NAIS Security responded, too, and the battle lasted more than two full hours. When it was over, the ComStar force had been destroyed to the last Battle-Mech. The memory core remained intact and in the hands of the Federated Suns scientists. The clandestine mission ended in dismal failure, but the First Circuit did not blame Precentor Myndo Waterly. Because Primus Tiepolo had failed for so long to make any kind of move against the Federated Commonwealth, Waterly's failure with a bold move could be excused. No one on the First Circuit doubted her personal power or devotion to the word of Blake, and Waterly's star was on the rise.

In November Primus Tiepolo died in his hospital bed, never knowing the dangerous new path ComStar had started down. As the Fourth Succession War finally ground to a halt, the First Circuit appointed Myndo Waterly as the thirteenth Primus of our blessed Order.





THE WATERLY ERA

Myndo Waterly's rise to power was one of the most turbulent and controversial in the history of ComStar. In just ten years time, during the final, stalemated years of the Third Succession War, the Precentor of Dieron rose from the ranks to become an advocate Precentor of the First Circuit and then Primus. During her last two years as a Precentor, between the Third and Fourth Succession Wars, she was brought up on charges of treason and faced excommunication, led the call to interdict House Davion, and used ComStar troops to attack the capital world of one of the Great Houses.

Waterly's appointment to the primacy was part of an extreme shift away from Primus Tiepolo's liberal approach to affairs with the Inner Sphere states. Waterly represented the most conservative elements of ComStar, advocating the use of force to fulfill the prophecies of Blake. Most historians agree that the First Circuit backed her appointment to the primacy only because most of its members feared standing against her—having seen the results with Julian Tiepolo.

[This shift in approach to dealing with the Inner Sphere was neither wrong nor inherently evil. Primus Waterly saw the gradual downslide of ComStar under the weak-kneed, hands-off approach of Primus Tiepolo. Her devotion to Blake and his word represented the best salvation for our Order at the time, and the First Circuit realized this as well.]

Primus Waterly believed that the merging of the Steiner and Davion bloodlines signaled the end for the Inner Sphere and the will of Jerome Blake. In her oratories she often referred to Hanse Davion as a modern-day Satan, holding a blade to the throat of ComStar. She believed that the ComStar Guards and Militia, or Com Guards, as she renamed them, would become the salvation of the Word of Blake. In keeping with her conservative approach to ComStar policy, she replaced Precentor ROM Jarlath with the ultra-conservative Nicholas Cassew only three days into her primacy.

In November 3029, with the end of the Fourth Succession War drawing nigh, Primus Waterly opened discussions with the Federated Suns concerning their interdiction. Using the attack ComStar staged on Sarna as a prime example of the need for better protection of ComStar's HPGs, she convinced Hanse Davion that his forces were simply inadequate for the task and suggested placing ComStar troops and BattleMechs within the ComStar compounds on each world in his empire. Reluctantly, Prince Davion agreed and by December the interdiction was lifted. For the first time, the House Lords could confirm the existence of ComStar BattleMech forces, though the full extent of their strength would not be known for years.

Stationing Com Guard forces on each world of the new Federated Commonwealth required considerable time and resources. Until Primus Waterly negotiated this deal with Davion, the ComStar Guards had always been under the direct command of the Primus. Now Waterly found herself at the head of an administrative and logistical nightmare. Though ComStar had had a battle-ready 'Mech force since 3005, for obvious reasons they had little experience in moving troops on a large scale, and knew even less about supporting them. The Primus recruited several mercenary leaders as consultants to organize the vast operation. Though she

was always careful to never reveal the full extent of ComStar's military capability to her mercenary commanders, some long-term contractors, such as Brion's Legion, soon knew that the largest military force in the Inner Sphere was hidden on Terra. It took more than two years to deploy the troops to each HPG compound and set up the staggeringly expensive supply system to support them.

COVERT OPERATIONS

Unlike her predecessor, Primus Waterly believed that dividing the Inner Sphere Houses into two armed camps was dangerous. It was much better, she argued, to keep the Inner Sphere splintered as well as at each other's throats.

ROSEBUD

She authored Operation Rosebud to accomplish her goals. The plan called for ComStar to sponsor a movement within the Rasalhague worlds to win independence from the Draconis Combine. A new Rasalhague state would provide the Draconis Combine with a buffer between it and the Federated Commonwealth along the Lyran front, allowing the Combine to use troops against Davion that were currently acting as police to keep Rasalhague in check. Primus Waterly believed that she might even be able to foment enough unrest on Skye for it to go independent as well, which would physically split the Federated Suns and Lyran Commonwealth apart.

In September 3030 Primus Waterly met covertly with Kanrei Theodore Kurita to lay the groundwork for the first phase of Rosebud. The two met only briefly but agreed, in principle, on several key points. ComStar would provide the Draconis Combine with intelligence information on the Federated Commonwealth and with BattleMechs from its undisclosed sources to replenish those lost during the Fourth Succession War. In return, the Combine would allow ComStar to post Com Guard troops at all of its HPG compounds and would officially recognize the formation of the Free Rasalhague Republic. The risks on both sides were great, but in the end the two leaders recognized their common goals.

[Both sides stood to win from the Primus' scheme. The Combine stood to gain a buffer state between it and its traditional enemy at the cost of only a few worlds. It also sorely needed the proffered BattleMech forces to rebuild the losses suffered in the Fourth Succession War.]

ComStar gained by further dividing the Inner Sphere and posting its own troops within the Combine. If it accomplished nothing else, Rosebud proved the magnificent intelligence of Primus Waterly and her beliefs.]

When Primus Waterly returned to Terra, she faced a First Circuit that was uncomfortable at best with the terms and agreements she had negotiated. Primus Waterly quelled much of the debate by assuring her council that any BattleMechs given to the Combine would be stripped of any lostech devices, despite the promise of just those devices she had made to Kanrei Kurita. She also dismissed their concerns about posting the Com Guards in the Combine. Her opponents considered this a radical and dangerous

move, one more direct contradiction of the traditional interpretation of the word of Blake. Primus Waterly gave the First Circuit the same guarantee she had used to allay their fears when she bargained to post troops in Davion space: that the Com Guard forces posted on worlds other than Terra would serve only as an active agent to protect the weak and helpless, further encouraging ComStar's image as the saviors of mankind, never aggressors.

In 3034, House Kurita recognized the Free Rasalhague Republic (FRR), conceding to the new nation most of the worlds it had originally promised to give up in its agreement with ComStar. This forced the Lyran Commonwealth in turn to surrender to the Republic a considerable number of worlds that it had won during the Fourth Succession War, further damaging the fledgling relationship the Commonwealth had begun with leaders of a second Rasalhague resistance group before the war. Several Combine military units, unhappy at being asked to give up planets their compatriots had died to win, violated the Kanrei's orders and attempted to retake the Republic worlds, only to be attacked by DCMS units loyal to Theodore Kurita. House Kurita's action in what they named the Ronin War shocked most of the Inner Sphere, especially Steiner-Davion.

Not many months had passed before both the Combine and ComStar began to question the terms of their earlier agreement. The Combine reneged on its end of the bargain when it withheld several key worlds from the Free Rasalhague Republic in its Alshain District. ComStar, per orders from the Primus herself, only provided stripped-down BattleMechs to the DCMS, rather than the Star League-vintage equipment House Kurita believed Waterly had promised. Skye, meanwhile, was ablaze with demonstrations, but neither the Draconis Combine nor ComStar believed that a large-scale revolt against the Steiner/Davion union was in the offing.

The tensions between the Combine and ComStar reached a peak in the summer of 3034 when the Primus traveled to Dieron to meet with Theodore Kurita in the Dragon's Roost Command Post hidden in the Tatsuyama Mountains. The meeting has been described by both as cordial but tense, with both sides claiming that the other had failed to uphold his or her end of their pact. Theodore Kurita insisted that he was unable to concede any other worlds to the new Republic, and Primus Waterly conceded that ComStar would not interdict the Combine for renouncing its agreement.

As a final seal of their new concord (and what would mark the official conclusion of Operation Rosebud), Theodore Kurita pre-

sented a unique "gift" to Primus Waterly. The "gift" was a former general by the name of Anastasius Focht. The Kanrei knew that despite ComStar's vast military machine, the troops lacked any practical military experience or leadership other than that of the contracted mercenaries. By presenting Focht to Waterly, he gave the Com Guards a new future filled with brilliant possibilities.

[It also spelled the end of our Order as we knew it. The demon Focht stood for the destruction of everything we held dear and true. He and his band of murderers nearly succeeded in destroying the memory and dreams of Jerome Blake. He is the Grand Heretic—the Despiser, Pure Evil Incarnate!]

Primus Waterly made Anastasius Focht her new Precentor ROM, replacing Precentor Cassew because of "his gross incompetence during the recent dealings with the Draconis Combine"—even though the Primus handled the negotiations directly. Precentor ROM Focht was approved with little debate by the First Circuit, which was strange, given the sensitive nature of his posting. Most historians and witnesses believe that the Primus used political favors to hold off her more ardent opponents from creating controversy over Focht. None knew his background or beliefs, and believed him to be simply one of the Primus' followers.

[For all of us, this was a grave mistake.]

One of the most unforeseen benefits of Operation Rosebud occurred within the borders of the former Lyran Commonwealth. In several meetings between Primus Waterly and Ryan Steiner, leader of the Skye independence movement, Ryan agreed to provide ComStar with an "incident" to justify ComStar providing favored-user status to Ryan and his followers.

In 3041 forces loyal to Ryan Steiner ran a car carrying a bomb against the outer perimeter wall of the Ko HPG compound, killing five acolytes and two adepts and seriously wounding the Precentor of the Ko station. Using the bomb attack as a pretext, Primus Waterly demanded that Archon Melissa Steiner allow her to post Com Guard forces in the Commonwealth to protect those HPG stations, or else face a full Interdiction that could easily sever the massive government of the Federated Commonwealth. Despite the Archon's personal resentment of the Primus and her demands, she agreed.

The "terrorist" action on the part of the Skye Independence Movement gained notoriety for their cause and, as part of their agreement, Ryan was given priority access to transmissions into and out of Skye.



MYSTERY MAN

[Almost from the day he was appointed to his position, the intelligence organization in every House began an investigation to uncover Anastasius Focht's background. ROM collected copies of every document produced in these efforts in order to maintain their leader's secret identity. Precentor Atreus, Demona Aziz, knew Focht's real identity and opened ROM's files on the heretic so that he might be exposed for the power-mad dictator he really is. We intend to circulate these documents until every member of ComStar and every citizen of every world recognizes the traitor's evil intent.]

Our investigation into the new Precentor ROM has revealed little more than we knew several months ago when he was appointed to his office. There is no background whatsoever on anyone in the Inner Sphere named Anastasius Focht. There is a Focht family in the Lyran Commonwealth located on La Grave, but our investigation proved that they were not related to Focht (thanks in part to a sample of tissue recovered by one of our operatives from the Precentor during a recent dinner party). Indeed, his genetic pattern did not match any of the known living military leaders or warrior households, yet it is obvious by some of his organizational changes within ROM that Focht must have some sort of formal training in military affairs and intelligence.

What is known is that Focht was injured at some point in his life, losing his right eye. This incident has been queried in our data bases as well, with no resulting insight into his origin. Voice samples taken during a state luncheon indicate that the Precentor ROM has a heavy Germanic accent, but all of our queries and comparisons with living individuals that meet his criteria and physical description thus far have proven fruitless.

ComStar ROM is an extensive organization and it is highly likely that they have taken extreme efforts to conceal the identity of their new Precentor. This simply raises more questions, such as, why would Focht wish his identity hidden? Perhaps ComStar fears that if the Federated Commonwealth had access to his family we might be able to use them as a wedge against their new Precentor. At this point, however, all our conclusions are sheer speculation.

—MIIO Intelligence Report 304-JAP-DLP-A1
ComStar Surveillance of Precentor ROM Anastasius Focht, April 3037 (Intercepted by ROM Operative Adept Talpha Kearn)

[Little did MIIO realize at the time of this report that their failure to discover his origins lay in looking only at the living. Focht's true identity was with the dead. They had access to his family all along—House Steiner. They never knew how close they were to the truth...]

[This entire fairy tale is pure fiction invented by our heretic brethren. No evidence has ever been presented publicly to show that the Primus ever met with Ryan Steiner or that this alleged agreement ever existed. No members of the First Circuit were aware of this pact, yet here it is presented as true history.]

[The truth is that the terrorists had no connection at all to the Skye movement, as discovered by our own ROM investigation. Furthermore, the Primus' decisions to post troops in the Commonwealth and to give communications access to Ryan Steiner were made to preserve ComStar against the horrors of the Steiner-Davion union and can hardly be considered acts of conspiracy.]

The Primus claimed that Operation Rosebud was a success, despite its rather weak conclusion. Her detractors in the First Circuit pronounced it a failure, while her supporters backed her stance. Waterly eventually solidified her hold on the First Circuit by appointing Gardner Riis as the Precentor of Rasalhague, and as a new advocate member of the First Circuit. Riis had been only a low-level adept in the Order before Waterly promoted him, but he was a devoted follower of the extreme views of Myndo Waterly and would tip the balance of the First Circuit's control in her favor.

FLUSH

In the fall of 3034 MIIO agents deep in the Combine reported that House Kurita had access to information of such sensitive nature to Davion that it could only have been leaked to the Combine by ComStar. Prince Hanse Davion initiated Operation Flush in response to these reports.

Operation Flush was a clandestine war between MIIO and ROM designed to rid the Federated Commonwealth of all ROM agents as well as expose ComStar's suspected duplicity once and for all. Prince Davion believed that if he could prove that ComStar was not adhering to its party line of pacifism, he could rid the Federated Commonwealth of its current postings of Com Guard forces.

Though clandestine, Operation Flush was a bloody war. In December of 3034 MIIO operatives rounded up dozens of suspected ROM agents in sweeps on three dozen worlds, Flush's "opening shot." Though many of these civilians had no ties to our Order, Hanse Davion ordered them interrogated and interned. A handful of our key agents were also caught in such sweeps. Some were killed attempting to escape, while others took their own lives rather than reveal their secrets to MIIO's mind-drug experts.

Precentor Focht's response to Operation Flush was to wage a war of confusion against the Federated Commonwealth. Misinformation and false leaks planted by agents still operating in the Federated Commonwealth led MIIO to believe that several key administrators and statespersons in the government were ROM agents. MIIO's response, after months of following the red herrings, was to begin a systematic assassination of ROM agents who may have evaded the initial dragnets.

Responding to a proposal by Primus Waterly, the First Circuit passed the Readjustment Act of 3035. This act re-formed the Com Guards and ROM, creating the position of Precentor Martial. The Precentor ROM post still existed, reporting directly to the Precentor Martial, who in turn reported to the Primus and First Circuit. Primus Waterly appointed Anastasius Focht as her first Precentor Martial of the Com Guards. The new Precentor ROM was Charles Seneca, formerly of the Free Worlds League. Primus Waterly's reorganization placed Focht in direct charge of the Com Guards, a position in which she felt his unique skills would be put to the best use.

DUELING SPIES

I was stationed on Northwind, assigned to track the troop movements of the Northwind Highlanders and any changes to their organization. My cover was as a lieutenant in the Highlanders' quartermaster offices, a perfect position for monitoring troop status and supplies. I held that position for more than five years without being detected or suspected by Federated Commonwealth officials.

In November of last year I noticed that a new trooper posted to my command seemed to be trailing me. I initiated my own covert investigation and determined that this trooper, one sergeant Dinah Gomez, had been making contact with my counterpart—an MIO agent code-named Dark Storm. My foe and I had known each other for some time and we each had been attempting to expose the other's cover for the past three years. I knew Dark Storm was crafty, but I never thought him bold enough to send an operative to place me at such risk.

My counter-surveillance must have tipped off Sergeant Gomez. On December 20 she called me for routine assistance in checking inventory levels in one of the warehouses. As I walked down the aisle, one of the massive containment racks collapsed in the storage crib. The heavy cylinders of argon III broke my left leg in three places, and I was lucky to have survived at all.

Sergeant Gomez emerged from her hiding place and saw that her assassination attempt had failed. She lifted one of the cylinders over my head, determined to finish the job and make it look like an accident. Only the single-shot needler I carried concealed in my belt buckle saved me. My shot was true, hitting her in the heart. The dissolving, poisoned needles proved most effective. I quickly cleaned up the few traces of blood, making it look as if she had been killed in the accident.

My cover remained intact. My own investigation proved that Sergeant Gomez had used a slow-acting acid to contaminate the support cables holding the gas cylinders so they would drop when I was scheduled to visit that area. I must commend her professionalism; the trap was well-timed and next to impossible to trace without the resources of ROM.

I sent my MIO counterpart Dark Storm a black rose.

—Incident Report 203234-OGDN, Adept Tooty Lorenzo, 3 January 3040

[Our researchers have found that Primus Waterly wanted to replace Focht as Precentor ROM on the basis of his soft-handed approach to House Davion's Operation Flush. She believed Focht's background better suited him to serve the Com Guards. In our eyes he proved only marginally successful as master of intelligence for our blessed Order.]

Primus Waterly prompted newly appointed Precentor ROM Seneca to step up operations against the MIO, giving him permission to use ROM freely as an assassination tool. Agents and counter-agents on both sides played a deadly game of cat and mouse, using fire bombings, snipers, and booby traps to kill their prey. In all some 420 agents of both agencies had died by 3044, when Prince Hanse Davion called an end to Operation Flush. The Primus claimed that the covert war was a ComStar victory, while the Federated Commonwealth also claimed to have purged ROM from within its borders.

[The Fox Davion knew our power and sought ways to halt the divine will of our Order. When Sandhurst is once again our domain, the Word of Blake will find a way to honor those who died defending ComStar.]

SPREAD OF THE COM GUARDS

Thomas Marik's rise to power in the Free Worlds League owed much to Primus Waterly's new vision and direction for ComStar. When Thomas was injured during the assassination of his father in 3035, a ROM agent named Phillip Tagglibeau assigned to tail Thomas managed to get him off Atrous for lifesaving medical attention. Thomas was whisked from the Government Building and taken in Tagglibeau's private vehicle to the HPG compound on Atrous, and from there transported to Terra for treatment via a string of JumpShips diverted by ComStar just for the trip.

While at the Hilton Head medical facility on Terra, Marik met weekly with the Primus and was given full access to all transmissions to and from the Free Worlds League—an unprecedented move on the part of Primus Waterly. The Primus saw Thomas Marik as an opportunity to forge ties with one of the Inner Sphere Houses in a way never before possible.

As Thomas regained his strength and health, however, Waterly's hopes of turning the Free Worlds League into a ComStar state faded when he told her he was grateful for her aid, but that he intended to lead his people independent of his ComStar training. Waterly pressed her position, playing on Marik's background with our Order, and finally agreed to a compromise in which ComStar would continue to provide Thomas with information, on the condition that when he assumed the Captain-Generalcy, Thomas would allow Precentor Martial Focht to post Com Guards in the Free Worlds League.

By the spring of 3040 Thomas Marik managed to solidify his position in the Free Worlds League by capturing Dame Catherine Humphreys and thus ending Andurien's most recent rebellion. A ROM report smuggled to Thomas by Precentor Atrous on orders of the Primus made Humphreys' capture possible. Per his earlier agreement with Primus Waterly, Captain-General Thomas Marik announced that ComStar would begin posting BattleMech forces at all of its League HPG stations.

[The Word of Blake acknowledges the keen intelligence of our soon-to-be-announced Primus, Thomas Marik. Indeed, he too foresaw the threat that the Steiner-Davion union presented to the

holy prophecies of Jerome Blake. Though he did honor his agreement with then-Primus Waterly, he did it partly to protect his people—further proof of his honor. With the War of 3039 exploding along the Kurita-Davion front, Captain-General Marik moved to protect his holdings with our mighty BattleMech forces.]

Seeking to expand her Com Guard postings to every House, in 3038 Primus Waterly made a diplomatic visit to several ComStar facilities in the Capellan Confederation. During a state meeting with Chancellor Romano Liao, the tensions between ComStar and House Liao burst to the surface as Primus Waterly announced an increase of 25 percent in transmission rates for the Confederation, citing upgrade costs to the HPG network as the cause.

Stunned by the announcement, Chancellor Liao accused our Order of exploiting her nation's already weakened economy. In a spirit of compromise, Primus Waterly proposed that ComStar maintain the current transmission rates for 25 years in return for the Capellan Confederation permitting ComStar to station BattleMech forces at its HPG compounds. Though Romano was not immediately receptive to this suggestion, within six months she and Primus Waterly signed a pact allowing the Com Guards to begin posting troops to the Confederation.

The Com Guards posting failed to ease tensions between Romano Liao and ComStar. The Chancellor began to suspect that Precentor Tejh of Sian was a spy who was selling state secrets to Liao's dreaded enemy, the Federated Commonwealth. This idea originated partly with Maskirovka agents who falsified data on Precentor Tejh's connections and relationship with Tormana Liao. Chancellor Liao twice demanded that Primus Waterly replace the Precentor, and when her requests went unheeded, took matters in her own hands.

In 3041 Maskirovka agents attempted to assassinate Precentor

Tejh during a motorcade tour of the capital. The Precentor was wounded, but she managed to escape. Though the assassins were never apprehended, ROM did discover that they were operating on direct orders from the Chancellor, who accused the Precentor of selling state secrets. Chancellor Liao threatened to revoke her agreement with ComStar, saying she would remove the Com Guards from her empire with force if necessary. Primus Waterly courteously reminded Chancellor Romano Liao that assassinations and threats of aggression could force ComStar to declare an interdiction of the Confederation.

The stalemate continued for three weeks. Discussions with Precentor Martial Focht convinced Primus Waterly that Romano Liao's mental state and her previous record for violent action made resistance by ComStar futile. The Precentor Martial further contended that the Com Guards could win if forced to fight the Capellan military, but they would not be able to maintain control of the Confederation and continue to defend all of their other HPG sites.

Though faced with a difficult situation, Primus Waterly was able to turn it to her advantage. Rather than plunge ComStar headlong into a military confrontation with the Confederation, she opted to replace Tejh with Adept Jen Li as Precentor Sian. The Primus cited her concern for Tejh following the former Precentor's recent "accident" as the pretext for making the change.

Romano Liao was delighted with the change of personnel, especially since the Li family was a long-honored ally of House Liao and Romano personally knew and trusted Jen Li. Primus Waterly considered her move a victory for ComStar because Jen Li was actually a long-time ROM operative posing as an adept. For more than a decade, Li had been feeding ComStar information about the inner circle of the Capellan Confederation, a mission that continued long after her promotion to Precentor.



WAR OF 3039

ComStar knew that the War of 3039 was in the offing long before the first shots were fired. Primus Waterly, who had always recognized the real threat House Davion's power represented to ComStar, had intercepted military information from the Federated Suns and relayed it to the Draconis Combine, per the agreement made with Theodore Kurita prior to the creation of the Free Rasalhague Republic. In monitoring this information, however, both the Precentor and ROM were puzzled by how few messages were sent via the HPG network in comparison to the number required for military maneuvers of the size Davion planned to execute. ROM postulated that either the Federated Commonwealth was using JumpShip command circuits to relay information, or else they had come up with another way of transmitting their communications. Eventually ROM ruled out any technological breakthrough and instead began to monitor House Davion's commercial and military JumpShip traffic.

UNDER SURVEILLANCE

TO: Primus Waterly/First Circuit

ROM Report 20302-9998-OGDN-1A, Karma Level Security Protocol

RE: Federated Suns Troop and Supply Transmissions

DATE: March 12, 3039

In follow-up investigation to ROM Report 20302-9998-CHRYL-3B, no additional evidence surfaced to support the theory that the Federated Commonwealth possesses some new form of communication system to relay troop and supply information.

Though our agents and military analysts concur that the Federated Commonwealth is currently massing BattleMech and other conventional forces along the border with the Draconis Combine, we theorize that they are using a JumpShip relay circuit to carry their orders.

Several of our operatives have attempted to investigate the possibility that House Davion has developed its own form of faster-than-light communication system, but evidence has yet to emerge supporting such a breakthrough. Despite the pressure on ROM since the Federated Commonwealth initiated Operation Flush, we believe that enough agents have remained in place to detect the existence of such a device.

We believe our blessed Order's monopoly on interstellar communications is still intact. Hanse Davion simply does not trust ComStar enough to entrust all his troop deployment data to our network. But this lack of trust is likely to be costly to any war effort they launch.

The initial success of the Federated Commonwealth's offensive into the Combine was short-lived. Theodore Kurita's pre-Rasalhague Republic agreement with our Order had allowed him to rebuild his military stronger than ever. Using refitted ComStar BattleMechs to bolster his forces, the Kanrei repelled almost all of the Davion-Steiner forces, losing only a handful of worlds before the war ground to a halt, and gaining three.

[Once again, the enlightened foresight of former Primus Myndo Waterly prevented the Federated Commonwealth from establishing itself as the new Star League.]

AFTERMATH

One of the most sweeping changes that occurred in the decade prior to the Clan invasion was the reorganization of the Com Guards under Precentor Martial Focht. While the Com Guards' Divisions followed the same essential organization as the Federated Commonwealth's Regimental Combat Teams, they were spread out over many worlds. Using his military background, Focht assigned troops to positions from which he could quickly reassemble his forces into larger functional units in time of need. He also added supplemental infantry and ground armor support and aerospace fighters to the vintage Star League BattleMech forces.

Anastasius Focht also implemented extensive training for the Com Guard forces, drilling troops in anti-Mech combat as well as combat against static defenses. Though our Order wished to present a benevolent image of our Com Guards, Precentor Martial Focht made sure that the troops were prepared for any contingency, touring the planets where our forces were stationed during the two months of each year to inspect the Com Guards and ensure their readiness if called to action.

As it posted the Com Guards throughout the Inner Sphere, ComStar needed to avoid the image of militarism. To maintain its neutral, pacifistic stance, the Precentor Martial often deployed the Com Guards in peaceful roles, such as using ComStar BattleMechs and ground troops to assist in relief efforts after natural disasters, hostage rescues, and even search missions.

One of the most successful of these public relations ploys was the Com Guards' defense of the Periphery against pirate raiders. Of course, ComStar helped establish many of these same Bandit Kings and even exploited their raiding decades before during the Jolly Roger Affair of the Rusenstein era. Focht was careful never to search out the raiders' bases, but willingly placed his troops ready to defend against them when they came pillaging. This allowed the pirates to continue to exist as a possible tool for ComStar's future use while projecting the Com Guards' image as holy defenders of the citizens of the Inner Sphere. The holovid images of pristine white Com Guard Star League-era 'Mechs repelling the hodgepodge machines of the bandit raiders was also an excellent recruitment tool for the Order.

[ComStar's involvement with the Bandit Kingdoms of the Periphery was marginal at best. It would be more truthful to say that our Order never diverted any resources to removing menaces in the far-flung Periphery. After the primacy of Rusenstein and the failure of the Jolly Roger Affair, our Blessed Order broke off contact with the remaining bandits, allowing the pirates to continue with their own plans. This does not mean that ComStar, in any way, shape, or form, condoned their actions.]

THE CLAN WAR

One of the ironies of history is that Primus Adrienne Sims' nightmarish visions of horrific, demonic, animal-like creatures striking from the Periphery inspired her to create the Explorer Corps to protect ComStar and the Inner Sphere. Yet it would be this very tool that nearly led to the end of all that she sought to protect. In the summer of 3048 the Explorer Corps vessel *Outbound Light* jumped into Clan space over the Smoke Jaguar world of Huntress. Khan Leo Showers immediately ordered his aerospace forces to seize the ship before it could exit the system or deploy any DropShips.

The crew of the vessel was taken alive and interrogated regarding their origins and the nature of their mission. The information that they revealed under the influence of mind-control drugs and truth-measuring devices gave the Clans their first in-depth insights into the Inner Sphere in decades.

What Khan Showers learned from the *Outbound Light*'s crew forced him to realize that the Steiner-Davion union now had the Inner Sphere poised on the verge of forming a new Star League—without any help from or place for the Clans. He also learned much about our Order and our role in preserving the Inner Sphere. He used this knowledge as a basis for initiating the Clan invasion of the Inner Sphere a year later.

[The Outbound Light was scheduled to undertake a three-year mission, with no fixed destination or preplanned flight path. Because our heretic brethren allowed such a mission to be launched without specific coordinates, we were deprived of any way to determine a vital piece of information—the location of the Clan homeworlds.]

The Clans' initial invasion, which they named Operation Revival, struck at the Periphery with unprecedented fury. None of the pirate kingdoms or weak Periphery states were even remotely prepared for an assault of the magnitude unleashed by the Clans. ROM agents posted to many of these worlds managed to transmit

emergency messages to Terra before communications were cut off, but none could communicate the nature of the attackers or their origins.

The First Circuit did not know what to make of this enemy, wielding new technology and presenting a very real threat to the Inner Sphere. Many feared at first that the invaders might be alien hordes, but careful analysis showed that their use of BattleMech technology and their language indicated that they were human.

As the Clans' Operation Revival came to a close in the Periphery, Primus Waterly took matters into her own hands, ordering Explorer Corps emissary vessels to seek meetings with the unknown foes. The brave men and women manning these vessels were ordered to jump into Clan-controlled space and to broadcast a request to open diplomatic dialogue. Two of these ships were destroyed when they failed to respond to Clan Smoke Jaguar batchall challenges.

In November 3049 an Explorer Corps ship finally managed to establish contact with the Clans. It was during this first encounter that we learned that the Clans were the descendants of General Kerensky's Exodus fleet. The Clans treated the members of our Order with a certain degree of respect once they realized the similarities between the foundation of their society and ComStar's lonely struggle to preserve the true heritage of the fallen Star League.

In January 3050 Primus Waterly appointed Precentor Martial Focht as ComStar's official ambassador to the Clans. Focht traveled to the Clan occupation zone and entered into intense discussions with then-IlKhan Showers, and within two months he had hammered out an agreement in which ComStar agreed to cut off all military transmissions from those worlds targeted or captured by the Clans. Focht further agreed that ComStar would provide the Clans with basic information on the military disposition of the Great Houses of the Inner Sphere and information about the size, strength, and location of Inner Sphere armed forces on worlds they planned to attack. In return, the Clans promised not to interfere with ComStar's operations and to allow us to act as administrators of the worlds conquered by their invading armies.

The IlKhan, warlord of the Clans, agreed to the contract for several reasons. The Clans are a military people with little love for the details of administration, hence ComStar would relieve them of a necessary burden. Also, the writings of General Aleksandr Kerensky's son and heir Nicholas predicted that when the Clans returned to the Inner Sphere they would be assisted by "those kept shadowed until the time of need." IlKhan Showers chose to accept ComStar as that source of aid prophesied in the Clans' beloved *Remembrance*, the epic poem recounting the Clans' history and chronicling their current exploits.

ComStar's real intent in signing the pact was to buy the Primus and the First Circuit time to learn the true goals of their enemy. The agreement allowing ComStar to administer conquered worlds also gave us access to extensive information on the Clan invaders. Some of the First Circuit were against Primus Waterly's plan, arguing that these actions directly violated Jerome Blake's admonition that ComStar remain neutral in conflicts within the Inner Sphere. Instead, with one stroke our Order became a tool to aid in the near-destruction of the Inner Sphere.

[In her entire career Primus Waterly made only two mistakes. The first was her appointment of Anastasius Focht to our Order and to the post of the Precentor Martial. The second was making this pact with the satanic Clans. These barbarians from the hinterlands

BLITZKRIEG

Transmission 304966-JAP-Red Karma Level Priority

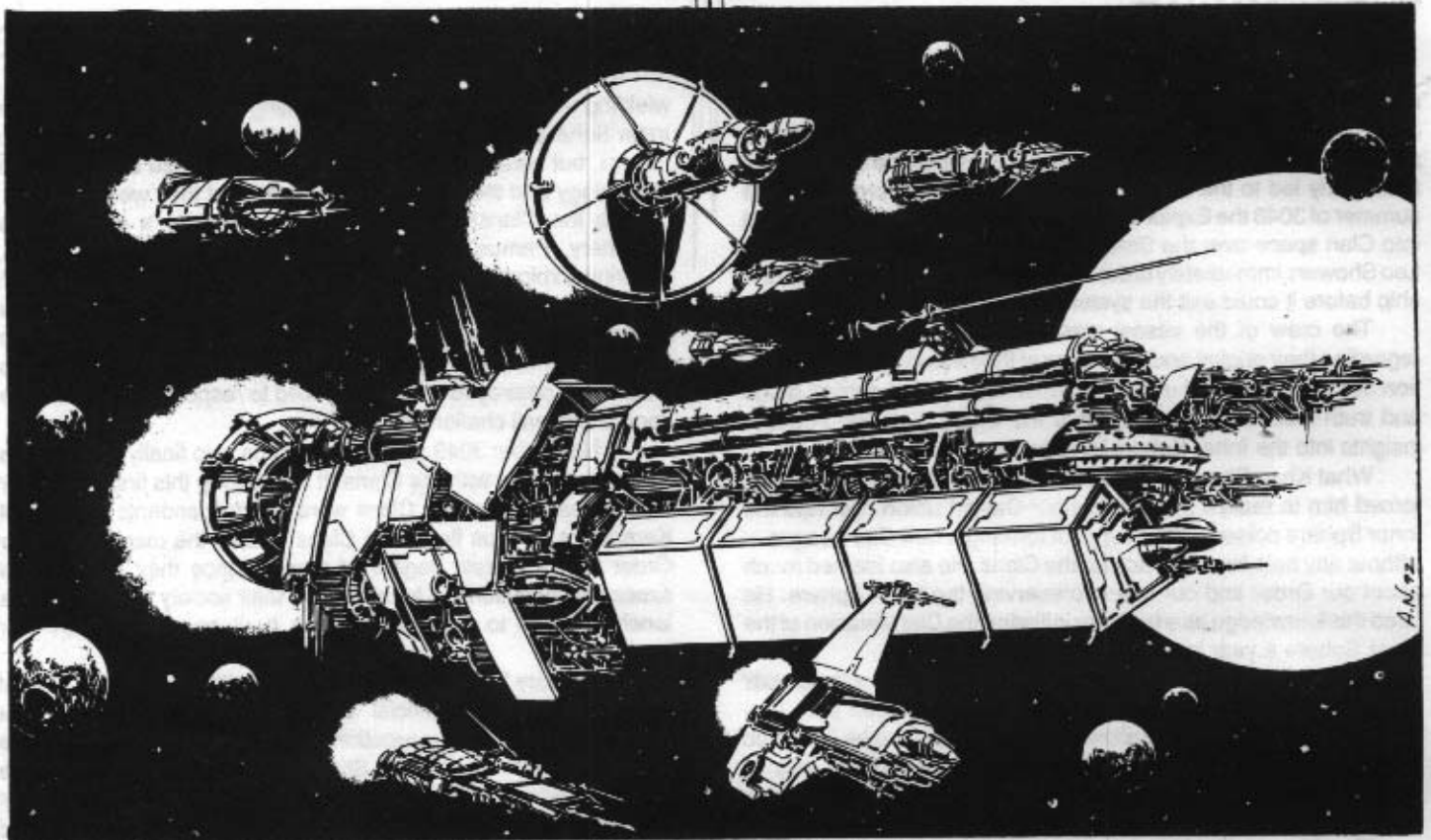
Elissa HPG to Terra

Primus Eyes Only, Access Code 00212

Agent Mirrorshade reporting. Forces of unknown origin have landed on Elissa's main continent. No strong resistance. The unknowns are using new technology and BattleMech designs. Weapons appear superior in manufacture. Repeat. New technology and weapons systems. We have also detected new armored infantry troops, jump-capable, heavily armed, and with anti-Mech capabilities. Troops are marked with wolf's-head insignia not found in our databases of mercenary or house units.

Local garrisons have been unable to mount even minor defenses. Unknowns send out challenges for personal combat, reasons unknown at this time.

Unknowns are firing on our compound! Executing emergency evacplan Bravo. Request relief immed...EOM



very nearly succeeded in destroying our blessed Order and allowed Focht and Mori to create the rift between the Word of Blake and the accursed ComStar. Primus Waterly would better have served ComStar's goals by simply committing our troops to eliminating these invaders when they first appeared.]

YEAR OF PEACE

The Clan forces mauled most of the Free Rasalhague Republic and the surrounding Federated Commonwealth and Combine territories, but the continual onslaught came to a sudden halt when ilKhan Leo Showers died in November 3050. When the Clans' elite Bloodnamed warriors withdrew to Clan space to elect a new ilKhan, ComStar continued to serve as their administrative arm. It was during this year of peace that Primus Waterly began to envision using the Clans as a catalyst to eventually place the entire Inner Sphere in ComStar's hands. She believed that the Com Guards were the only force that could stop the invaders. In the Primus' opinion, the leaders of the Inner Sphere would never be able to work together—even against a common foe such as the Clans.

With the renewed Clan offensive matters began to take a turn Primus Waterly had not anticipated. It began when Colonel Jaime Wolf of Wolf's Dragoons invited the House leaders to meet on Outreach. He revealed that the Dragoons had originally come to the Inner Sphere on an intelligence-gathering mission for the Clans, then went on to convince them that working together gave the Inner Sphere its best chance of defeating the Clans. Wolf's Dragoons security was so tight that no ROM operatives were able to penetrate these meetings on Outreach.

What the Primus and the First Circuit never expected was that at least some of the House Lords would manage to put aside their differences in the interest of survival, particularly Theodore Kurita and Hanse Davion. Even Thomas Marik was eventually convinced, at the price of his ailing son's health, to cooperate with a shaky union of the House Lords. These vital agreements would later help turn the tide against the Clans.

ComStar's failure to step in and take the role of diplomatic leader of the Inner Sphere was duly noted. Most of the House Lords surmised from their absence at this meeting that ComStar was aiding the invading Clan troops and even then began to distrust our Order. This suspicion would eventually unravel the fabric of power that ComStar had woven and embellished over the centuries.

Ulric Kerensky's election as ilKhan to replace Leo Showers marked the beginning of a new Clan offensive. ComStar still had made no progress toward discovering the location of the Clan homeworlds or the invaders' true objectives, and so Primus Waterly insisted on continuing to provide the Clans with military target information. The fact that she spent her childhood in the Draconis Combine did not prevent the Primus from revealing Luthien's defenses to the Clans, because Primus Waterly considered the Clans mere pawns in her control. She planned to turn them against the Combine and against the Federated Commonwealth as well.

[True to her personal philosophy, Primus Waterly was simply attempting to distribute information evenhandedly. As a balance to providing data on the defense of Luthien, she later offered data on the defense of Tharkad. She sought to create an even level, not implement her own designs against the House Lords.]

CONFLICT RENEWED

In January 3052 Clans Nova Cat and Smoke Jaguar launched an all-out offensive against the Combine's capital world. Hanse Davion sent the elite mercenary forces of Wolf's Dragoons and the Kell Hounds to defend Luthien in an unexpected show of unity between the Houses that caught Primus Waterly completely off guard. Even though Coordinator Takashi Kurita felt deep animosity toward House Davion and mercenaries, Davion's forces tipped the scale in favor of the defenders, and helped defeat the Clan attackers.

[This view of history implies that Primus Waterly's intelligence network somehow failed. The truth of the matter is that the Primus knew the Fox too well. She assumed that Hanse Davion, in keeping with his long-held contempt for House Kurita, would jump to exploit borders weakened by the Clan assault and launch an attack against his old foe. Houses Davion and Steiner's willingness to send their best mercenary troops to defend their worst adversaries shocked the entire First Circuit.]

The Primus planned to wait out the Clans' headlong assault and exploit them in their first moment of weakness. However, key members of the First Circuit and Precentor Martial Focht himself protested this course long before Primus Waterly began to doubt the wisdom of her plan. The Precentors who opposed the Primus insisted that ComStar's duplicity also brought danger to the Order, not just the Inner Sphere. Primus Waterly dismissed their fears. In fact, she hoped to further manipulate the Clans by convincing them to coordinate their attacks to coincide with her political agenda.

Primus Waterly traveled to the Clan occupation zone to join the Precentor Martial and met the Wolf Clan entourage at Salsveda on the planet Satalice, captured from the Free Rasalhague Republic. She offered the ilKhan a great prize: a full military disposition of Tharkad, capital of the Lyran Commonwealth. Primus Waterly made this offer on her own initiative, without the permission or knowledge of the First Circuit.

ilKhan Kerensky rejected Primus Waterly's offer and informed her and the Precentor Martial that such a campaign would only divert resources from the Clans' true objective—conquering Terra, the former seat of the Star League. This announcement stunned ComStar's leaders. No amount of battle analysis, no degree of familiarity with the Clans, had led them to suspect that Terra was the invasion's main goal. This revelation forced Primus Waterly to admit that even ComStar could not hope to control the Clan juggernaut.

COUNTERATTACK

Primus Waterly and Precentor Martial Focht spent the time traveling back to Terra outlining a course of action against their newly discovered enemies. When the First Circuit learned the Clans' true objective, they called for an immediate end to administering the Clan-held worlds. Some Precentors demanded an all-out military response to the Clan assault. Primus Waterly, however, pointed out that remaining faithful to ComStar's pact with the Clans was a necessary part of a carefully crafted plan to defend Terra and defeat the invaders. The Precentor Martial then outlined how the Com Guards would battle the Clans for control of Terra by using a proxy world.

[Even a criminal of the caliber of Anastasius Focht possessed enough intelligence to know that destroying Terra in a battle was madness.]

Using the vast resources of ComStar's archives and his own

knowledge of military strategy, the Precentor Martial chose Tukayyid, in the remains of the Free Rasalhague Republic, as the proxy world. Varied terrain and a small civilian population, as well as its proximity to the Clan front lines, convinced Precentor Martial Focht that Tukayyid was the best choice.

Primus Waterly sent Precentor Riis to meet with the exiled government of the Free Rasalhague Republic to negotiate for the use of Tukayyid. His mission was a success; the FRR Parliament welcomed the opportunity to provide the site for the Inner Sphere's final victory over the Clan forces that had decimated their territories. Just as they had kept their involvement with the Clans a secret, ComStar attempted to keep their plan to deliver the Inner Sphere

BARGAINED WELL AND DONE

I based my selection of Tukayyid as the proxy for Terra on a variety of statistics and characteristics that pointed to the world as an excellent choice. My study of Clan tactics showed that the key to defeating the Clans was simply to wear down our opponents over a period of time, and Tukayyid made it possible to conduct such a campaign.

Knowing that the ilKhan might reject Tukayyid as the venue for our conflict, perhaps suspecting a trap, I chose two alternatives. But one decision agreed upon by two mortal men made Tukayyid the modern Thermopylae rather than either of the less-satisfactory alternatives.

My second choice was the planet Chaffee, in the Federated Commonwealth. I had served on that world prior to joining ComStar, and knew the world and its terrain well. Its volcanic southern continent would serve well as the pivotal meeting ground of our battle, and the rest of the planet offered many of the same advantages as Tukayyid. The most difficult hurdle to using that planet would be asking Prince Davion and Archon Steiner to grant this favor. Even Primus Waterly might balk at the prospect.

My third choice was the last resort. I knew that the ilKhan's upbringing and heritage might force him to choose to fight on Terra itself. If that worst-case scenario came to pass, I targeted the South American continent as the site for our battle. Its dense jungles and isolated civilian population, in addition to the mountain and hill regions, made it a viable alternative, but one I hoped to avoid.

ilKhan Ulric Kerensky accepted without question my choice of Tukayyid as a battle site between the Com Guards and the Clans, but realized I intended it as a proxy for Terra only after he agreed. The events that followed burned Tukayyid into the hearts and minds of thousands of warriors.

—From *The Gallant Defense of Mankind: The Battle of Tukayyid*, by Precentor Martial Focht, ComStar Press, July 3054



from the Clan menace a secret also. After all, how could ComStar explain its knowledge of the Clan plans except to admit its complicity? ComStar evacuated Tukayyid's civilian population slowly, to arouse the least possible interest by House intelligence organizations. The entire operation to engage the Clans in one definitive battle could have been accomplished in secrecy, except that Precentors Tharkad and New Avalon leaked information about ComStar's plan to the Federated Commonwealth.

[Precentors Vandel and Everson sought to betray our Order even then, and eventually conspired with the heretics who turned their backs on the true Word of Blake. We have excommunicated both traitors, and issued warrants for their arrests for crimes against the will of Jerome Blake.]

Perhaps the Precentor Martial's most demanding task in the Tukayyid campaign was to arrange the logistics of mobilizing and transporting the Com Guard's vast military to the planet. Focht also argued eloquently for the right to bid personally against the ilKhan for the forces to be used in the battle of possession for Terra—and for the fate of the Inner Sphere. While reluctant to send her war leader back into the enemy's camp, Primus Waterly granted his request.

[Recorded tapes in possession of the Word of Blake prove that Focht forced the Primus to offer him the Archonship of the Lyran Commonwealth in exchange for his "cooperation" in defeating the Clans. This blackmail reveals only the tip of the iceberg of the depth of Precentor Martial Focht's corruption.]

While the Precentor Martial met with the ilKhan, Primus Waterly unfolded a plan of her own, which she dubbed Operation Scorpion. Phase One of Operation Scorpion depended on those forces left administering the HPGs in the Clan occupation zone to

rise up in rebellion against the Clans and retake control of those worlds. At the heart of the plan, however, was a ComStar Interdiction of every House, which would throw the entire Inner Sphere into confusion and remind the House leaders how heavily they depended on ComStar's services. Then, in return for concessions, ComStar would restore service to each House as they agreed to use the organization as their government's administrative arm. Primus Waterly intended for ComStar to emerge from Operation Scorpion in complete control of the Inner Sphere as the Precentor Martial defeated the Clan military.

[Operation Scorpion was potentially the greatest achievement of ComStar, the ultimate fulfillment of Blake's prophecy. The weak and tainted fools who eventually turned against us betrayed the Primus and her plan, preventing ComStar from uniting all the Inner Sphere under the common banner of a new Star League, led by ComStar.]

Primus Waterly completed the preliminary stages of Operation Scorpion without the knowledge of the First Circuit or the Precentor Martial. She met with her supporters covertly in a hotel outside Hilton Head Island, accompanied by a cadre of loyal ROM operatives who pledged their service to the Primus personally and ensured that the Precentor Martial remained ignorant of the plan. While not present at this meeting, Waterly's hand-picked heir to the primacy, Precentor Sharilar Mori, knew of the Primus' plans early on.

As the plans for Operation Scorpion progressed, it became clear that such an action violated all that Jerome Blake intended for our Order. Precentor Mori alone gathered her will and foresight and placed herself in direct opposition to the Primus. She sent the details of Operation Scorpion to Theodore Kurita, who passed the information to the Federated Commonwealth in partial repayment for Hanse Davion's assistance in defending Luthien from the Clans.

[Heresy! In this act of heinous betrayal, Mori turned against Blake's will. She will pay the eternal price for her betrayal in the afterlife in an eternity of damnation!]

As Primus Waterly hatched her plots, Precentor Martial Focht bid successfully with the ilKhan to fight the proxy battle for Terra on Tukayyid. Focht bid fifty BattleMech regiments of Com Guards to defend twelve cities on Tukayyid against the six attacking Clans, committing all but a token number of his total army to the battle. Focht also bid to add artillery, air, and infantry support to his forces.

Precentor Martial Focht and ilKhan Ulric Kerensky agreed to the following terms. If Tukayyid fell to the Clans, ComStar became one with the Clans. Focht pledged that ComStar would serve as administrators on the Clan worlds, cease providing HPG services to the Successor States, and relinquish Terra to the victors. If the Clans won this key battle, they had the resources in place to forge a new Star League.

If the Com Guards defeated the Clans, the ilKhan agreed to restrict his forces to the already conquered worlds, restraining the Clans from seizing territories closer to Terra than a line drawn at Tukayyid for fifteen years. Because the Clans struck this bargain with ComStar, honor did not prevent them from attacking other worlds "above" the line drawn at Tukayyid: the Houses of the Inner Sphere still had to contend with the Clans.

The two leaders decided to join battle on May 1, 3052, and the Com Guards, already mobilized, immediately began to deploy on Tukayyid, even before the Precentor Martial returned to Sandhurst. Unknown to most of the Inner Sphere, the Primus planned to launch Operation Scorpion on the same day.

BATTLE FOR TUKAYYID

The Precentor Martial spent countless hours studying tapes of battles between the Clans and various Inner Sphere forces, and felt confident that he knew the one weakness of the Clan fighting style. He was determined to exploit this Achilles' heel during the battle for Tukayyid. Focht knew that the Clans' fighting philosophy consisted of quick, conclusive attacks and short-term assaults. The Clans struck quickly and counted on quick victories, precluding any need for the support services necessary to conduct a long-term campaign.

The Precentor Martial planned his defense carefully. He stockpiled enough repair parts and ammunition to supply his troops for more than a month. By using his forces to harass the Clans, rather than commit to a direct confrontation, he hoped to prolong the battle for Tukayyid beyond the Clans' capacity to support such an operation.

The Clan forces' greatest advantage going into the battle was their combat experience. Though Focht's Com Guards had been training for combat for decades, they had never experienced war. The Precentor Martial attempted to make up for that lack of experience by coordinating the battle from a deep bunker in the Tamo Mountains. His virtual-reality construct allowed him to direct individual units anywhere on Tukayyid's surface if it became necessary.

Each of the six Clans involved in the invasion attacked two cities on Tukayyid. Clan Smoke Jaguar would attack Dinju Heights and Port Racice, Clan Nova Cat had as its objectives Joje and Tost, Clan Ghost Bear would attempt to take Spanac and Luk, Clan Steel Viper would attack Kelly Springs and Kozice Ranch Station, Clan Wolf targeted Brzo and Skupo, Clan Diamond Shark was assigned

Urcunat and Kozice Prime, and Clan Jade Falcon would attack Humptulips and Olalla.

The battle began on May 1, with each Clan landing troops near their objectives according to strategies developed by each Clan's Khans. (Though ilKhan Ulric Kerensky functioned as the Clans' war leader, the Khans declined to use him as a battle coordinator in the bidding for Tukayyid.) Clan Wolf hit their landing zone five days later.

[The Word of Blake feels that the horrors of Tukayyid provide ample testimony to the willpower and might of Blake's will. Of the gallant warriors who fell in defense of the Inner Sphere, we alone remain to preserve the ComStar for which you fought. The Word of Blake recognizes your sacrifice, for we witnessed your gift in the battle to save mankind.]

[Those of you who served in this glorious battle and still support the infidels of the "new" ComStar: we beseech you to remember your oaths. We are the Inner Sphere's last bastion of the will of blessed Jerome Blake. Heed our call, and return to his Word as it was before the heretic Focht led you into horror and hell fire.]

As happens in every planetary assault, commanders often feel as if each battle is fought separately, and it becomes difficult to see the big picture. Com Guard holotapes provided a roughly chronological record of the battle.

The first major encounter unfolded as the Smoke Jaguars landed their forces in two groups, hoping to win their objectives quickly (and perhaps regain some of the honor lost in the defeats on Wolcott and Luthien).

The Smoke Jaguar force landing in the Dinju Mountains pounced on the Com Guards' Fiftieth Division (Uncluttered Speech),

ACE IN THE HOLE

The battle of Tukayyid might have had a very different outcome if the Clans had discovered the importance of the Com Guard command bunker hidden in the Tamo Mountains. A mere handful of Clan warriors could have changed history.

Carved out of the heart of Mount Kline, the Tamo bunker was a fully equipped Star League Strategic Command post, with a full interactive virtual-reality construct that allowed the Precentor Martial to coordinate the battle across the entire planet from one central location. The first time that such a bunker had been built in more than 300 years of warfare, the Tamo bunker stands as testimony to the skill of the ComStar engineers. Modern-day Inner Sphere militaries make an attempt at such technology, but fall far short of the level our Order commands. The Clans use similar, but more advanced technology called holotanks aboard their combat JumpShips to coordinate planetary efforts, but because on Tukayyid each Clan fought as a distinct unit, and the Com Guards fought as a unified military element, the Clans' superior technology failed to work to their advantage.

Because the Precentor Martial intended to use the vast majority of his troops defending Terra, he retained only one company of 'Mech troops and two platoons of infantry to defend the command bunker. He also set aside a vintage *Atlas*

for personal defense should matters reach that point. His strategy made use of a simple principle; the less attention he drew to the location by placing troops there, the less the chance existed of the Clans recognizing the importance of the facility.

Only one small Clan force approached the Tamo bunker during the battle. On the third day of fighting, a Supernova Star of Smoke Jaguars from the 122nd Strike Cluster (The Spotted Cats of Death) passed within 30 kilometers of the bunker, but a well-placed ambush and aerial bombardment wiped them out before they could signal their location.

The ComStar engineers also built defenses into the bunker itself. Two massive slabs of granite, each more than 20 meters thick, protected the tunnel accesses to the two main entrances. The slabs were designed to drop on initial attack, preventing an assault on the interior. Its ample stores and internal power source guaranteed that the Com Guards' command bunker under Mount Kline would survive the duration of the battle, regardless of the winner.

—From a Com Guard report prepared by Adept Belvedere Plante concerning the specifications of the Tukayyid Strategic Command Post

pinning them in the foothills. The relatively green Fiftieth stood no chance against the Jaguar's Alpha Galaxy, and for a time the Smoke Jaguars appeared likely to secure their objectives quickly.

The Com Guards 401st, 207th, and 367th Divisions herded Beta Galaxy into the bogs of the Racice River delta with hit-and-run attacks, using their superior knowledge of the terrain to decimate the Jaguars. Beta Galaxy quickly crumbled and was forced to withdraw.

The Nova Cats fared no better. Their daring strategy of a mixed landing and drop turned to disaster when aerospace fighters of the Com Guards 417th Division destroyed the Alpha Galaxy Command DropShip as it hovered over the landing zone. Like the Smoke Jaguars, Clan Nova Cat was lured into a well-prepared battle site of ComStar's choosing. The Com Guards' Ninth Division (Bountiful Words) used air and ground forces to shatter the Nova Cats advance just north of Joje, a handful of kilometers from their target, and drew the Clan force into a war of attrition. The Nova Cats quickly became mired in a prolonged battle for which they were unprepared, in terms of both supplies and ammunition.

The Ghost Bears made a better showing against the relatively green Com Guards First Army. In the first two days of the battle they shattered the 121st Division and swept toward Luk, but the Ninety-first and Twelfth Divisions trapped the elite forces of the Ghost Bear's Twentieth Polar Bear Attack Cluster and pounded them until they were forced to withdraw.

The initial Jade Falcon and Diamond Shark landings were largely unopposed, but the Jade Falcons' cautious advance allowed the Precentor Martial to inflict maximum damage using the same hit-and-run tactics the House militaries found effective in wearing the Clans down.

The Jaguars next fell prey to an ambush sprung in the tight confines of the Dinju Pass by the 323rd and 299th Divisions of the Com Guards Fifth Army—within sight of their objective of Dinju Heights. The Jaguar Grenadiers took heavy losses, but managed to move through the pass, leaving blood and death in their wake.

Both Smoke Jaguar Khans were killed at the height of the battle, and ilKhan Kerensky ordered Clan Smoke Jaguar to withdraw, fearing that the sudden lack of leadership and command structure would allow the remains of the Clan to be utterly destroyed. That decision caused a bitter resentment that still flames between the Smoke Jaguars and Clan Wolf. Several Smoke Jaguar units, including the Sixth Jaguar Dragoons, refused to obey the order, preferring death to dishonor. Only eight warriors of the Sixth survived the bloodbath.

Clan Diamond Shark suffered the next loss to the Com Guard sword. The Sharks' Nineteenth Heavy Cluster (The Barracudas) managed to inflict more than 30 percent losses against the Eighty-fifth Division (Lions of the Periphery) in a series of battles in the foothills overlooking Kozice Prime. The fighting was most bitter between the ambushing forces of the Eighty-fifth's Second and Fourth battalions and the Diamond Shark's 222nd Assault Cluster (The Rippers). Only two warriors survived from the entire 222nd Cluster, and the Clan stripped one of his Bloodname for his disgrace.

By the third of May, Clan Nova Cat had made three separate attempts to seize Joje and Tost. They ran out of ammunition quickly because they outfitted their OmniMechs primarily with artillery and missile configurations, despite the ilKhan's warnings against using a strategy based on non-energy weapons. Despite this misjudgment, the Clan made headway against the Com Guard forces at Joje, and the 417th and Ninth Divisions finally retreated toward



Tost in order to force the Clans to divide their attention between the 467th Division (The Whirlwinds) at their rear, which was attempting to cut off Beta Galaxy from its landing zones and supplies, and the division they faced. The Com Guards harassed Beta and Gamma Galaxies, luring them into quick skirmishes that used up Clan ammunition. Gamma Galaxy withdrew, luring the 244th and the 467th into a Beta Galaxy ambush, defeating both forces and winning several ComStar supply depots.

ComStar immediately launched a furious counterattack, rupturing the Nova Cat lines and overrunning their positions. When the Com Guards once again controlled more than half the Losiije Lake District, the Nova Cats reluctantly withdrew. Clan Nova Cat suffered the most staggering losses of any Clan on Tukayyid: less than three Stars returned to the DropShips.

Clan Steel Viper learned from Clan Smoke Jaguar's mistake and chose a more conservative drop pattern. Even though the Com Guards had time to dig into positions between the Clan drop and their objectives by fighting a delaying action using artillery and aerospace fighters, Khan Breen's Vipers managed to advance toward Kozice Ranch Station.

As the Steel Vipers crossed enemy lines, they became mired in a hell hole known as Devil's Bath, just 18 kilometers from their primary objective. A horrific combination of geysers, boiling mud, and narrow confines between massive granite columns, the region stretched for dozens of kilometers. The Vipers advanced through Devil's Bath, pushing the Com Guards ahead of them, but expended too much ammunition in the process. The Com Guards continued to attack the Viper supply lines, stripping the force in Devil's Bath of critical munitions.

Clan Ghost Bear lost the Seventh Bear Guards of Beta Galaxy, assigned to cover the withdrawal from the strike at Luk, when the Twelfth Com Guard Division (Pure Waveforms) ambushed them in the Holth forest and set fire to the woods. Khan

HEAT OF BATTLE

POST-COMBAT INTERVIEW DOCUMENT 4003-1

INTERVIEWEE: Adept Shintaro Datsin, Twelfth Division

SUBJECT: Engagement and Tactical Analysis of Battle of Holth Forest, Tukayyid

DATE: 10 August 3052

My company had orders to dig into the forest, burying our 'Mechs and tanks in the dirt and removing flammable material from the area. We cleared several swaths of the forest centering on our position to give ourselves the best firing opportunity possible when the Ghost Bears arrived. We cut the trees and removed the brush to form long narrow corridors, piling the excess debris on both sides to set the stage for tight fighting and almost certain death for any Clan warriors who fell into our trap.

The forest fire was a vision of hell. We knew the flames would push the Seventh Bear Guards right into our hands—all we had to do was wait. I remember sitting in the cockpit of my *Lancelot* and praying. I thanked Blake for blessing me with survival and praised my 'Mech for its performance thus far, and asked Blake to continue to bless our mission. Others in our ranks joined their prayers to mine—such was the way of the old Order.

The Seventh Bear Guards burst suddenly from the woods, just ahead of the fire, taking refuge in the areas we had cleared that were still free of the flames. Their Elementals and OmniMechs were charred black, but we could make out the Ghost Bear emblem on a handful of them. They had been at the edge of the flames for hours.

I powered up my *Lancelot* and shot a salvo from my PPC. By the will of Blake, my shot hit true, square on the cockpit canopy of a *Black Hawk*. The warrior inside stood no chance of surviving. The *Black Hawk* slowly turned, then crumpled.

The rest of my company did the same, firing everything it had into the raging fire and smoke. Our sudden attack seemed to shock the Ghost Bears. They had fled across 20 kilometers of raging fire just to be trapped between the flames and our firepower. Some 'Mechs held their ground and fired, others charged us like madmen. One *Dash* rammed me head-on, taking at least five hits as it charged through our ranks. Only a lucky hit with one of my lasers saved me from that MechWarrior's wild assault.

And the Ghost Bears didn't even have to fight there. They could have pulled out of the battle through the flames. Precentor Jodoin guessed that the Clans would stand and fight, though—their honor demanded it. Retreat, even in the middle of a forest fire, was against their nature.

In the end, it was nature that killed them all, not our 'Mechs.

Buckenburger made a formal protest to the ilKhan against these Com Guard tactics, but his forces in the forest had already been wiped out.

The Ghost Bears' Alpha Galaxy had Spanac under siege, and when the remnants of the Beta and Delta Galaxies arrived as support, the Clan forces pushed Com Guard's First Division back. Precentor Martial Focht withdrew the First Division from the center of Spanac, realizing that the Bears now controlled the Ninety-first's supply depots and were positioned to inflict more damage than they would take. Only Clans Ghost Bear and Wolf recognized the importance of protecting their supply lines. Ghost Bear realized their supply line mistake only after landing, but managed to overcome it by capturing Com Guard munitions.

Clan Diamond Shark faced a days-long stalemate with the Third Com Guard Army. The only decisive action took place between Gamma Galaxy and the Eighty-fifth Division. The Eighty-fifth disrupted the Sharks' supply lines for a day, and Gamma Galaxy retaliated by destroying the Com Guard unit. The Second and Fifth Armies' arrival cut the Sharks off completely from their supplies. The Com Guards dislodged the Clans from their fortified positions with a barrage of artillery, and, when the Clans attempted to break away and withdraw from the planet, destroyed their forces completely.


Clan Jade Falcon lost fewer troops, but failed to accomplish its objectives. The Eleventh Com Guard harassed the Falcons constantly as they moved toward Olalla and Humptulips, mostly whittling away at their supply lines, per the Precentor Martial's plans. When the Clan finally reached the rushing Przeno River, Com Guard sappers destroyed both bridges just as the Falcons crossed.

The Falcon Guard (a unit still tainted for its massive, humiliating loss on Twycross) managed to cross the turbulent river, strike at the rear of the Com Guard units on the far side of the Przeno River that were maintaining an artillery barrage, and create a beachhead for a heavier Jade Falcon assault. The Falcon Guard continued past the crossing toward Olalla, one of their target cities, realizing almost too late that the target at the coordinates provided was not Olalla, but a Com Guard trap.

The Jade Falcons moved steadily through Olalla, taking heavy losses but advancing until Com Guard reinforcements arrived from Humptulips. A simultaneous attack on the bridge defenses, and a lucky Com Guard strike on a Falcon ammunition dump, convinced the Jade Falcon Khans that they did not have enough supplies to take either objective, and they reluctantly ordered a withdrawal. The withdrawal itself was costly, as the Com Guards attacked the Clan landing zone with DropShips and executed a rear assault on the retreating forces. A Trinary of Elementals and elements of the Falcon Guards foiled ComStar's two-pronged attack, and most of the remaining Falcon force made it off-planet.

Clan Wolf entered the battle of Tukayyid on the fifth day of the conflict. ilKhan Ulric Kerensky's insight into Precentor Martial Focht's methods and the intelligence and familiarity with Inner Sphere tactics of Khan Natasha Kerensky and warrior Phelan (Kell) Ward, plus days spent observing other Clans' battles with ComStar, gave Clan Wolf a distinct advantage.

Clan Wolf landed and immediately formed fighting ranks. Their first contact was with the inexperienced 283rd Division, part of the furthest Com Guard defensive line guarding Brzo and Skupo, Clan Wolf's objectives. The Third Battle Cluster of Beta Galaxy, the Seventh Battle Cluster of Gamma Galaxy, and the Fourth Wolf Guards of Alpha Galaxy pushed the 278th Division and the Tenth



Army from their positions, but the 283rd prevented Clan Wolf from closing a loop around the Com Guards' main defensive force. When the Com Guards pulled back to establish a new defensive line, Clan Wolf did not follow, and ComStar quickly discovered why. Using a series of sweeping strikes, Natasha Kerensky's Thirteenth Wolf Guards, including the elite Wolf Spiders, attempted to slip around the Tenth and circumvent the 166th in a drive for Skupo. Precentor Koivu sent the veteran 282nd Com Guard Division (Clear Thoughts) to stop them. The 282nd suffered heavy losses, but stopped the Wolf Spiders' drive and allowed the Tenth Army to gain its next defensive position. The battle so far revealed two important factors in Clan Wolf's favor. The Clan had continued its early strategy of maintaining ample campaign supplies and protecting its supply lines, and for Tukayyid, it configured most OmniMechs with energy-based weaponry, making each unit more autonomous than ever. Precentor Martial Focht feared that Clan Wolf might turn the tide of battle across Tukayyid.

The Tenth Army under the command of Precentor Myrvang stood between Clan Wolf and the cities of Skupo and Brzo, but Clan Wolf launched another offensive before the Com Guards could dig in. The attackers broke through the line, then suddenly encountered entrenched 'Mechs, tanks, and infantry rising from an apparently open hilltop. Sheer stubbornness kept the Wolf Spiders in the fight, and they began to push ComStar back once again. Just as it appeared they might encircle Skupo, Com Guard reinforcements arrived in the form of the Ninth Army, led by Precentor Mulvenna. Clan Wolf failed to advance further in this push, but the Com Guard victory came at high cost to the Tenth, with losses of more than 50 percent, largely to the 138th Division (The Bandits).

As Clan Wolf tightened the knot around its two targets, Clan Steel Viper struggled to fight its way out of Devil's Bath. Two days after Clan Wolf dropped to the surface of Tukayyid, the Steel Vipers managed to surround the Com Guards Sixth Division almost at the center of the pits and geysers of the hellish terrain. Striking repeatedly, the Vipers destroyed the Sixth and began the long crawl out.

Though victorious against the Sixth, the Viper's Gamma Galaxy emerged from Devil's Bath to face two reserve divisions of the Second and Fifth Com Guard armies. These fresh troops broke the Vipers' front line, but could not rout the Clan forces. When the Sixth Army's 386th and First Divisions arrived to back up the Com Guard troops only ten kilometers from Kozice Ranch Station, the Vipers were forced to withdraw. Clan Steel Viper suffered 25 percent losses, and both Khans were wounded.

The Steel Vipers' retreat left only two Clans on Tukayyid to defeat the Com Guards—Wolf and Ghost Bear. The Ghost Bears held Spanac against artillery bombardment from the Fourth Army, and the troops not pinned down by artillery or necessary to hold Spanac attempted to take Luk. As they attacked, divisions of the First Army assaulted a Bear supply depot, and, running low on supplies, parts, and ammunition, the Ghost Bears were forced to pull back to defend the depot, losing most of the ground they had gained. Despite the fact that several Stars of their Alpha Galaxy's Fiftieth Strike Cluster (The Maulers) managed to break into Luk's suburbs, too few troops remained to take the city, and the Ghost Bears ended their campaign by winning only one objective.

Clan Wolf continued to press the attack. As the Wolf Spiders broke the 138th Division, the Eleventh Wolf Guards of Delta Galaxy careened into the lines held by the 278th Division (Clear Courtesy),

but despite excellent coordination of the Com Guard forces, the Wolf Guards tore the 278th apart. Skupo fell to Clan Wolf when the Com Guards realized that the Clan forces pushing to connect with the rest of their force would encircle the Com Guard forces in Skupo, and retreated.

The Wolves aimed their next axis of attack at Brzo, and the Tenth Army bent under the force of Clan heavy and assault OmniMechs. The Ninth moved to support the Tenth, but Clan Wolf breached the defenses where the two armies should have met, nearly splitting the two forces. The Eleventh Army arrived as reinforcements, but Clan Wolf declined to further attack the Ninth and instead concentrated on raiding ComStar supply depots and creating its own.

Though Clan Wolf had enough mobility to work around the ComStar positions in the Porozistu Mountains, they chose to engage Precentor Stinson's Eleventh Com Guards directly, eventually breaking off a series of small skirmishes to gather for a coordinated attack. Beta Galaxy inflicted heavy damage on the Eleventh, even though Khan Garth Radick was killed at the peak of the battle, but the war ended before the Com Guard reinforcements, the Thirteenth Army, could join the fray.

Despite the short-lived blow to Wolf Clan's morale inflicted by Khan Radick's death, the Com Guards could not unseat the Wolves from either Brzo or Skupo. Striking at Clan Wolf supply lines proved fruitless, because Khan Kerensky heavily reinforced these vital points. Her knowledge of Inner Sphere tactics gave Clan Wolf its successes.

After 21 days of fighting the ilKhan of the Clans conceded victory to ComStar. Only Clan Wolf successfully gained control of both target cities. Clan Ghost Bear held Spanac but failed to take Luk. Based on the surviving forces, Clan Jade Falcon achieved a draw.

Both sides suffered staggering losses. It soon became apparent that Tukayyid represented much more than the largest military battle in three centuries. The Com Guards ended the conflict with nearly 40 percent dead and more than that number injured. Smoke Jaguar suffered the highest losses with 32 percent dead. Clan Wolf lost only 20 percent of its forces on Tukayyid.

This was one of the Inner Sphere's greatest victories. ComStar bloodied the soil of Tukayyid to stand between Terra and the Clans' tyranny for the next decade and a half. Precentor Martial Focht learned only too late that his military victory was shadowed by Primus Waterly's Operation Scorpion.

[Many of us within the Word of Blake acknowledge that the actions of the Inner Sphere that culminated in Tukayyid fulfill Jerome Blake's prophecies. He saw that the age of darkness that would befall the Inner Sphere might come in the guise of horrific wars, and that ComStar alone would stand as a shining light for all mankind. Our efforts and victory on Tukayyid represent his divine wisdom and foresight, and are tainted by the betrayal of Focht and Mori.]

OPERATION SCORPION

Primus Waterly launched Operation Scorpion as the Smoke Jaguars landed on Tukayyid. While the Precentor Martial squared off against the Clan military force, the Primus secretly squared off against the occupying Clan forces and the Houses of the Inner Sphere. She called together the First Circuit and announced a full interdiction of the Inner Sphere by right of the primacy. She ordered all ComStar HPG compounds to comply with the interdiction protocol and post security forces to deal with local resistance.

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

The order was clear enough; shut down operations until further notice. Our Order was interdicting the governments of the entire Inner Sphere.

Every ComStar adept knows history better than any House historian. When Precentor Johnson read the order, we were stunned. None of us had taken part in an Interdiction before. A few adepts were excited, but most were afraid and prayed for Blake's guidance.

I was the first to question the order. The transmission bore the symbol and seal of the Primus, but the First Circuit's approval and explanations were missing. Our garrison forces had left for Tukayyid, and we wondered if ComStar was already defeated. The adepts tied to ROM spoke up to say that this had nothing to do with the battle on Tukayyid. Primus Waterly was, in their words, "fulfilling the holy destiny of ComStar." I couldn't fall for that rhetoric. This Interdiction had all the earmarks of a political maneuver, something Jerome Blake himself despised.

Precentor Johnson ordered me to fold our antenna, and I refused. Several other adepts refused the command as well. We held our ground, quoting to the Precentor the passage in Blake's writings that said to impose an Interdiction for political gain was unjust.

One of the ROMmies, Zeaman, pulled out a laser pistol and pointed it at a friend of mine, ordering her to pull the antenna down. He never saw me swing the wrench, and by the time he realized I was going to hit him it was too late.

In less than twenty minutes we overpowered the Precentor and her ROMmies. Three adepts died, one of theirs and two of ours. But we controlled the HPG and maintained operations, and when DCMS troops showed up an hour later, I surrendered the compound gladly.

I expected to die. After all, ComStar members defied the Primus at the risk of suffering from the long arm and watchful eyes of ROM. Later we learned that the Primus had retired. ComStar, the ComStar I had joined, no longer existed. The new Order invited us to fulfill the will of Jerome Blake in a more practical way. I heard this news with relief and pride, but rumors still reach me that Precentor Johnson, now in exile with the Word of Blake, seeks revenge against me and the other adepts who defied her and the Primus on Galtor III. As Precentor of Galtor III, I hope that she finds solace in the new balance of the universe...

[Precentor Wagner: May you never find sleep or rest for the sins you have committed. Live in fear. Precentor Marita Johnson lives and awaits the day when she again holds the seat you took from her. Your personal greed and arrogance is appalling and an affront to the will of Blake.]

—From the logbook of Precentor Thaddius Wagner, Galtor III ComStar Compound, 3052

HPG techs and ComStar forces on Clan-occupied worlds received additional orders instructing them to engage all Clan occupation forces and recapture Clan-held planets in the name of the Order. Primus Waterly intended for Operation Scorpion to bring both the Clans and the Inner Sphere to their knees and unite them under one government led by ComStar. She believed that one swift, bold stroke could fulfill Jerome Blake's prophecies and visions.

Operation Scorpion was doomed from its inception. The Draconis Combine and the Federated Commonwealth somehow received word of the plan before it was implemented. These two governments wrested control of most of the HPGs on their planets from ComStar before the Interdiction order arrived. (Hanse Davion ordered a series of "accidents" staged at HPG stations in his realm that required the ComStar staffs to evacuate the compounds and then be quarantined "as a medical precaution.") Several members of the First Circuit, believing that Primus Waterly's orders went against the very nature and will of ComStar, warned their own loyal adepts and Precentors to disobey the command.

[There is no doubt of the source of the leak. The bitch Mori and her henchman betrayed our Order.]

The Capellan Confederation and the Free Worlds League bore the brunt of the Interdiction, because their First Circuit representatives warned them of Primus Waterly's intentions too late. The order stunned newly appointed Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao, who personally ordered several regiments to surround key ComStar facilities and cut them off from all supplies and local communications. On several key worlds, Liao loyalist troops seized the HPG stations and captured their staffs, careful to take prisoners.

Only Captain-General Thomas Marik showed little concern at the onset of the shunning order. As a former member of ComStar, he believed that the Primus and the First Circuit would only order an interdiction with good reason. Thomas Marik simply pressed his commercial JumpShips into service as a command circuit to relay any messages in the interim.

Civilian populations throughout the Inner Sphere protested the sudden cutoff of ComStar services. In the past, ComStar had always announced its reasons for imposing interdictions—and they had been justified. When this interdiction carried no message giving ComStar's reasons, the House propaganda machines quickly began painting ComStar as a corrupt organization that was betraying mankind to the Clans. These combined events produced sometimes violent results. On many worlds in the Federated Commonwealth, the local citizenry simply rushed the HPG compounds and took them over, sometimes at the urging of MIO or Loki operatives. A small number of ComStar installations failed to heed the Operation Scorpion order due to mechanical failure or ongoing preventative maintenance on their equipment. Other installations ignored or contested Primus Waterly's command.

[The traitors perpetrate more lies! ComStar did not betray mankind to the Clans. Indeed, we lulled the Clans into trusting us and then struck our greatest blow against them. If not for our intervention, the Inner Sphere as we know it would not exist.]

Operation Scorpion failed most stunningly in the Clan occupation zone. Because most of ComStar's and the Clan's military forces were in the fighting on Tukayyid, the battle to control most worlds became a slow tug of war. ComStar initially held the upper hand in the rebellions, because the Clans did not expect their "dishonorable" betrayal, but the Clan forces simply had more military troops on the occupied worlds.

The occupying Clan troops, usually second-line Provisional Garrison Clusters (PGCs), while equipped with older 'Mechs than the front-line units, proved equal to the task of quelling the ComStar efforts at rebellion. It quickly became apparent that the Clans transmitted messages through ComStar as a condition of their agreement, not from necessity. On the handful of worlds that ComStar even briefly recaptured and held, Apollo, Graus, Colmar, Leoben, Dawn, Goito, Bangor, Schwartz, and Irece, the Clans set up portable HPGs. Within eight days of the beginning of Operation Scorpion, all Clan-held worlds were back in contact with their leaders above Tukayyid, and by the time Tukayyid ended, the Clans again controlled every world they occupied. Primus Waterly's Operation Scorpion was a dismal failure.

[This defeat need not have happened. Those Precentors loyal to Focht and Mori betrayed Primus Waterly's vision and prevented ComStar from breaking the Clans' hold.]

[Many of ComStar's "facts" are simply exaggerations. On Irece, for example, elements of the Com Guard infantry garrison harassed the Clan force from the forests of Frisco until June 22, also managing to liberate the DCMS garrison forces imprisoned in the Kindu Reformatory during that time, further upsetting the Nova Cat defenders. On Apollo, it took the Seventeenth Falcon Regulars more than ten weeks to track down the ComStar light ground armor forces, which hounded the Falcons in the Dollgray Mountains for weeks without supplies or support. The bravery of those men and women who carried out Operation Scorpion will not be forgotten, nor can the betrayal of their spirit by a corrupt few be forgiven.]

KEEPER OF THE FLAME

We stand in the door and watch one of history's great storms gather power. Those of us who remember the Star League in its glory recognize the dark times that will soon unfold. ComStar must serve as the foundation for a new building that will survive the storm and lift mankind up from its own dark side.

We will hold the flame of knowledge and keep the fires of technology burning in the Inner Sphere, ready to spread knowledge, ensuring that mankind does not return to the eternal abyss.

Let no person or group of people obstruct the spread of knowledge. ComStar represents enlightenment and protection for all mankind. This is our task, and our descendants' task—to keep the science of nature alive until the science of man's soul once again allows the unification of the glorious Star League.

The foundation is laid. The future lies in the hands of those who come after me. The torch that the Star League lit will burn for decades and centuries to come. Remember that knowledge belongs to every man, woman, and child, and that corruption exists in the soul, not in the heart of the machine.

—From *HPG Technology Readout 102-B: Hyperpulse Principles and Applications*, by Jerome Blake, 2813

The final statistics of Operation Scorpion told the tale. In the Federated Commonwealth, ComStar controlled only 22 percent of the HPGs. In the Draconis Combine, ComStar held only 18 percent of its installations. In the Capellan Confederation, ComStar maintained control of 70 percent of its compounds. The Free Rasalhague Republic and the Free Worlds League came closest to suffering the full impact of the ill-fated Interdiction, with ComStar controlling 99 percent of the Rasalhague stations (minus the Tukayyid HPG) and 90 percent of the League stations.

When Precentor Martial Focht discovered the Primus' duplicity he arranged for a hand-picked emissary to ensure that Terra's own defenders, Brion's Legion, were loyal to him before he returned. Upon returning to Terra, he met with Precentor Mori, and together they convinced Primus Waterly to resign her post. In a sad coincidence, Myndo Waterly suffered a cerebral hemorrhage only four days later and died.

[This is one of the most vicious lies of the "new" ComStar Order. Precentor Martial Focht killed Primus Waterly in cold blood without even giving her a chance to defend herself.]

[He killed her least of all for Operation Scorpion. His main motivation was power. Having been promised the Archonship of the Lyran Commonwealth, Focht knew that his hopes of grandeur and power had died with his supporters' betrayal of the Primus' operation. If she had succeeded, he would have received free access to that realm. All that remained for him now was the primacy, and Waterly stood in his way. He saw his opportunity and took it, killing Primus Waterly and replacing her with the puppet Mori. In all of the years of our Order, even in the darkest hours under mad Primus Kurstin, no act of savagery compares to the blasphemy committed by the heretic Focht!]

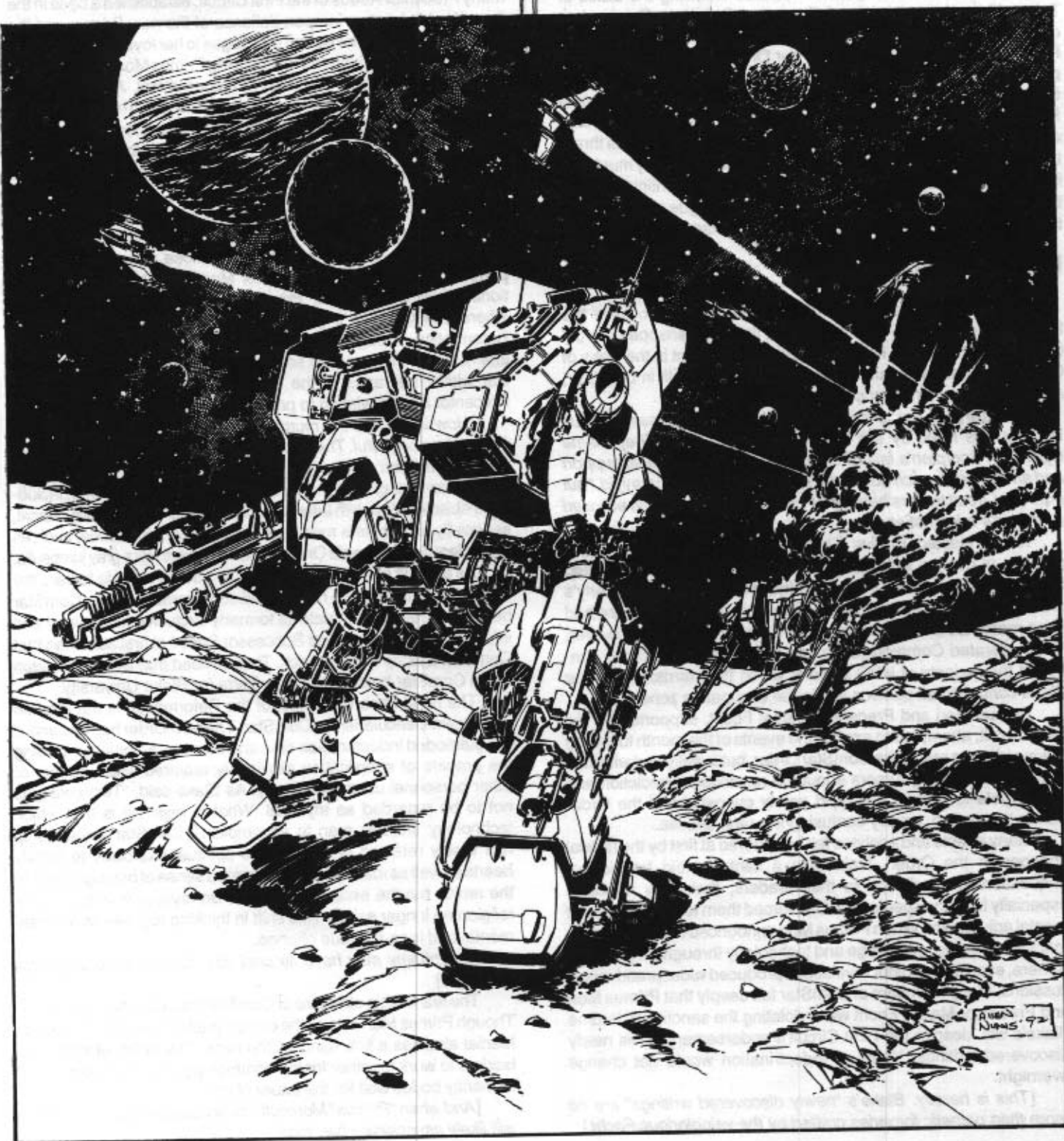
The Precentor Martial placed all members of the First Circuit into protective custody when the battle for Tukayyid ended to ensure their safety in the unrest that followed. During that period of several weeks, Focht was visited by a vision of Jerome Blake. The image led him to the cornerstone of the Hall of History, where he found a copy of a technical readout written by Jerome Blake himself. In the preface, dated later than the journals that form the core of ComStar's beliefs, several passages clearly state that ComStar's responsibility was to spread knowledge to mankind, rather than keep it secret.

[Blasphemy and lies! No such volume exists. The heretic Focht invented it for his personal corruption of Blake's blessed Order. He created this fabrication while holding the First Circuit prisoner and used it to justify the Primus' death.]

The discovery of Blake's further writing shook the First Circuit and the very foundation of the Order. The Precentor Martial realized that these new revelations must immediately be passed throughout the Order, and that ComStar needed to undertake major changes to live up to the words Blake left behind. Jerome Blake never wanted all the years of devotion spent praying for harmony with technology. He created ComStar to spread technological enlightenment to all mankind, to prevent a dark age from emerging by joining humans to the technology they needed for a better life. Power-hungry Primuses had corrupted ComStar's true direction.

[Heresy! A new age of lies was forged, built with words falsely attributed to our glorious founder. To any who read this work: know that the Word of Blake continues to do our Order's work. The way of the heretics of ComStar is wicked and wrong. This work and their words are a blight and a cancer on the divine vision of our creator.]

NEW ORDERS



NEW COMSTAR

The following text provides an overview of the much-needed changes in the blessed Order of ComStar that Precentor Martial Focht and Primus Sharilar Mori instituted following the Battle of Tukayyid and the debacle of Operation Scorpion. Our leaders discovered a Blake document that contradicts much of what past Primuses have incorporated into our Order through ignorance or personal ambition, and they intend to better fulfill Jerome Blake's true vision of ComStar. The chaos between Houses that past Primuses have attempted to maintain and increase must become a thing of the past. The Clans represent the most dangerous threat the Inner Sphere and ComStar have ever faced, and they must face it together if there is to be any hope of victory. We continue to work toward the peace and prosperity of the Star League era, and hope that someday all people will live together in harmony.

REFORMATION

ComStar defeated the Clans at Tukayyid and so gave the Inner Sphere a fifteen-year peace, but the effort snapped the old ComStar Order in two. Primus Waterly's retirement in the wake of Operation Scorpion's failure created an internal split in ComStar, and the rift shows no signs of mending quickly.

[Contrary to the official ComStar press releases, Primus Waterly was killed by the traitors Focht and Mori. They blame Operation Scorpion's failure on "poorly planned logistical support and an ill-timed launch during the peak of fighting on Tukayyid," but the First Circuit traitors betrayed Primus Waterly and thus eclipsed ComStar's brightest star.]

Newly elected Primus Sharilar Mori faced the immediate problem of dealing with the Inner Sphere under a half-executed Interdiction. She issued a full retraction of former Primus Waterly's order, and within 72 hours, all HPGs within the Inner Sphere had been reactivated. Not all were under ComStar's control, however. The Federated Commonwealth and the Draconis Combine controlled the majority of HPG stations within their territory, and the Clans controlled all stations within the occupation zone.

Primus Mori and Precentor Martial Focht, supported by the First Circuit, attempted to explain the events of the month following Tukayyid to the rest of the ComStar Order, but initially met with little success. Conflicting rumors about the rescinded Interdiction and the horrible losses on Tukayyid nearly overwhelmed the Order during this period, greatly confusing the rank and file.

Many adepts and acolytes felt bewildered at first by the radical changes in the Order. Trained to a centuries-old tradition of unquestioning obedience to their leaders, their new freedom, especially from the specter of ROM, forced them to make a difficult mental adjustment. When Primus Mori announced the Order's new role in dispensing knowledge and technology throughout the Inner Sphere, even other, minor revelations produced widespread repercussions. Many members of ComStar felt deeply that Primus Mori and Precentor Martial Focht were violating the sanctity of Jerome Blake's will, despite the First Circuit's endorsement of his newly discovered writings. Years of indoctrination would not change overnight.

[This is heresy. Blake's "newly discovered writings" are no more than pathetic forgeries crafted by the vainglorious Focht.]

[Fearing to face us in open debate, the apostates resort to insults.]

More confusion erupted when Precentor Demona Aziz, formerly Precentor Atreus of the First Circuit, established a base in the Free Worlds League in open defiance of the new Primus and the Precentor Martial. She issued messages to her loyal followers in the Order that stopped just short of accusing Primus Mori and Precentor Focht of overthrowing ComStar in a coup d'état. Aziz negotiated with former ComStar member Captain-General Thomas Marik to obtain asylum in the Free Worlds League for those members of ComStar who could not accept Primus Mori's reforms.

[Precentor Aziz, unlike the fork-tongued serpents Focht and Mori, speaks the truth.]

The split affected all ranks within ComStar, including ROM. Those who rejected the new order packed up and fled to the Free Worlds League to join Precentor Aziz; those who remained supported Primus Mori and Precentor Martial Focht, but also questioned their own beliefs. Primus Mori, recognizing the turmoil inherent in ComStar's growth, named this time of change the Reformation. Though the split inevitably harmed ComStar, the only alternative to this peaceful schism was to wage a more costly civil war within the ranks of the Order. Neither the Primus nor the Precentor Martial wished to precipitate such bloodshed.

[How ironic that the murderers of Primus Waterly should call themselves peaceful. They will have war yet. Blood will have blood!]

Primus Mori's sweeping reforms have changed both major aspects and minor details of ComStar's organization. Some, including a sizable cutback in internal monitoring by ROM, seem radical, especially to long-time members. Others are more subtle, such as the replacement of the old Order's white robes with light-gray jumpsuits.

As a result of the Reformation, ComStar's attitude toward the rest of the Inner Sphere has altered considerably. When ComStar began to freely disseminate its formerly exclusive technology and information, the suspicious Successor States at first assumed that ComStar was up to some trick. They revised that wary evaluation when ComStar broke ground on Terra for Blake University.

The most important effect of the Reformation is the gradual trend toward secularism in ComStar. The new Order has discarded the outmoded indoctrination rites and other ceremonies, including the prayers of supplication previously required when adepts or other personnel used technology. As Blake said, "Technology is not to be regarded as mystical. What is mystical is that which technology enables man to accomplish." ComStar's leadership has wisely retained enough of the spiritual exercises to satisfy hearts as well as minds, and to maintain a sense of belonging within the ranks, but the excessive reliance on mysticism and pseudo-religion no longer exists. This shift in thinking represents a fundamental and long-overdue change.

[Blasphemy may have its brief day, but we will avenge this sacrilege.]

The leadership structure of ComStar has also changed subtly. Though Primus Mori acts as the official, public leader, the Precentor Martial also has a firm hand on the reins. The ability of these two leaders to work together for the common good of the Order and of humanity bodes well for the future of both.

[And when "Primus" Mori outlives her usefulness to him, Focht will likely assassinate her, too.]

UNITED WE STAND

In July 3052 Primus Mori dispatched Precentor Martial Focht to negotiate with each House to establish new contracts for ComStar's services. Focht's prestige following Tukayyid made him one of the few members of ComStar that the governments trusted. The Precentor Martial had a tough assignment. The Inner Sphere was in turmoil, and the temporary alliances made to battle the Clans slowly began to dissolve. Much of the grudging respect, and even admiration, the House leaders felt for each other was not shared by their citizens. As the old ComStar's part in the Clans' conquest came to light, long-held suspicions of the organization's activities bloomed into active distrust. The Precentor Martial's only advantage in these meetings came from his personal integrity, and the fact that ComStar still held a near-monopoly on interstellar communications and the technology to maintain them. Anticipating more serious resistance from House Kurita than from the other Houses, the Precentor Martial went first to the Draconis Combine to meet with Theodore Kurita.

[Integrity? A murdering heretic has none!]

Precentor Focht faced mixed feelings about ComStar in the Combine. Though most citizens appreciated ComStar's epic battle to end the Clan advance, they also scorned the Order for not intervening sooner. Operation Scorpion only increased their distrust.

Theodore Kurita proved the most difficult to convince of ComStar's new good will. While willing to renegotiate a contract for maintenance and operating services on the HPGs under the Combine's control, he resisted ComStar's plan to post Com Guard forces on those worlds. Precentor Martial Focht bargained from a difficult position, but, after three weeks of intense negotiations, managed a compromise. ComStar signed a ten-year service contract for the HPG network, and agreed to post no more than one lance of BattleMechs or armored troops at any HPG facility, providing the Combine with a full disclosure of ComStar troops within its borders. The final condition of ComStar's contract with the Combine was repeated in negotiations with each House; the Com Guards pledged to defend the planets they occupied against any Clan aggression.

The Precentor Martial faced similar resentment and demands from Prince Victor Steiner-Davion and Archon Melissa Steiner of the Federated Commonwealth. Working under somewhat less intense pressure than characterized the meetings in the Draconis Combine, ComStar ended negotiations by agreeing to a 15-year service contract with the same terms of troop movement disclosure and defense against the Clans for the occupying Com Guard forces.

Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao followed in his grandfather Maximilian's footsteps during the negotiations with the Capellan Confederation. At the peak of Operation Scorpion, his troops captured several ComStar compounds in order to maintain communications. Despite Precentor Mori's lifting of the Interdiction, Chancellor Liao

continued to hold several adepts as "prisoners of the state." Precentor Martial Focht protested that this action constituted holding hostages, but his protest fell on deaf ears. Chancellor Liao simply did not trust ComStar.

[Nor should he. They have betrayed the Word of Blake; what lesser causes might they betray?]

During the five weeks of negotiations that followed, Precentor Focht faced constant stonewalling tactics. He eventually negotiated a four-year service contract with the Capellan Confederation, with certain limits. Chancellor Liao insisted that the Com Guards only be posted to worlds both ComStar and the Confederation agreed upon, and though the Precentor Martial had strong doubts about the outcome of such an arrangement, he was forced, in the interests of unity, to concede the point. Sun-Tzu placed the Com Guards on worlds bordering the St. Ives Compact, the Federated Commonwealth, and the Periphery.

Sun-Tzu's action caused an uproar in the ranks of the Federated Commonwealth's intelligence arm, MII/O, which feared that ComStar had finally chosen to ally itself with the Capellan Confederation. Though ComStar, as a neutral power, is strictly forbidden to assist any House with non-Clan-related military defense, assignment of those troops to its border unnerved the Federated Commonwealth's intelligence community.

The remains of the Free Rasalhague Republic, reduced to only seven worlds on the Clans' front lines, also turned a cold shoulder to ComStar. Even though the ComStar victory over the Clans took place on the Rasalhague world of Tukayyid, many of the



surviving citizens shared the disillusionment common people on planets throughout the Inner Sphere felt with ComStar. They, too, questioned why the Order waited so long to enter the fight. Despite opposition from the citizens, the Precentor Martial successfully negotiated a twenty-year contract with the Free Rasalhague Republic's leaders and received permission from the exiled government to post an unlimited number of Com Guard BattleMech forces on all FRR planets.

Precentor Focht immediately set to reinforcing the remnant of the FRR to help allay Inner Sphere fears that the Clans might betray the truce. Keeping in mind the long-standing political infighting in the Inner Sphere, Precentor Focht also placed the Com Guards in the Free Rasalhague Republic to protect that diminished nation from absorption by the Draconis Combine or Federated Commonwealth. So far, the Precentor Martial's fears on both counts have proved groundless.

Focht failed to complete his mission in only one House: the Free Worlds League. Captain-General Thomas Marik refused to meet with the Precentor Martial, instead sending minor officials to discuss the Precentor's proposals. Thomas Marik's message came through loud and clear: he neither trusted nor supported the Precentor Martial or the organization he represented.

[Knowing Thomas Marik's steadfast adherence to Blake's true Word, Precentor Aziz has declared Marik Primus-in-exile. Soon we will make him Primus in truth.]

THEIR FINEST HOUR

Each ambassador gathered here has given impassioned speeches telling of how our blessed Order betrayed your governments. Apologies cannot undo the harm we have done, but for those errors, I apologize. A malicious few sought personal power at the expense of our dead sons and daughters: those few no longer possess the power to betray nations. To trust ComStar now is difficult, in fact nearly impossible, but now more than ever that trust is necessary for our mutual survival.

The Clans are poised over the Inner Sphere like Damocles' sword. The victory at Tukayyid only bought us time—a fleeting victory, at best. In fourteen years the Clans will strike again. Set aside your feelings about ComStar and consider what this means.

United, we can defeat them. If we fight side by side, we will end their threat forever. But unity requires trust. ComStar is already changing to earn your trust. But you and your governments must accept that change as real.

If we do not unify our defenses against the Clans, they will destroy us. Terra, and all the Inner Sphere, will be theirs to do with as they please. Carry this message to your leaders. We stand ready to aid you in the coming fight, and assuredly, it will come.

—Excerpt from Precentor Martial Focht's closing remarks at the Terran Peace Summit, ComStar Hilton Head Complex, April 10, 3053

[The League alone, of all the Successor States, has not been suborned by false prophets.]

Six long weeks of discussions culminated in the Free Worlds League agreeing to a one-year service contract with ComStar, at the end of which time adept technicians from the Word of Blake who had sought refuge within the Free Worlds League would replace ComStar brethren. The equipment would remain, but would be maintained and operated by the Word of Blake.

As expected, Thomas Marik refused to allow ComStar to post BattleMech or other military forces within his borders, instead relying on soldiers from the Word of Blake. Though the Precentor Martial had expected such an outcome, he had not anticipated the swiftness with which the Word of Blake so firmly established itself.

In a bid to make ComStar a more direct player in Inner Sphere politics, Primus Mori invited representatives of the ruling Houses to a peace summit on Terra in the spring of 3053. She hoped, with this meeting, to establish a framework for a working relationship between the Houses in order to better deal with the Clans once the Treaty of Tukayyid expires. The Primus offered military combat data from the battle of Tukayyid as an incentive to attend the meeting. The data itself represented a rare prize in the effort to understand Clan fighting style and tactics.

The summit proved an utter disaster. No House Lords appeared personally, but all accepted the invitation by sending delegates in their name. The delegates eagerly accepted the tactical data ComStar provided on the Clans, but seemed more interested in the current state of affairs within ComStar.

The only real accord of the summit occurred when Draconis Combine ambassador *Tai-sho* Henry Sobrioff announced that the Combine no longer recognized ComStar as an impartial arbitrator of mercenary contracts. House Liao and the Federated Commonwealth's representatives immediately backed his declaration, and all three eloquently argued that ComStar's duplicity in dealing with the Clans, despite its victory at the battle of Tukayyid, had seriously eroded their trust in our Order.

Precentor Martial Focht, who privately agreed with their condemnation, attempted to retrieve some good from the summit by proposing that ComStar abandon control of the Mercenary Review Board, which would then re-form as a jointly administered committee made up of representatives from each government. He also convinced the ambassadors to allow ComStar to maintain an active seat on the board, as a legitimate employer of mercenary forces. The Federated Commonwealth ambassador General Felra proposed to make Outreach, the home of Wolf's Dragoons, the official seat of the new Mercenary Review and Bonding Commission. After some discussion, all parties agreed to that final point, marking the end of ComStar's centuries-old control over mercenary contracts. This decision was the sole concrete result of the summit.

Precentor Martial Focht ended the summit with a moving closing plea. He warned the ambassadors to fear not ComStar, but the Clans, because the victory at Tukayyid was only temporary. ComStar had not vanquished the Clans forever. But even this heartfelt appeal fell on deaf ears, and the ambassadors returned home more concerned about the risks they imagined an armed ComStar posed than the real threat of the Clans.

Though disappointed by the Terran Peace Summit, Primus Mori and Precentor Focht attempted to reinforce their words with several important gestures of good will. Two weeks after the

summit, the leaders of each House received a personal message from Primus Mori. ComStar, in an effort to spread knowledge throughout the Inner Sphere, was officially opening its vast archives to the citizens of the Inner Sphere. The Primus invited House historians and archivists to make full use of the ComStar Archives. In addition, ComStar had already set aside permanent offices for each House government on Hilton Head so that researchers could work in comfort. In return, ComStar requested similar access to House libraries and archives. Currently, only ComStar's historical databases are open to the public; access to those dealing with technology remains restricted.

This move met an enthusiastic response. Historians flocked to Terra to pore over the incredible data the archives contained. ComStar historians received more restricted access to House libraries, especially within the Draconis Combine and the Capellan Confederation, but this massive information exchange provides ComStar with a dramatic insight into the history of the Succession Wars. Our Order hopes such exchanges may ease tensions between the Houses as well as dispel their mistrust of ComStar.

In a second display of good will, ComStar announced the creation of a new university on Terra dedicated to providing technological information and skills to all interested Houses. The University of Blake began construction at the end of 3053, and expects to hold its first classes in the spring of 3056. Already, a

number of graduates of the NAIS and the Sun Zhang Academy have applied for entrance.

[Such hotbeds of heresy should not be allowed to exist. Primus Waterly's strike on the NAIS only scorched the snake; when the time is ripe, we will kill it.]

Primus Mori's final announcement generated the greatest excitement. She declared that by 3057, all stellar discoveries, and star charts created by the Explorer Corps, would be available to the House governments for review. The Order is currently assembling an extensive database containing our findings. Given ComStar's traditional closed-door policy, an information release of this magnitude should convince even the most skeptical in the Successor States that our actions of the past three years represent an honest effort at open exchange.

ComStar's mighty military machine is no longer shrouded in mystery. Precentor Martial Focht began to announce troop movements in 3053 during his efforts to re-form the Com Guards following their victory on Tukayyid. Any time ComStar re-forms or relocates a battalion-size contingent of forces, the Precentor Martial sends a detailed report of the movement to all House Lords. Precentor Martial Focht is determined to avoid accusations of covert actions against our blessed Order, and this policy stands in striking contrast to the ComStar of only a few years ago that was able to secretly amass a military force of more than fifty BattleMech regiments.



ORGANIZATION

The current reformation led by Primus Sharilar Mori and Precentor Martial Focht has not changed ComStar's basic organizational structure. The highest levels of ComStar's authority still rest in the Primus and the First Circuit. The Primus controls ROM and the Com Guards, but the First Circuit can veto use of these forces by a majority vote. Each member of the First Circuit casts a single ballot.

To balance the distribution of power, the First Circuit handles and approves all financial policy. The Primus may veto these policies, but the First Circuit can override the veto by a majority vote. The Primus may name his or her successor or accept one appointed by the First Circuit. Should a seat on the First Circuit fall vacant, the Primus appoints a replacement.

ADMINISTRATION

As administrator of the Order, the Primus controls a wide range of departments. Reflecting its corporate past, and renewing its ties to the early Order that was still free of revisionist mysticism, the new ComStar is divided into branches, each run by a Demi-Precentor who reports to the Primus.

The current administrative branches of ComStar break down into the following departments.

Financial Affairs

This branch determines financial policy, including budgeting, overseeing the exchange rates for the C-bill against the various House bills, and monitoring economic trends. The 15 percent drop in the value of the C-bill after the battle of Tukayyid has severely strained this branch's resources under the current administration.

Stellar Relations

The newest department within ComStar, this branch owes its existence to Reformation Act IV, proposed by Precentor Riis of Rasalhague. Designed to facilitate ComStar's diplomatic relations with the House Lords, under this reform, good-will ambassadors of Demi-Precentor or Precentor rank tour the House governments offering educational, cultural, and military exchange. Thus far, every government save the Free Worlds League has welcomed Stellar Relations personnel. The Capellan Confederation has shown particular enthusiasm for these diplomatic visits, which we believe shows that Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao, unlike his mother Romano, sees value in providing his people with free education and information.

Terran Affairs

Dedicated to maintaining life on Terra and the rest of the Sol system, this branch of ComStar controls all administrative, social, and political dealings between ComStar and the civilians of Terra and the Sol system's terraformed worlds.

Archives and History

The ComStar Archives and History Branch administers a wide range of services, including the ComStar Census. Partly caretakers, partly collectors and museum curators, Archives personnel preserve and protect the historical and technological records of mankind. The vast Halls of History in the Hilton Head Complex represent the richest source of historical information in the Inner Sphere.

Science and Research

This branch of the Order continues to expand the horizons of the Inner Sphere's scientific knowledge. Though somewhat neglected over the past 300 years, the Reformation's focus on scientific advancement for better living has greatly increased this branch's funding and staffing.

Research personnel have made the study of Clan OmniMech technology their highest priority, using the many samples of Clan OmniMech and other Clan tech left on Tukayyid by the defeated Clans. In addition to working on OmniMech technology, ComStar researchers are currently developing an Inner Sphere equivalent of the Elemental battle armor.

Communications

The Communications Branch carries out ComStar's primary mission: the maintenance and operation of the hyperpulse generator network. While the Inner Sphere Houses now own the HPGs within their territories, virtually all parts and servicing still come from ComStar Communications.

News Bureau

Founded centuries ago, the ComStar News Bureau is the only Sphere-wide news-gathering organization. In the past, the Bureau slanted and even ignored news to fit the needs of ComStar; however, the Order no longer indulges in such self-serving manipulation. The Bureau frequently runs commentaries and editorials submitted by reporters and other members questioning ComStar's internal politics, and news stories have taken on a more realistic tone.

ROM

ROM has been and remains the internal and external security arm of ComStar. The Reformation, however, eroded much of ROM's power. Even before the schism, ROM agents tended toward conservatism at best, fanaticism at worst. A defection rate of ROM agents to the Word of Blake estimated at 65 percent has unfortunately crippled ComStar's once-powerful security forces. With our reduced number of agents, we have been unable to significantly infiltrate the Word of Blake, but must instead use our diminished resources to defend ourselves against their covert intelligence war.

[Of course Focht's apostates have not infiltrated our organization in the Free Worlds League. They are incompetent, as well as heretical.]

Com Guard

Formerly the ComStar Guard and Militia, the Com Guards have suffered the brunt of our enmity with the Clans. Between the staggering losses on Tukayyid, the defection of many Epsilon adepts to the Word of Blake, and an all-time recruiting low, several years will pass before the Com Guards regain their pre-war strength.

Explorer Corps

The Explorer Corps suffered several materiel and personnel losses during the Clan war, mostly before ComStar established contact with the Clans. Since Tukayyid, exploration has been cut back dramatically, and the Corps' funds diverted to more critical branches.

Defunct Branches

The Fundamental Branch, responsible for interpreting Jerome Blake's writings and ComStar doctrine, left during the early stages of Primus Mori's Reformation. After Primus Mori began stripping away many of ComStar's excessive religious overtones, the Fundamental Branch defected almost entirely to the Word of Blake.

The Reformation also dissolved the Mercenary Review Board. Though ComStar maintains a seat on the current board on Outreach, we no longer negotiate or enforce mercenary contracts.

RANK STRUCTURE

Primus Mori instituted several changes in ComStar's command hierarchy. A fourth tier of administration now supplements ComStar's former three-tiered structure, officially sanctioning the commonly designated rank of Demi-Precentor below that of Precentor. Five or more Demi-Precentors now report to each Precentor and receive rotating assignments.

Each rank supports numerous sub-rankings and functions. Sub-rankings, or grades, are designated by Roman numerals, with I representing the first-year members of each rank. Each year of an acolyte's tenure within ComStar raises his or her sub-ranking by one; therefore, an adept III represents an adept who has spent three years at that rank within the Order. Promotion to the next rank is granted upon the recommendation of a superior, or else occurs automatically upon achieving 25 years—Grade XXV—in a given rank.

The rank and grade classifications are further broken down by Greek letters used to specify each individual's function.

For example, Adept Epsilon XI designates an adept MechWarrior in the Com Guards with eleven years of service. Precentor Rho VIII designates a Precentor in ROM's intelligence network who has served at that level for eight years.

As part of her reforms, Primus Mori dropped the ROM designation Omicron (ComStar Internal Obedience/Intelligence) and the Com Guard designation Psi (Spiritual Enlightenment Staff). In the new Order, coercion and indoctrination have no place.



COMSTAR FUNCTION DESIGNATIONS

General

- Alpha: Hyperpulse Generator Operation
- Beta: Scientific Analysis
- Kappa: Medical/Doctor
- Delta: Intelligence (non-ROM/Com Guards)
- Gamma: Diplomacy
- Sigma: Public Relations
- Omega: Research
- Eta: Education/Instructional
- Nu: Recruitment
- Tau: Historian/Archivist
- Chi: Terran Affairs
- Phi: Financial/Monetary Control Offices

ROM

- Mu: Intelligence Analysis
- Rho: Intelligence-Gathering

Com Guard

- Epsilon: MechWarrior
- Pi: Aerospace Pilot
- Iota: Infantry
- Xi: DropShip Crew
- Lambda: Ground Armor Crew/Pilot
- Theta: JumpShip Operations/Crew
- Zeta: Military Technician

THE FIRST CIRCUIT

The ComStar command hierarchy underwent great changes in the Reformation. For nearly 300 years, under the leadership of the primacy, the First Circuit held sole responsibility for administering the ComStar communications network. The ranking Precentors of the First Circuit maintained ComStar's religious status among the citizens and turned the writings of Jerome Blake into gospel.

In the new Order, the First Circuit can no longer function simply as the cloistered leaders of a quasi-religion. The Precentors must often travel far from the marble halls of Hilton Head to serve as much-needed administrators, diplomats, and ComStar liaisons.

For centuries, misguided leaders of ComStar used the communications network and their exclusive control of the technology to manipulate events in the Inner Sphere to their own ends. A particularly costly abuse of this power occurred during the Clan war, when Capellan Chancellor Romano Liao used interstellar communications to send assassins against Justin Allard, husband of the St. Ives Compact's Duchess Candace Liao. The First Circuit knew the content of her communications but failed to prevent her instructions from being carried out. The Inner Sphere lost a valuable life through their inaction.

ComStar's new policy of openness extends to the First Circuit's administration of all communications. The Free Worlds League

has unfortunately chosen not to benefit from the new democracy in ComStar, and though the First Circuit maintains the seat of Precentor Atreus, representative of the League, that Precentor has not appeared at any meetings since Primus Mori took office.

REFORMATION-ERA ROM

The most clandestine element of ComStar, its intelligence organization, ROM, remains largely unknown even today to those outside its ranks. Recent access to the ComStar Historical Archives revealed a great deal about ROM's role in suppressing innovation and access to technology over the centuries. In the past, ROM has manipulated governments, initiated and escalated wars, and cost the lives of thousands. Primus Mori will not allow such atrocities to happen again.

Primus Mori's Reformation affected ROM more than any other branch of ComStar. In casting aside their traditional role as enforcers of the will of Blake, Primus Mori offended ROM's many staunch conservatives. By the end of 3054, more than 70 percent of ROM agents had left Mori's new Order for the Word of Blake.

[These honorable men and women could not tolerate the destruction of Blake's dream. They, and the entire Word of Blake, truly serve Blake's vision.]

The ROM agents remaining within the Order wage a constant, bitter war against those agents who defected. Minor skirmishes between the two factions have broken out at several HPGs, and though ROM has conducted several intelligence operations against the Word of Blake, primarily in the Principality of Gibson, none so far have succeeded.

[Much good may defiance do them. Righteousness shall triumph.]

Adding to the tension of the situation, the Word of Blake made several failed assassination attempts against our operatives. To protect the Order, we have been forced to retaliate in kind. The Word of Blake's ultra-radical Toyama sect planned the boldest attempt in June of 3054. The Toyamas smuggled several explosive devices onto Terra, intending to plant them in the Hilton Head Island Complex. Though ROM agents foiled the plot, the Toyamas made their message clear. The Word of Blake will most likely continue this senseless intelligence war until long after its excesses can accomplish their ends. Unfortunately, their vendetta may prevent ComStar from giving its attention to more important concerns any time in the near future.

[Our plan nearly succeeded, save for blind luck. Sooner or later, their luck will run out.]

We cannot be certain how deeply the Word of Blake has infiltrated ComStar ROM's ranks. Unfortunately, both the schism and the covert war prevent ROM from using its considerable intelligence resources for the benefit of the Inner Sphere, and internal security is practically impossible to maintain. Falling victim to its rampant paranoia, the Word of Blake finds security no easier. As a sad consequence of this division, every Inner Sphere intelligence organization is taking advantage of ROM's internal strife to infiltrate our ranks in ever-increasing numbers.

The reformed ROM provides protection against external, not internal, threats to the Order. Though no longer the watchdog of adepts and acolytes, ROM still maintains its reputation among ComStar's older members, who cannot quite stop believing in the fearsome ROM of legend.

COM GUARDS IN THE REFORMATION

ComStar suffered many losses in the Clan war, especially at Tukayyid and in the aftermath of that battle: unity, status, trust, and many more tangible assets. Of the Order's physical assets, the losses in the ranks of the previously untouched Com Guards were most devastating. The Precentor Martial estimates Com Guard losses at more than 40 percent, with many divisions decimated in the terrible battle. In addition to these losses, many more MechWarriors abandoned the Com Guards after Tukayyid to pursue their beliefs within the ranks of the Word of Blake. The forces remaining form basically the same unit types as before Tukayyid.

The basic ComStar military unit is the division, roughly parallel to the Regimental Combat Team (RCT) common in the Federated Commonwealth military structure, both based on a Star League military concept. A division may field a number of 'Mechs equal to or more than a regiment (usually less in the case of the Com Guards), plus supporting ground armor, artillery, infantry, and aerospace fighter support. Each individual Com Guard unit, down to the smallest configuration, is made up of a combined arms element capable of supporting itself.

The Com Guards base their unit identification on Roman numerical ratings. The smallest unit level is Level I, representing a single BattleMech, vehicle, artillery piece/crew, aerospace fighter, or infantry platoon. Level II units contain six Level I units, or roughly half a company of firepower. Level III units contain six Level II units, equivalent to an Inner Sphere battalion. A division, or Level IV unit, is comprised of three Level III units, containing approximately the same number of troops as two regiments. The highest unit level is Level V, or Army Level, comprised of six Level IV units. Currently, only four Level IV units report to each Army Commander (Precentor rank).

The Com Guards identify their units with Greek letters, each letter representing a unit's composition of BattleMechs, armor, artillery, aerospace fighters, and infantry. Generally, units with letter designations closest to the beginning of the Greek alphabet contain a larger number of BattleMechs, and those nearer the end of the alphabet usually contain more support or infantry elements. To provide maximum flexibility of response in the field, the exact composition of ComStar divisions varies. Precentor Martial Focht increases this flexibility by regularly re-forming his divisions, making it even more difficult for an enemy to anticipate the opposition it will face.

Always a brilliant tactician, Precentor Martial Focht has ably rallied his remaining forces. ComStar still fields twelve armies, though each is reduced to just four divisions (from six divisions each prior to Tukayyid). In the wake of Tukayyid, most divisions shed their original designations in favor of names related to battles they fought or Clan units they engaged. The new Com Guard armies appear more mobile, ready to defend every front quickly should the Clan offensive begin anew.

Though the Com Guards lost a staggering amount of machinery on Tukayyid, even more devastating was the loss of manpower. The Com Guards replaced some of the destroyed equipment from the Order's huge cache under Hilton Head. They also reopened several mothballed 'Mech factories, revitalizing the Blankenburg Technologies factory in the old North American state of Michigan to produce the new *Grim Reaper* BattleMech and bringing two facilities in Europe (Krupp Armaments Works and Skobel

MechWorks) back to life. Both European facilities began manufacturing new BattleMechs based on Star League-era designs but using modern modifications. Two of these, the *Star Python* and the *Galahad*, have already been shipped to Com Guard garrisons across the Inner Sphere.

ComStar's current contracts with the various Inner Sphere governments stretches the Com Guards very thin in some areas and leaves other areas virtually undefended. The current placement of forces clearly shows that the Precentor Martial does not intend the Com Guards to fight any organized military other than the Clans.

ComStar currently employs only one mercenary unit. Brion's Legion has been under contract to ComStar since near the end of the Fourth Succession War, when the unit suffered a blow so demoralizing during the battle for the planet David that they fled to David's HPG Compound to seek sanctuary. The Twelfth Deneb Light Cavalry had tricked the green Legion into revealing the position of its commanding officer and then blasted Colonel

Pythonius Brion to dust. His broken command passed to his youngest son, Octavius.

Most military experts considered the unit of questionable value prior to this battle, but their contract became practically worthless after their cowardly retreat. Primus Waterly agreed to pick up their contract, but maintained the unit as a single regiment and used it as part of the Com Guards' garrison on Terra. Under the command of Precentor Martial Focht, the unit received a full refit with Star League-era BattleMechs and gained a second regiment. The rigors and demands of Com Guard training transformed Brion's Legion from a hard-luck unit into a deadly weapon of war.

The following listing provides postings of the Com Guards as of 3055. While the Guards currently stand at 70 percent of their original strength, those forces must cover a larger number of worlds. Since 3050, ComStar has re-posted the Com Guards in such a way that their positions fall roughly into the divisions of a clock superimposed over the Inner Sphere. The listing below provides each army's headquarters location.

COM GUARD DECORATIONS

As a peace-keeping force, the Com Guards have never waged war and so had no need for insignia or regalia to commemorate their battles. Precentor Martial Anastasius Focht, formerly of the LCAF, has implemented several changes in response to his troops' battle experience in the past three years.

Every veteran of Tukayyid wears a ribbon indicating which Clans they fought during the campaign. A small silver star on the ribbon indicates that the wearer was wounded in action. A small black star commemorates the warrior's defeat of a BattleMech or fighter. Many veterans wear multiple stars.

The following colors designate the separate Clans.

Smoke Jaguar: Gray

Nova Cat: Midnight Blue

Ghost Bear: Sky blue with white horizontal stripe

Steel Viper: Black with blue horizontal stripe

Wolf: Scarlet

Diamond Shark: White

Jade Falcon: Green

A ComStar badge worn on the right arm and a silver metallic badge worn on the right side of the uniform collar indicates rank in the Com Guards. The collar badge bears the ComStar logo. Acolytes wear a white patch with no border. Adepts wear a ComStar patch bordered in dark blue. A Precentor's patch is trimmed in red, and Demi-Precentors wear patches with narrow borders of white, blue, red, and yellow.

The Greek letter on each patch designates the individual's function. For instance, lambda marks a member of an armored vehicle crew, and epsilon indicates a MechWarrior. Each

member of the Com Guards also wears a metallic Greek letter on his or her collar opposite the ComStar insignia.

Below the ComStar patch, each division wears a patch unique to its unit. Often colorful, each patch is distinctive, making it easy to spot and identify.

The Com Guards award the following handful of medals to their members.

Precentor's Sword

The Com Guards consider this dagger-shaped pin a medal of honor. The Primus or the Precentor Martial personally awards this decoration.

Star of Honor, or the Focht Star of Honor

This silver, twelve-pointed star and ribbon is awarded for acts of valor and automatically grants the award's recipient advancement to the next rank in the ComStar hierarchy. After Tukayyid, a total of 146 Stars of Honor went to new Precentors, who then assumed commands within the newly re-formed Com Guards divisions.

Sinclair Wings

This set of golden wings spreading from a sword commemorates Adept Charles Sinclair's heroic actions on Tukayyid. During the battle against Clan Diamond Shark near Urcunat, Sinclair flew his *Gotha* against three Stars of OmniMechs, knocking out five 'Mechs before his own craft went down. Pilots who demonstrate bravery above and beyond the call of duty receive the Sinclair Wings.

—Jerrold Train, "Medals and Regalia of the Com Guards," White Paper Thesis, Sakhara Academy, 3052

AFTER TUKAYYID

Like ComStar, the Com Guards face a number of internal problems. One is the growing number of adepts defecting to the Word of Blake. The men and women who gallantly sacrificed their lives at Tukayyid cannot be easily replaced. The Com Guards will sorely miss their experience and skill. The increased tensions in the Inner Sphere between the Houses, and between the Houses and ComStar, resulted in certain Houses denying the Com Guards access to their normal bases of operation (primarily within the Free Worlds League). The Com Guards face a difficult road.

Though able to rebuild our battered military, ComStar must pay a heavy price. Though we can replace our destroyed BattleMechs with 'Mechs of exceptional quality, machines make up only part of the solution. The need for new MechWarriors in the Com Guards' ranks, at ComStar's lowest-ever level of recruitment, makes replacement warriors hard to come by.

The changes within ComStar are most evident within the ranks of the Com Guards. No longer must warriors pray before using the 'Mechs, and the semi-religious trappings once associated with ComStar's military machine are a thing of the past. But that same religious zeal bonded the Guards into a cohesive unit, and that bond no longer exists. The recognition of their mutual struggle on Tukayyid is reflected in the Com Guards' new unit names, but we question whether the bond of this one battle can hold this vast military machine together.

—Excerpt from Overall Status Report: ComStar Divisions and Placement, Precentor Malcolm Duncan, May 25, 3054

COM GUARDS

(Deployment as of 3055)

Commander: Precentor Martial Anastasius Focht

Estimated 'Mech Strength: 41 Regiments + Supporting Elements

1st Army V-kappa (The Bear Maulers, Dieron Theater, from 1 to 2 on the "Inner Sphere Clock")

Commander: Precentor X Katrina Troth

Unit Name	Experience Level	Headquarters
91st Division (The Luk-y 91st IV-eta) Commanding Officer: Precentor V Rachal Drake	Elite	Dieron
211th Division (The Martial's Hunters IV-phi) Commanding Officer: Precentor VI Marvin Daeuble	Veteran	Benjamin
308th Division (Winged Divinity IV-xi) Commanding Officer: Precentor IV Karl Karter	Regular	Pesht
103rd Division (Kimmelry's Raiders IV-nu) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Styven Kimmelry	Regular	Dover

2nd Army (The Iron Warriors V-mu, Fomalhaut Theater, from 2 to 3 on the "Inner Sphere Clock")

Commander: Precentor XII Alexander Cocus

Unit Name	Experience Level	Headquarters
81st Division (The Defenders of Joje IV-kappa) Commanding Officer: Precentor IX Randolph Riggins	Veteran	Fomalhaut
301st Division (Shark Bait IV-phi) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Fibber Walton	Veteran	An Ting
82nd Division (The Web-Cutters IV-pi) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Julius Rostinberger	Elite	Halsted Station
77th Division (The Monsters IV-theta) Commanding Officer: Precentor I Jollings Rajli	Regular	Proserpina

3rd Army V-lambda (The Emerald Falconeers, Caph Theater, from 3 to 4 on the "Inner Sphere Clock")

Commander: Precentor V Alexander Durbin

Unit Name	Experience Level	Headquarters
11th Division (The Wing Clippers IV-beta) Commanding Officer: Precentor II Sharron Tang	Elite	Caph
2nd Division (The Falconeers IV-xi) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Reigis Grandi	Elite	Epsilon Indiri
323rd Division (The Groundhogs of Tukayyid IV-nu) Commanding Officer: Precentor I Charles Reanner	Regular	Siris
299th Division (The Battle-Smokers IV-lambda) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Peter Fedt	Regular	New Avalon



4th Army V-iota (The Defenders of Honor, Bryant Theatre, from 4 to 5 on the "Inner Sphere Clock")
Commander: Precentor III Oscar Wetzel

Unit Name	Experience Level	Headquarters
83rd Division (The White Cyclones IV-gamma) Commanding Officer: Precentor III Allyn Omliid	Regular	Bryant
87th Division (The Nova-Cat Trainers IV-pi) Commanding Officer: Precentor VI Archie Pardeau	Regular	St. Ives
79th Division (The Steel-Snake Charmers IV-zeta) Commanding Officer: Precentor V Louisa Draga	Elite	St. Andre
366th Division (Wolf Balt IV-rho) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Kari Marita	Green	Terra Firma

5th Army V-omicron (The Mountaineers, New Home Theatre, from 5 to 6 on the "Inner Sphere Clock")
Commander: Precentor VI Anna Gesicki

Unit Name	Experience Level	Headquarters
394th Division (The White Lions IV-tau) Commanding Officer: Precentor II Harris Harvison	Elite	Procyon
78th Division (The Battered Wolf-Warriors IV-mu) Commanding Officer: Precentor I Ullan Brian	Regular	Sian
467th Division (The Jaguar-Skinners IV-xi) Commanding Officer: Precentor I Terry Shykes	Regular	Menke
39th Division (Hawks of the High Wind IV-pi) Commanding Officer: Precentor IV Dakkara Sin	Green	New Home

6th Army V-kappa (Grim Defiance, Procyon Theatre, from 6 to 7 on the "Inner Sphere Clock")
Commander: Precentor V Daniel Mueller

Unit Name	Experience Level	Headquarters
31st Division (The Lost Boys IV-theta) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Johnny Ruth	Elite	Procyon
12th Division (The Grizzly-Grinders IV-gamma) Commanding Officer: Precentor I Herman Schtilles	Elite	Pella II
102nd Division (Focht's Knights IV-omicron) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Peter Isotera	Regular	Carver V
1st Division (McGillaray's Legion IV-xi) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Peter McGillaray	Regular	Hall

7th Army V-iota (The Dark Wave, Talitha Theatre, from 7 to 8 on the "Inner Sphere Clock")
Commander: Precentor IX Karina Vista

Unit Name	Experience Level	Headquarters
9th Division (DKK-Dark Kat Killers IV-pi) Commanding Officer: Precentor II Narami Nichigama	Elite	Talitha
244th Division (The Cloaked IV-sigma) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Shint Dieter	Green	Devil's Rock
222nd Division (The Banished Few IV-xi) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Hart Kraig	Regular	Pollux
214th Division (The Red Arrow Division IV-eta) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Richard Pettigrew	Regular	Sirus

8th Army V-pl (Stern Defiance, Castor Theatre, from 8 to 9 on the "Inner Sphere Clock")
Commander: Precentor IV Beeshor Yekel

Unit Name	Experience Level	Headquarters
182nd Division (The Steel Calvary IV-kappa) Commanding Officer: Precentor I Erin Harwell	Regular	Castor
85th Division (Mack the Knife Division IV-omicron) Commanding Officer: Precentor II John Graf	Elite	Callison
56th Division (The Martial's Sword IV-iota) Commanding Officer: Precentor V Marleen Dunn	Regular	Solaris
167th Division (The Green Mountain Boys IV-xi) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Slurpea Kuzi	Green	Loric

9th Army V-lambda (The Rag Tags, New Earth Theatre, from 9 to 10 on the "Inner Sphere Clock")
Commander: Precentor VIII Sonic Owens

Unit Name	Experience Level	Headquarters
34th Division (Black Glove Division IV-upsilon) Commanding Officer: Precentor I Patrice King	Elite	New Earth
366th Division (The Brzo Lancers IV-iota) Commanding Officer: Precentor I Lilly Lafferty	Green	Trent
143rd Division (The Focht Hussars IV-delta) Commanding Officer: Precentor III Alder Reed	Regular	Lipton
207th Division (The Pounders IV-mu) Commanding Officer: Precentor IX Newton Fawcett	Green	Oliver

10th Army V-nu (The Red Legion, Rigil Kent Theatre, from 10 to 11 on the "Inner Sphere Clock")
Commander: Precentor XI Cynthia Byrd

Unit Name	Experience Level	Headquarters
283rd Division (The Wolf Lords IV-pi) Commanding Officer: Precentor X Kristine Reardon	Regular	Rigil Kent
66th Division (The Loner Division IV-upsilon) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Gustav Garron	Green	Tharkad
198th Division (Dinju Mountain Men IV-epsilon) Commanding Officer: Precentor I Winston Quiller	Elite	Great X
208th Division (The Racice River Raiders IV-eta) Commanding Officer: Precentor I Gravely Zane	Elite	Izar

11th Army V-eta (The Honorable, Yorii Theatre, from 11 to 12 on the "Inner Sphere Clock")
Commander: Precentor X George Wagoner

Unit Name	Experience Level	Headquarters
48th Division (The Silver Calvary IV-chi) Commanding Officer: Precentor II Cheryl Raume	Regular	Yorii
388th Division (The White Banshees IV-xi) Commanding Officer: Precentor I Andrea Shillery	Regular	Lyons
39th Division (The White Lancers IV-gamma) Commanding Officer: Precentor IV Joan Oprea	Elite	Ko
312th Division (The Ivory Rooks IV-rho) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Leonardo Dintaro	Green	Sabik

12th Army V-beta (The Broadsword and Shield, Tukayyid Theatre, from 12 to 1 on the "Inner Sphere Clock")
Commander: Precentor VI Allian Higham

Unit Name	Experience Level	Headquarters
278th Division (The Khan Killers IV-chi) Commanding Officer: Demi-Precentor Richardo Burketon	Elite	Tukayyid
403rd Division (Przeno River Rats IV-phi) Commanding Officer: Precentor IV Darrel Burns	Elite	Ueda
116th Division (The Aggressors IV-lambda) Commanding Officer: Precentor III Gloria Poquet	Regular	Karbala
321st Division (Corn Guard Grenadiers IV-beta) Commanding Officer: Precentor I Tamatha Sparks	Elite	Orestes

Terran Defense Force V-gamma (The Home Guard, Sol star system)
Commanding Officer: Precentor IV Ralph Marchino

Unit Name	Experience Level	Headquarters
201st Division (The Winged Warriors IV-beta) Commanding Officer: Precentor I Margo Koivu	Veteran	Terra
Brion's Legion (Two Regiments) Commanding Officer: Colonel Octavius Brion	Elite	Terra
104th Division (Smoke and Mirrors III-chi) (Re-forming, Currently III Strength) Commanding Officer: Precentor II Marietta Winger	Regular	Terra

THE SOL SYSTEM

Under ComStar's protection, the planet Terra escaped the destruction of the Succession Wars, and it alone remains as the last vestige and reminder of the Inner Sphere during the age of the Star League. Dismayed by the destruction caused by Stefan Amaris' followers in the wake of the coup, ComStar invested in Terra and restored it to a shining jewel.

[A jewel they corrupt by their heretical presence.]

The only scar that remains marks the site where Amaris' occupation forces used a nuclear weapon to decimate the Royal Black Watch 'Mech regiment near the Court of the Star League three centuries earlier. The populace abandoned this area and ComStar posted guards to protect innocent lives from the radiation, contamination, and other threats that still exist there.

For centuries, access to Terra was by invitation only, ComStar's way of protecting the inhabitants from the careless, destructive forces of the Great Houses. Primus Mori's Reformation implemented open access for the first time since the blessed Blake took

the planet under our Order's protection. People from all across the Inner Sphere now come to Terra, and those seeing the planet for the first time are awestruck by its beauty and prosperity.

Of the original 500 SLDF bases on Terra, the Com Guards currently use 200, keeping the others carefully sealed for future use. Terra's Castle Brians, once used to defend the cradle of humanity, now serve as staging and storage complexes for a vast array of Com Guard military equipment. Heavy security ensures that only Com Guard troops have access to these complexes.

Almost since our blessed Order's inception, the governments of the Inner Sphere have attempted to accurately determine ComStar's military might. The troop placements provided in this text tell only part of the story, as the Order maintains thousands of Star League-era BattleMechs, carefully stored from the time of Kerensky's Exodus. Jerome Blake in his wisdom also mothballed several key 'Mech manufacturing facilities in Europe and North America, as insurance against a future need for renewed production. ComStar reactivated several of these factories in the past two years to build new BattleMechs, tanks, and aerospace fighters to bolster the wounded Com Guards' existing inventory.

The secret of what remains of the SLDF's incredible ground-based Space Defense System (SDS) may never be revealed. Even ComStar's new dedication to sharing information does not absolve the Order of responsibility for keeping certain technology out of the reach of those who might misuse it. Common knowledge states that during the campaign for Terra, General Kerensky destroyed many of these huge batteries of long-range missiles and particle cannons, but did not eliminate all of them. In the interests of peace, ComStar will continue to hide the locations of the remaining installations. Those SDS sites still operational, however, represent a potent defense against any Clan warship that might violate the Treaty of Tukayyid.

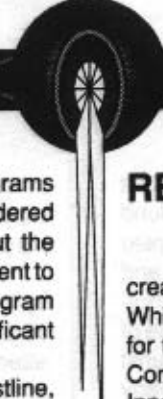
The civilian population on Terra strongly supports our blessed Order. Though ComStar's blanket control of virtually all information coming in from the Inner Sphere over the past three centuries has unjustly deprived the Terran people of their right to true accounts of events, in all other respects ComStar has proved a benevolent government for most of the past 300 years. Terra also maintains the highest standard of living in the Inner Sphere, and the vast libraries and other repositories of knowledge stand as testimony to ComStar's commitment to the people living in humanity's birthplace.

The average Terran's almost religious devotion to ComStar appears to be cracking under the tension created by now-commonplace visitors to Terra. Revealing the truth about ComStar's duplicity and its role in the Succession Wars will cause many to question ComStar's fitness for leadership. Though the change will be difficult, the approaching time of revelation and doubt will ultimately produce necessary growth and healing, both within and outside the Order. Ultimately, the people of Terra and the Inner Sphere will see the truth of Blake's vision that ComStar only recently recognized itself. Then together, we can begin to make Blake's true dream a reality.

[Their reality is Blake's nightmare. They will destroy all that Blake worked to preserve!]

Terra's current government resides in Geneva, in old Europe. Though far less extensive than the size and scope it achieved during the height of the Terran Hegemony, in 2367, Geneva still serves as home to the Branch of Terran Affairs. Under the leader-





ship of Terran Affairs, Terra's economy and social programs receive careful administration. ComStar never before considered civilian input into these matters important or desirable, but the Reformation calls for elected representatives on every continent to assist in running Terra. Primus Mori anticipates that this program will be up and running within two years, marking a significant change in the planet's government.

Hilton Head Island, on North America's eastern coastline, serves as the administrative hub of ComStar and the heart of the vast HPG network. Originally built as a single complex surrounded by shore communities, Hilton Head evolved into a vast megaplex and a magnificent example of Star League architecture. ComStar allows limited tours of the facility, which many visitors regard as religious pilgrimages. Sadly, the outlying areas around Hilton Head have deteriorated since Terra opened its borders to the general public, due to the wear and tear from vastly increased human traffic. Despite the local administration's best efforts, the outskirts of the megaplex are beginning to look like slums.

[See how corruption follows in the wake of the destroyers.]

Changes for the better also are under way. During the dark days of the Star League's slow demise, the Court of the Star League was abandoned with the rest of Unity City, and the ruins have been systematically stripped over the centuries by a dozen Primuses. Primus Mori pledged to revitalize and rebuild Unity City and completely refurbish the Court of the Star League, and proposes to open it to the public for the first time since the Star League fell. This courageous proposal met with strong opposition within ComStar's rank and file, many of whom feel that such restoration should wait until the new Star League is established.

[The Court of the Star League will remain shut until the true ComStar reclaims it in the name of the new Star League. The Word of Blake will not allow blasphemers to profane this sacred ground.]

During the height of the Star League's power, the planets of Venus and Mars represented shining examples of terraforming, accomplished by using the best and most advanced Hegemony technology. ComStar has concentrated its efforts on maintaining Mars as a mining colony for the past 300 years, enjoying the additional income generated by the mineral-sales tariffs. Precentor Martial Focht reopened the long-abandoned SLDF War Academy of Mars twenty-five years ago as a training center for the Com Guards, giving them valuable experience in low gravity/atmospheric warfare. He also retrieved an extensive store of Star League equipment and records hidden in the Academy's vast tunnel complex during the Amaris coup, using these priceless artifacts to rebuild the War Academy.

While Mars prospered in recent years, Venus fell into almost total decay. The planet lost ten of its massive atmospheric stabilization stations over the past 300 years, allowing Venus to slowly revert to its natural hellish environment. As of the spring of 3055, only one domed city, the capital city of Aphros, supports human life on Venus. The waning population of only 5,000 may force ComStar to completely abandon the planet by the time the Treaty of Tukayyid expires. Pre-Reformation ComStar accepted this controlled decay because they believed the cost of the technology to repair the stabilization stations outweighed the rewards. Primus Mori, unwilling to force the remaining Venusians to leave their homeworld, is currently searching for an economically viable alternative.

RELATIONS WITH THE INNER SPHERE

The turbulence caused by our blessed Order's Reformation created a trying situation, both internally and for the Great Houses. While ComStar's valiant action on Tukayyid halted the Clan threat for the next decade and a half, in many leaders' minds the truce ComStar forced the Clans to sign did not outweigh its betrayal of the Inner Sphere governments. The new Order's willingness to admit to ComStar's somewhat tainted history has, in many cases, seemed to damage our reputation further. In the long run, honest admission of wrongdoing will foster the trust it deserves, but at present it simply serves to contribute to the widespread distrust of ComStar.

The following summary provides the current status of diplomatic and political affairs between ComStar and the House governments of the Inner Sphere.

FEDERATED COMMONWEALTH

One of the most surprising facts ComStar revealed to the Inner Sphere was Precentor Martial Anastasius Focht's true identity as Duke Frederick Steiner, one-time contender for Archon of the Lyran Commonwealth. The Precentor Martial sent several messages to the current Archon assuring her that he no longer desires the position he once coveted, but this additional deception perpetrated by ComStar only served to increase the Federated Commonwealth's distrust of our organization.

[Focht no longer wants the Archonship because he knows he cannot have it. He has since turned his lust for personal power toward ComStar.]


Both the Primus and the Precentor Martial recognize the importance of maintaining a continuing diplomatic dialogue with the Federated Commonwealth. Part of those efforts included Primus Mori's trip to New Avalon in the fall of 3054, where she was greeted by civilian demonstrations protesting ComStar's actions during the first stages of the Clan war. Despite the protests, Primus Mori met with Prince Victor Steiner-Davion, in part to express her concerns about rising tensions between the former Lyran Commonwealth and the Federated Suns. The Primus signed an agreement with Prince Victor guaranteeing that ComStar would not transmit any messages or data that might be used against the union of the Federated Commonwealth, but few who knew of it felt confidence in the secret agreement's validity. Our Order was unable to simply shrug off the misguided actions of its predecessor.

ComStar's founding of Blake University garnered a much warmer reception. Many NAIS professors have already sent in their resumes, eagerly anticipating pursuing information in ComStar's vast collection of knowledge.

DRACONIS COMBINE

Unconfirmed rumors allege that Primus Mori, then Precentor Dieron, initially leaked information on Operation Scorpion to Theodore Kurita, and that the ISF planted Primus Mori as a deep agent years ago to infiltrate the ComStar hierarchy. No evidence exists to support these charges. Primus Mori has continually demonstrated her integrity and sincere desire to further the great work begun by the blessed Jerome Blake. Any suggestion of the Primus' involvement in espionage should not be taken seriously.

[The evidence lies with Theodore Kurita. "Primus" Mori possesses a talent for perfidy.]



The Draconis Combine presents ComStar with a difficult problem in restoring diplomatic relations. As the most honor-bound society in the Inner Sphere, the citizens of the Combine despise ComStar as traitors for dealing with the Clans. Angry mobs and anti-ComStar gangs have attacked or ambushed ComStar technicians on several worlds. Theodore Kurita sought to diffuse some of this anger by publicly acknowledging ComStar's assistance against the Federated Commonwealth in the War of 3039, but too many people had died for the average civilian to forgive ComStar easily.

Because the planet Luthien, home of the Combine's capital city, lies on the border of the Clan occupation zone, tensions between ComStar and the citizenry will likely increase. As a gesture of good will, Precentor Martial Focht visited Theodore Kurita in the summer of 3054; in the resulting meetings, the two leaders agreed that ComStar would place a large contingent of troops on Luthien under joint command with the DCMS. In stark contrast to the common opinion of ComStar, most Combine citizens consider Precentor Martial Focht a living legend because his political position and bold actions on Tukayyid represent the best qualities of a classic warlord. His good will has gone far toward patching the strained relations with House Kurita.

FREE RASALHAGUE REPUBLIC

ComStar enjoys its strongest diplomatic relationship with the remains of the Free Rasalhague Republic. The Clans left the FRR in control of only seven worlds and decimated their military machine, leading that battered nation to welcome ComStar's military out of necessity. Precentor Martial Focht responded by placing the bulk of the Twelfth Army in Rasalhague holdings. ComStar is also funding a massive fortification effort on these worlds, assuming they will bear the brunt of any new Clan offensive. The Precentor's generosity disarmed the people's initial suspicions, and our Blessed Order now counts the Free Rasalhague Republic among our strongest supporters.

Because ComStar acted to save the Inner Sphere on Tukayyid, the Republic has willingly forgiven the Order's past duplicities. The civilian population of the FRR supports ComStar and welcomes its presence on their worlds as a means of survival—not just against the Clans, but also against any aggressive action on the part of the Draconis Combine or the Federated Commonwealth.

ST. IVES COMPACT

Duchess Candace Liao considers ComStar's Reformation in a financial light, rather than a political one. Precentor Martial Focht stationed Com Guard troops on her worlds, and the HPGs under Duchess Liao's control are old and in desperate need of repair and upgrading. Because the Compact now controls the stations, all upkeep costs fall to that government, even though ComStar continues to collect revenue. This financial strain is the only source of tension existing between ComStar and the St. Ives Compact: the Compact was so far removed from the Clan front lines that they felt none of the betrayal at ComStar's actions in the Clan war that devastated their neighbors.

CAPELLAN CONFEDERATION

Though more than one of the younger generation of ruling families came into power at the end of the Clan advance, Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao represents the least-known quantity in the Inner Sphere equation. Most observers consider him an unpredictable,

emotional powder keg, much like his grandfather, Maximilian Liao. His dealings with ComStar do not contradict these impressions, though his present mental state appears to be firmly on an even keel.

The Capellan Confederation retaliated for Operation Scorpion by seizing a number of ComStar compounds. This alone represents a radical departure from most governments' responses to attempts by ComStar to use the HPGs as a blackmail tool. Even after Primus Mori lifted the Interdiction imposed by Myndo Waterly, Sun-Tzu continued to hold dozens of ComStar personnel as hostages against ComStar's future actions.

The Chancellor used to the fullest extent every advantage he negotiated for himself in creating the terms of his service contract with ComStar. Having achieved his desired concessions regarding Com Guard troop placement, Sun-Tzu wasted no time placing Com Guard units near the politically sensitive border with the St. Ives Compact.

Sun-Tzu Liao may have negotiated a short contract term with ComStar to appease the father of his fiancée, Isis Marik. Captain-General Thomas Marik is an active proponent of the Word of Blake (see *Free Worlds League*, below). Interestingly, Chancellor Liao recently met with Precentor Blane of Gibson, possibly to initiate talks about contracting trained technicians from the Word of Blake to fill his communications network service needs when his present contract with ComStar expires. An alliance of any kind between those two nations poses a danger for ComStar nearly equal to the Clans. Prudence dictates close surveillance of the Capellan Confederation.

FREE WORLDS LEAGUE

Captain-General Thomas Marik was an adept of ComStar during the heyday of the Waterly primacy. With such a background, his decision to open his worlds to the Word of Blake following what he perceived as ComStar's betrayal by Primus Mori and Precentor Martial Focht came as no surprise.

Bad feelings run high between the Free Worlds League and ComStar. The Captain-General refused to discuss an HPG service agreement, preferring to use refugee technicians who fled ComStar to join the Word of Blake. Though ComStar remains the only source of spare parts and supplies, the League purchases as little as possible from the Order. Marik also rejected the offer of Com Guard protection for League HPG compounds, instead allowing Word of Blake troops to defend those assets.

In a disturbing development, rumors from every front say that Thomas Marik will accept nomination as Primus-in-exile from Precentor Demona Aziz. Our slim hope that he might see reason and reject Precentor Aziz's scheme has faded. That appointment will set the military might of the Word of Blake even more solidly behind the Captain-General.

Marik's decision has created a number of problems for ComStar. As a result of his actions, ComStar lost all control over the HPG network in the Free Worlds League. Marik has also increased the probability of civil war in his own realm; by controlling the Word of Blake, he now possesses military and political protection against his future son-in-law, Sun-Tzu Liao, if he should need it. If Liao perceives the alliance between the Word of Blake and Captain-General Marik as a personal threat, he may react violently.

[The Word of Blake will not waste its power attacking Chancellor Liao unless he joins the ranks of apostates. We guard against a greater threat: the demon Focht and his minions.]

COMSTAR PERSONALITIES

PRIMUS SHARILAR MORI

A highly intelligent woman, the new Primus served ably as Precentor Dieron for many years. False rumors, likely planted by the Word of Blake, allege that Sharilar Mori originally joined ComStar in an attempt to infiltrate the Order's inner workings for the Draconis Combine's Internal Security Force. She rose rapidly through the ranks, assuming the primacy upon Primus Myndo Waterly's unexpected retirement.

Though less well-known outside the Order than her co-reformer, Precentor Martial Anastasius Focht, Primus Mori controls the First Circuit with an iron hand.

The reforms enacted by the Primus and the Precentor Martial have changed ComStar almost beyond recognition, earning Primus Mori both admiration and bitter enmity. Sources within the Word of Blake claim that former Primus Myndo Waterly did not retire, but was killed, and that Primus Mori had a hand in her predecessor's death. These, like earlier rumors, have no basis in fact.

PRECENTOR MARTIAL ANASTASIUS FOCHT

The Precentor Martial, with Primus Mori, is a prime mover behind the Reformation of ComStar. Some people have even called Focht the power behind Primus Mori's throne, though this overstates the case. Both leaders are equally committed to reform of our blessed Order, and complement each other's strengths.

During the life he lived as Frederick Steiner, the Precentor Martial demonstrated an impressive understanding of the political arena, but unfortunately lacked the finesse to master it. He has learned much since then. As Precentor Martial, Anastasius Focht now plays the role of Grand Diplomat to the Inner Sphere, traveling from realm to realm bolstering the Successor States' fragile unity in preparation for the end of the Tukayyid accord.

Precentor Focht's epic battle on Tukayyid has made him the greatest living legend in the Inner Sphere since General Kerensky. Realizing that the Clans represent the greatest threat to the Inner Sphere since the rise of the evil usurper Stefan Amaris, Precentor Focht repudiated the short-sighted policies of Primus Waterly, instead using his influence to unify the Successor States. Should he fail to hold the Inner Sphere together, the Clans may yet extinguish the lights of human civilization.

[If human civilization dies, it will be by Focht's hand. His folly aids the Clans in their destructive purpose. Humanity's only hope lies in the Word of Blake. We alone will not fail in our duty!]

PRECENTOR ROM VICTORIA PARRDEAU

In the winter of 3054, Primus Mori nominated Victoria Parrdeau as the new Precentor ROM. Parrdeau served valiantly in the Com Guard on Tukayyid against Clan Smoke Jaguar. She faces the unenviable task of rebuilding the crippled ROM into a viable intelligence organization. Given the high rate of defection to the Word of Blake among ROM agents, the new Precentor has her hands full.

Precentor Parrdeau has announced plans to dismantle the current ROM and reorganize it from top to bottom. The Word of Blake is also building a new ROM, from the ranks of ComStar's talented defectors.

[And when we have finished building up our strength, none shall stand in our way!]



WORD OF BLAKE

Our most recent intelligence regarding the activities of the reactionary element known as the Word of Blake is provided here. Though smaller in number than our brotherhood, the Word of Blake must not be taken lightly. Despite ComStar's massive losses of personnel and equipment on Tukayyid, the Word of Blake still fields impressive military strength, almost equal to our own. Their military might and close ties to former Precentor Thomas Marik, currently Captain-General of the Free Worlds League, gives them considerable power in the Inner Sphere's political arena. The Word of Blake currently operates in the Free Worlds League; these reactionaries bear careful watching lest their influence spread out of control. Detailed reports on each section are available through ROM officers with Alpha Level Security Clearance.

THE RENEGADES

ComStar defeated the Clans on Tukayyid, but the victory was bittersweet. ComStar had negotiated for an end to all offensive action aimed at striking further through the Inner Sphere toward Terra for fifteen years if the Clans lost, offering Terra's subjugation to the Clans if the Clans won. However, this agreement only bound the Clans to cease advancing toward Terra; they considered the rest of the Inner Sphere fair game. As long as it lay "spinward" from Terra, the Clans could assault any world within their reach, honing their tactics and wearing down the Successor States little by little. ComStar had gained a brief breathing space for the Inner Sphere; in less than two decades, mortal battle will once more be joined.

The action on Tukayyid and events following spelled the downfall of the old ComStar. When Precentor Martial Focht returned to Terra after Tukayyid, he confronted Primus Waterly about Operation Scorpion, her futile effort to take over the Inner Sphere by staging revolts to sabotage the Clans' administration of conquered worlds and placing all Inner Sphere HPGs under interdiction. Though the details of the meeting remain unknown, Precentor Focht convinced Myndo Waterly to abdicate the primacy. One week later, the First Circuit elected Sharilar Mori, Precentor Dieron, as Primus. Together, Primus Mori and Precentor Martial Focht embarked on a series of far-reaching reforms.

[They profane everything our blessed founder held dear. May their benighted souls rot in hell for all eternity!]

Demonia Aziz, Precentor of Atreus and a member of the First Circuit during Operation Scorpion, held strictly to the rigid, conservative interpretation of the works of Jerome Blake, and blindly followed Primus Waterly. Precentor Aziz wrongly assumed that Primus Mori's accession and her internal reforms resulted from an illegal coup d'état by the Precentor Martial. Though the other First Circuit members saw the wisdom of Precentor Martial Focht's actions, Precentor Aziz took her staff and bolted from Terra, traveling to Atreus to meet with Captain-General Thomas Marik. Upon arriving, she informed the Captain-General that the ComStar he once served was under attack from within. Demonia Aziz petitioned Thomas Marik for sanctuary in the Free Worlds League for herself and any other members of ComStar who might share her fears and follow her. Captain-General Marik granted her request.

Ignorant of the full scope of the Reformation, Precentor Aziz failed to reveal the true nature and extent of the changes in ComStar to Captain-General Marik, and the eventual depth of response to his offer of sanctuary astounded him. When Aziz fled, Primus Mori had yet to initiate most of the Reformation Acts; ComStar's internal struggle had not yet spread beyond the First Circuit. Judging Primus Mori and Precentor Focht by her own narrow standards of conduct, Aziz mistook the rebirth of ComStar for no more than another round of petty political maneuvering.

Using ROM agents loyal to her, Precentor Aziz sent messages to every HPG station across the Inner Sphere, inviting all ComStar members who rejected the new ways in favor of the old to join her in exile. As Precentor Aziz's call went out, Primus Mori passed the first of the Reformation Acts and began to uproot some of the Order's underlying misconceptions. The situation could easily have erupted into a violent internal conflict, but Aziz's rebellion provided an easy way out for those unwilling to accept change. Primus Mori wisely showed great patience by allowing the conservative members of the Order to make their choice and leave unopposed, keeping turmoil to a minimum in the divided brotherhood.

Within months, Aziz's initial handful of followers became a flood of more than two thousand refugees, most arriving in the Free Worlds League with only the robes on their backs. Some of the most fanatical members of the Com Guards managed to smuggle out their BattleMechs, or carried their personal tools and weapons with them. The defectors formed a loose organization, still led unofficially by Precentor Aziz, and adopted the name Word of Blake.

[We name ourselves for our guiding light: the true Word of the Blessed Blake. May we restore his truth to its rightful glory!]

The Word of Blake accepted as members all those who subscribed to ComStar's traditional operating procedure and faith, wrongly believed to be the teachings, writings, and methodologies of the sainted Jerome Blake. While the Reformation Acts unfolded within ComStar, changing almost every aspect of the old Order, members of the Word of Blake held true to the monolithic, repressive ComStar they had always known.

[We guard the old ways against distortion by evil minds. Let righteousness prevail!]

Some remaining traditions are superficial. For example, unlike the new ComStar, Word of Blake followers still wear the white robes of the old Order. More seriously, they continue to recite prayers to the technological devices under their control, praising them for their continued, smooth operation. The reformed ComStar no longer retains this unnecessary and superstitious practice. To an untrained outsider, acts of techno-worship performed by Word of Blake members appear to be nothing more than harmless, quasi-religious chanting. The danger lies in the Word of Blake's sincere but ignorant belief that without prayers, the machinery will not function. They claim that operating an HPG merges technology and mankind, and their prayers both thank and supplicate the machines. By their example, they teach others to emulate superstitious flummery, arming them against any efforts to teach independent thought.

[Lies and distortions! We know that machines will run with or without prayer. We believe, however, that man's relationship to

technology exists in a precarious, precious balance. Prayer helps us remember and maintain that balance. Technology is inherently dangerous.

[The heretics cannot admit that most human beings are as children, and must be kept ignorant of many things for their own well-being. Blake understood this. To teach the secrets of technology to the Successor States is to give a child a BattleMech; such an action will only destroy both child and machine. Better "ignorant" and alive, than "enlightened" and dead!]

THE MARIK ALLIANCE

Caught off guard by the sheer number of ComStar followers switching their allegiance to the Word of Blake, Captain-General Marik arranged to meet with several of the defecting Precentors that he knew personally to determine the best course of action. Already, each Precentor represented an individual faction of refugees seeking sanctuary within the Free Worlds League borders. Precentor Blane of Gibson, a long-time friend and ally of the Captain-General, led the delegation. Blane offered a more moderate, less overtly reactionary style of leadership, providing a marked contrast to the often-combative Aziz. Thomas Marik's open support for Precentor Blane as the ad hoc leader among the Precentors infuriated Demona Aziz, and still provokes controversy within the Word of Blake administration. Believing that her former rank on the First Circuit entitled her to prominence among the renegades, Precentor Aziz resented her fall in status from founder to leader of a minority faction in the group she helped forge. She could do little about it, however, except seethe inwardly under a barely civil exterior and bide her time.

The meeting yielded two accords. Thomas Marik agreed to relocate the arriving members of the newly created Word of Blake to the planet Gibson, granting them a landhold there. In return, the Word of Blake signed a contract to service the HPGs the League had gained in the aftermath of Operation Scorpion. Precentor Blane and the other gathered leaders willingly drafted the contract, aware that they would need the resulting income to support the ever-growing number of ComStar refugees.

[The traitors have displaced us from our homes, but they cannot displace the truth we serve. Let them remember that, and pray for mercy!]

The HPG service contract between the Free Worlds League and the Word of Blake benefited both parties equally. It provided the Word of Blake with a substantial, steady source of income that their new Order desperately needed. It also placed a formidable political and military tool in Thomas Marik's hands. Knowing that Marik supported their cause, the Word of Blake in return pledged him their aid should the need arise. Should House Marik's upcoming marital alliance with House Liao prove shaky, the Captain-General may use his newfound allies to shore it up. In the meantime, the Word of Blake's trained MechWarriors and skilled, ruthless ROM operatives add considerably to Thomas Marik's personal power. Time alone will show what use he plans to make of them, and how large a threat they pose to ComStar.

Fortunately, even as ComStar struggles through changes, the Word of Blake is also suffering upheaval. Where the ComStar Reformation has the advantage of a clear vision and a strong leader, the Word of Blake has yet to define its true direction and goals. As yet, only blind rejection of Primus Mori's reforms binds

THE PROMISED LAND

My dear old friend,

Our group has recently completed its move to holdings in my Precentorship, but we face new problems daily. In good news, the latest group of adepts to join us came from the Eighty-second Division of the Com Guards, which was nearly destroyed during the fighting on Tukayyid. They brought their battered BattleMechs with them, bringing our standing military force to nearly two regiments. Another band of technicians arrived from the Federated Commonwealth in a freighter, traveling with a load of poultry. We continue to welcome those who oppose the changes in our Blessed Order from throughout the Inner Sphere.

With our refugee camp full to overflowing, several of my fellow Precentors have begun an earnest effort to construct more permanent housing. It is a slow process, but I know that in the end, we will have all we need.

Your support in this endeavor has been a true blessing, Thomas. The blessed Blake often wrote of the power of giving, but you have carried that principle to a welcome extreme. I am glad to report that we stand ready to begin the discussed repayment. At your request, more than two hundred volunteers will depart immediately to begin maintenance on your HPGs. By the end of the first quarter of '53, I anticipate your loyal followers will man every station.

Thank you again, Thomas. I look forward to our next meeting, and until then, may the Peace of Blake be with you.

—From a letter by Precentor Blane to Captain-General Thomas Marik, dated December 3052

them together. Each subgroup within the Word of Blake proposes a different direction for their organization to take, and the sect's leaders lack sufficient control over their members to prevent each faction from acting on its own.

[Lies! We are united in our determination to preserve the Will of Blake. The heretics seek to divide us by publishing such slanders!]

All factions agree on a few points. They decry our blessed Order and its members as heretics for defying the ancient doctrines falsely claimed to be the writings of Jerome Blake. They denounce as forgeries the recently discovered, true writings of our blessed founder on which Primus Mori and Precentor Martial Focht have based the Reformation. They mourn ComStar as lost, destroyed from inside, and claim that salvation is possible only by fleeing from our Order's so-called corrupted vision and joining the Word of Blake. Beyond such narrow-minded hatred, they hold little in common.

[These statements are the distortions of diseased minds. Pay them no heed.]

Precentor Demona Aziz recently deepened the tension between ComStar and the Word of Blake by unveiling her logo for the



growing organization. Wisely declining to widen the schism with a show of anger, neither Primus Mori nor Precentor Martial Focht have publicly commented on the logo. However, Precentor Aziz's act of petty defiance can only dim hopes for an eventual reconciliation.

The logo of the Word of Blake consists of a massive broadsword thrust downward, its hilt decorated with the ComStar insignia surrounded by six concentric rings. According to Aziz, the sword represents the Word of Blake's iron determination to establish what they call the true faith, and their willingness to use force to fulfill their version of Jerome Blake's prophecies and visions. The six concentric rings surrounding the ComStar insignia represent the original seats of the First Circuit during Blake's time. By invoking the Order's earliest days, Precentor Aziz seeks to legitimize centuries of creeping revisionism and false doctrine as the gospel of Jerome Blake.

[The only false doctrine comes from Focht and his demonic minions. We guard Blake's truth!]

Currently, ComStar has more pressing concerns than these empty gestures. Former Primus Waterly's influence remains strong within the ranks of the Word of Blake, and some factions call for the death of "the heretic Primus," Sharilar Mori. Most factions also consider the Primus and the Precentor Martial to be evil demons who destroyed ComStar and betrayed Blake's work. Their hysterical rhetoric might seem comic, were its potential consequences not so grave. The Order has taken steps to provide protection for the Primus and the Precentor Martial. Though the murder of either leader would create temporary chaos, ComStar would survive such a trauma. Destroying our leaders will not destroy our faith or our work. The Word of Blake's most fanatical members pose a danger beyond their threat to ComStar, however. Those who call Myndo Waterly a saint point accusing fingers at the Federated Commonwealth, calling it evil and advocating its destruction. Allied with the Free Worlds League, the Word of Blake may poison relations between these two states beyond repair, possibly even touching off another Inner Sphere-wide war.

[The next war will be a holy war of purification. When it begins, let the heretics remember that they forced us to it.]

"MONKEY" WARFARE

If guerrilla warfare is defined as perpetrating clandestine attacks on the opposition in order to wear them down, in "monkey" warfare, both sides wage a conflict of escalating, annoying pranks that, though expensive and time-consuming, cost no lives. Petty harassment of ComStar by Word of Blake members in the Free Worlds League and the Federated Commonwealth has forced our Order to retaliate in an ongoing war of one-upmanship.

As a gesture of respect for their misguided brethren, ComStar allows the Word of Blake to use the ComStar HPG network, requiring no modifications for alternate methods of transmission or additional security measures. Because ComStar holds a one-year service contract with the Free Worlds League, we also transmit through the HPG stations held by the Word of Blake. However, ComStar has only minimal control over those stations as its personnel are gradually replaced by Word of Blake technicians (as agreed in that contract), and therefore cannot guarantee that the messages sent through them will arrive at their destination unmolested. Mounting evidence suggests that Word of Blake technicians frequently tamper with ComStar message packets sent through their Class A HPGs.

For example, in June of 3054, the Draconis Combine ordered 50 Magna small pulse lasers from the Free Worlds Defense Industries, Inc. Luthien transmitted the original message via HPG, passing it through the Oriente Class A HPG station. ComStar believes, but cannot verify, that the Word of Blake technician at Oriente station changed the order before transmitting it to the Lopez HPG. When the message arrived at FWDI, the order had been expanded to 250 pulse lasers.

The company shipped the armaments, with the bill, to a shocked customer. The Combine's ambassador to ComStar rejected the overshipment, using the original message transcript as proof of the actual quantity ordered. Tracing the message through HPG stations outside the Free Worlds League, ComStar found no error. Logic dictated that an agent of the Word of Blake must have sent the altered order; lacking proof, however, ComStar had no choice but to pay for the extra stock plus legal and shipping costs.

Word of Blake technicians also delight in adding entire, unrelated messages to transmissions. Frequently, they insert recruitment information into private communiqués. ComStar internal documents bear the brunt of this abuse, often appearing at their destination padded by pages of ranting commentary from the Word of Blake renegades. Though this tampering has a fleeting impact, ComStar loses time and money when forced to re-transmit messages, sometimes several times, to ensure that at least one copy makes it through unaltered.

[Dismiss us as a mere "inconvenience" at your peril, blasphemers!]

A more serious interception involved former Primus Myndo Waterly's body, which disappeared from Terra prior to its scheduled cremation. Primus Mori declared the theft a "morbid, callous, and heinous act against the dead." Precentor Martial Focht privately fears that the body of the former Primus may be used as a symbol of worship to enshrine Waterly as a martyr. As of this writing, no group claims responsibility for the theft, but evidence points strongly to the Word of Blake's role in the desecration.

[Our sainted Primus' murderers have the gall to accuse us of desecration? We saved Primus Waterly's body from desecration by Focht and Mori, preventing them from mouthing pious lies about a "fatal brain hemorrhage" over the scattered ashes of their victim!]

ORGANIZATION

The Word of Blake retains much of the organizational structure used by ComStar prior to the Reformation. The three-tier ranking of acolyte, adept, and Precentor remains the same, and each division's function uses the standard Greek-letter classifications. The Word of Blake has kept the Omicron designation, which represents ROM's internal security and doctrinal purity function.

Repudiating the First Circuit as a corrupt body, the Precentors leading the Word of Blake rejected that portion of ComStar's command structure; yet each are leery of relinquishing personal power and so they formed a loose tribunal, currently led by Precentor Blane of Gibson. One Precentor represents each faction of the Word of Blake, with Blane arbitrating all disputes. As of this writing, no one faction controls the tribunal, and the Word of Blake remains in constant flux.

SPLINTER GROUPS

Part of the reason no one faction can gain control of the tribunal lies in the widely diverse interpretations of the writings and will of Jerome Blake held by the various factions. Though outwardly committed to a single "true vision" they claim to possess, few within the Word of Blake agree on even the smallest doctrinal point. Each faction boasts a certain number of supporters, often centered around a specific person, geographic area, or unique view of Blake's vision. These factions often break down into smaller splinter groups, each of which endorses yet another specific viewpoint or ideology. Precentor Demona Aziz leads the most radical faction, a group known as the Toyama, named for Primus Conrad Toyama, who first turned ComStar from humanity's guardians to humanity's oppressors. The Toyama group militantly follows their namesake's gospel, convinced it is Blake's philosophy, and believes that the Word of Blake should build a large enough army to seize Terra from our Order and reimpose the suffocating religion of the old ComStar throughout the Inner Sphere. The Toyama have made several assassination attempts against our Primus and Precentor Martial, and have launched several terrorist attacks against ComStar HPGs in the Federated Commonwealth.

[We strike at the nests of vipers. Terrorists harm the innocent; the Toyama punish only the guilty.]

Even within the Toyama, more extreme splinter groups call for the assassination of all the Successor State House Lords. Though these murderous reactionaries represent only a small fraction of the total group, the lack of centralized control within the Word of Blake makes it impossible to check the movements of each faction or individual. Still other minor contingents lobby for attacks against the Wolf Pack, formerly Wolf's Dragoons, in retaliation for their decades-old ties to the Clans. We of ComStar must not be misled by their small size into underestimating the danger these groups pose. As history has demonstrated time and again, the act of a single zealot can plunge worlds into the flames of chaos.

Precentor Blane leads the moderate True Believers faction, who resort to violence only when diplomacy fails. Precentor Blane considers reconciliation between ComStar and the Word of Blake possible, but only at the cost of extreme sacrifice on both sides. Given the recalcitrance of Blane's fellow Precentors, reunification seems unlikely. In accordance with his hopes, however slim, Blane plays the role of middleman in the struggle within the Word of Blake, balancing the violent factions against those who view ComStar strictly as a religious calling.

[Precentor Blane believes the Word of Blake must unify our disparate beliefs into one philosophy, then set our course for the future. Until we can achieve that concord, we will gain no ground in the struggle against ComStar.]

The Counter-Reformists, led by Precentor Willima Willis, maintain that the Word of Blake should review the writings and teachings of Jerome Blake and revise them where necessary. Though they disagree with the reforms enacted by Primus Mori and Precentor Focht, they admit that Blake's philosophy may have been tainted since ComStar's founding. They believe that the only proper response to past treachery is to use the past as a building block for the future, reevaluating the existing interpretations of Blake's vision to discover where ComStar went wrong and to avoid making those same mistakes. Predictably, this faction has already been branded heretical by the majority of the Word of Blake. Though its hot-tempered Precentor boasts a number of followers, this faction also lacks a definitive direction or plan.

Reconciliation, if it occurs, will probably come from within the Counter-Reformists or the True Believers. Some minor splinter groups under Precentor Blane see reconciliation as the only way to deal with ComStar, and advocate extending diplomatic ties to our Order as a way to begin healing the breach between the two groups.

The Shunners faction has not splintered, and, in fact, seems to be growing in power. Shunners believe that Jerome Blake's prophesied destruction of the Inner Sphere draws near, and that the Word of Blake's only hope for survival is to isolate itself and weather the coming storm. They consider the current contract with the Free Worlds League a mistake, a blatant disregard of Blake's warnings about allying with one of the Successor States. In their own way, the Shunners are as radical as the Toyama group. Though they disagree about how to act on their theology, they will fight for their right to exist. Precentor Curtis Byrd, former Precentor of Florida in the Federated Commonwealth, currently leads the Shunners, the least vocal but most steadfast of the current factions.

Further splinter groups may exist of which we remain ignorant, making our analysis of the balance of power within the Word of Blake precarious, at best.

ROM

The Word of Blake retained the name of ROM for its internal security organization. They consider themselves to be the true ComStar, and aside from jettisoning the First Circuit, have made a point of retaining the Order's outward trappings, including the Greek-letter function identification for all military and other rank structures. Along with its structure, the Word of Blake ROM also retained its traditional watchdog role. ROM agents infiltrate every level of the Word of Blake, seeking out ComStar agents and punishing any converts tempted to rethink their loyalties. Most of ROM defected to the Word of Blake in the early days of the Reformation, bringing with them considerable skill in espionage as well as rigid conservative convictions. As in the past, ROM assumes autonomous authority to deal with members they feel have been tainted by external influences. Lacking control by a central authority, they frequently overstep the bounds of their position and of common decency.

[ROM's zealotry earns them praise. Extreme measures must be taken to deal with evil.]

ROM agents associated with the Toyama faction recently attempted to bomb Hilton Head Island. One of the few ComStar ROM agents to successfully infiltrate the Word of Blake ROM sent a warning which foiled the attack. If successful, the attack would have killed the Primus, the First Circuit, and the Precentor Martial at one stroke. Instead, the incident only served to further escalate the tensions between our blessed Order and the renegade Word of Blake.

Thankfully, only sixteen altercations between the ROM forces of ComStar and the Word of Blake have degenerated into fatal violence, mainly in the Federated Commonwealth, where the more bloodthirsty factions attempted to punish those individuals who defied Primus Waterly's orders during Operation Scorpion. Given the scope of changes going on elsewhere, our Order views these distressing incidents as minor by comparison.

THE NEWS BUREAU

The ComStar News Bureau lost several key reporters in the early stages of the Reformation. Those who chose to join the ranks of the Word of Blake have set up a rival news service.

Calling their creation the Blake News, these reporters originated a series of programs purportedly illuminating the teachings of Jerome Blake. As with their parent, the Word of Blake, the Blake News cannot agree on one way to interpret the work of ComStar's founder; that they managed to produce this program at all is astonishing. As might be expected, the final version sparked immediate controversy. Mirroring the internal struggle taking place within the larger organization, fights sometimes break out during live broadcasts between rival factions and splinter groups. The actual reporting of news unfortunately receives short shrift.

[Fine words, coming from an organization devoted to spreading sacrilegious lies!]

BLAKE GUARD/WORD OF BLAKE MILITIA

Of the thousands of ComStar members who fled to the Free Worlds League, one of the most notable and potentially dangerous refugees is Precentor Trent Arian of the Com Guards. During the battle of Tukayyid, he fought against Clan Diamond Shark, earning several commendations for his bravery and leadership, including the Precentor's Sword. Upon returning to Terra with his unit for refit, he learned of Primus Mori's Reformation Acts. He promptly took more than thirty MechWarriors and their equipment back off-planet and headed for the Free Worlds League.

Precentor Arian met with Precentor Blane on Gibson and pledged his loyalty to the Word of Blake. Precentor Blane, realizing that the number of refugees coming from the ranks of the Com Guards made a Precentor Martial necessary for the organization, appointed Precentor Arian to that position.

Precentor Martial Arian faced the challenge of forging viable military units from the hodgepodge of BattleMechs and personnel that left ComStar to join the Word of Blake. Captain-General Marik provided the assistance of the Free Worlds League Ministry of Defense, and with their help Arian shaped his army around the traditional Com Guard unit structure. The Free Worlds League advisors suggested establishing two primary military bases on Gibson, and remained there as technical consultants. Their true function may be to act as Thomas Marik's eyes and ears, attempting to ensure that the Word of Blake military acts in accordance with Marik's designs and goals.

[Untrue. We bow to no one save the Will of Blake. Thomas Marik, as our Primus-in-exile, dances to our tune, not we to his.]

Despite their philosophical differences, all Word of Blake factions agree that to ensure their survival, they must directly control military assets. The tribunal allocated funding to Precentor Martial Arian with instructions to replenish and increase his forces with new BattleMechs and equipment. He issued an immediate appeal to all ComStar refugees, calling for engineers to design a new generation of 'Mechs for his troops, variously known as the Blake Guard or the Word of Blake Militia. To his delight, many ComStar engineers had joined the Word of Blake and eagerly tackled this new assignment.

Once the engineers had several designs underway, Arian negotiated a production contract with Free Worlds Defense Industries' Gibson BattleMech factory. The Word of Blake underwrote the loan needed to expand the facility and fund the development of the new BattleMechs, using the proceeds of their HPG service contract with the Free Worlds League. By the spring of 3055, the Blake Guard received its first fresh-off-the-line shipments of *Grand Crusader* and *Pit Viper* 'Mechs. Precentor Martial Arian gave several of these 'Mechs to the Free Worlds League to express his appreciation for Captain-General Marik's support. Our ROM agents in the Capellan Confederation report that Sun-Tzu Liao also received at least one *Grand Crusader* for his technicians to study, possibly from Marik as a wedding gift. If so, Thomas Marik may one day regret that act of dubious generosity.

The Blake Guards currently field slightly more than four divisions of troops, roughly equivalent to three and a half BattleMech regiments. Though slow to arrive, the new BattleMechs have already bolstered the renegade forces. All units use the standard Com Guard numbering and configuration, and are currently stationed on Gibson. Precentor Martial Arian so far has refused to commit his troops to any action until the Word of Blake agrees on a unified theology and a firm direction for its future. Given the reactionaries' fragmented state, Precentor Martial Focht expects no belligerence from them for some time. As of this writing, our Com Guards may turn all their attention to preparing for the coming battle with the Clans with no concerns for an attack from this quarter.

BLAKE GUARDS/WORD OF BLAKE MILITIA

(Deployment as of 3055)

Commander: Precentor Martial Trent Arian

Unit Name	Experience Level	Headquarters
1st Division (True Devotion IV-beta) Commanding Officer: Precentor Suzanne Mulvanery	Elite	Camp Sims
2nd Division (Stern Resistance IV-mu) Commanding Officer: Precentor Daphne Chrysler	Regular	Fort Tukayyid
3rd Division (Pure Thought/Actions-IV-iota) Commanding Officer: Precentor Randolph Kanni	Veteran	Fort Tukayyid
4th Division (Blake's Boldest IV-chi) Commanding Officer: Precentor Jake Rule	Veteran	Camp Sims
5th Division (Forming) (The Chosen III-kappa) Commanding Officer: Precentor Trenton Endicott	Regular	Fort Tukayyid

CURRENT DOCTRINE

The various factions of the Word of Blake have so far been able to agree on only one point: that the blessed Order of ComStar has been taken over by "heretics." Nearly every faction believes that the tainted writings that masqueraded as the philosophy of Jerome Blake prior to the Reformation remain valid and offer a clear direction for their organization. They also believe that the dark age Blake predicted approaches, and that his believers must save and protect the sacred technology that will relight the candle of knowledge and lead humanity out of its benighted era. In truth, our blessed Order has not forsaken our belief in the need to save technology in order to preserve civilization. We have come to realize, however, that we can best save knowledge by sharing it, not by denying it to others. The new dark age that Blake predicted began in the misguided actions of the old ComStar. Unless the Inner Sphere stands together against them, the Clans will make that dark age permanent.

[Truly, they will suffer torments for such heresy.]

The original version of *The Word of Blake*, written and published by Primus Conrad Toyama, is required reading for all True Believers. Depending upon their factional affiliation, some members must also be familiar with Primus Rusenstein's *Blessed Destiny*. Though ComStar no longer publishes either work, the Word of Blake still produces them through several presses operating on Gibson. When and if the organization reaches theological consensus, their pretender Primus may simply add a chapter containing these interpretations to *The Word of Blake*.

[Our Primus-in-exile is Blake's true heir. Mori is the pretender.]

The Word of Blake believes that ComStar's corruption grew like a cancer for centuries, ultimately manifesting itself in Precentor Martial Focht and Primus Mori, who they claim conspired against Blake's teachings and killed Myndo Waterly. They insist that her death allowed Operation Scorpion to fail, a conclusion they reach only by ignoring the fact that Waterly still held power when the Clans fought off the takeover attempts, and that Precentor Martial Focht graciously allowed her to retire in peace despite her crimes against Blake's vision. Precentor Aziz has successfully managed to gloss over ComStar's initial support for the Clans, revising history to show their support as a ploy to lull the Clans into complacency.

[Precentor Aziz speaks the truth. Our beloved Primus Waterly only cooperated with the Clans as a means to deceive them. Had her plans been allowed to come to fruition, ComStar would have delivered a grateful Inner Sphere from annihilation, and our blessed Order would have been acclaimed the leading light of a new Star League. Primus Waterly would have redeemed humanity; Focht, in his sin of pride, has ensured humanity's damnation.]

Other skewed versions of events have begun to surface. Because neither Jerome Blake nor his successors foresaw the role that the survivors of Kerensky's Exodus would play in the drama of life in the Inner Sphere, the Word of Blake continues to consider the Successor Lords a greater threat to the Inner Sphere than the Clans. Despite the Clans' and ComStar's common background, the dissenters view the Clans as misguided and barbaric. Following the pattern of many religions, the Word of Blake has rewritten their own history, calling their one-time hero Aleksandr Kerensky "the greatest betrayer of mankind" for his "single-handed, self-centered death blow to the Star League."



POLITICS

With his moderate views, Precentor Blane clearly enjoys the support of much of the Word of Blake's rank and file, and seeks compromise from the extremists. Precentor Blane's call to develop a unified theology that all members can support encouraged many members to suggest that he assume the primacy.

[The worthy Precentor of Gibson has chosen instead to loyally support Captain-General Thomas Marik as Primus-in-exile. Such honorable behavior is clearly beyond the apostates' comprehension.]

Having received ComStar training and served as a Precentor before he was recalled to lead the Free Worlds League when Janos Marik suffered his stroke in 3031, Thomas Marik easily won the hearts and loyalties of ComStar adepts. When the Reformation turned their ordered world upside down, he offered those same adepts shelter, support, and acceptance for their unwavering faith. Because they also trust Precentor Blane, who fully backs Captain-General Thomas Marik, Marik's eventual election as Primus for the Word of Blake seems a foregone conclusion.

The Word of Blake appears to solidly support Marik for leadership, but some express doubts about his fitness for the primacy because he has so far refused to push for a unified theology. Publicly, he maintains that his current role as benefactor to all factions prevents him from offering an opinion on the direction the movement's theology should take. We believe that Marik is simply biding his time, waiting to gain the formal title of Primus before turning the Word of Blake to his purposes.

[They persist in implying that we are puppets of the Free Worlds League, when in fact we are Marik's puppeteers. Their ignorance will cost them when we strike!]

Thomas Marik's political position as Primus-in-exile affords him an obvious opportunity to use the Word of Blake as a buffer against his future son-in-law, Sun-Tzu Liao. Regardless of Chan-

cellor Liao's true intentions in marrying Isis Marik, second in the Free Worlds line of succession to rule, the additional military force and fanatical devotion the Word of Blake offers to Marik will serve to keep Sun-Tzu in check. Rumors of several new Free Worlds League 'Mech bases being built within the always turbulent Duchy of Andurien indicate that Thomas Marik may plan to shift the Word of Blake Militia to the Duchy, both to better keep Andurien under his control and to position the Blake Guards on the doorstep of the Capellan Confederation. This is, of course, only speculation on our part, but these conclusions are logical based on the evidence at hand.

Chancellor Liao has not acknowledged the Word of Blake other than to send relief supplies and foodstuffs to Gibson. This single gesture is apparently intended to demonstrate the Chancellor's good will toward the Captain-General, but other signs indicate that Sun-Tzu may be playing a far more devious game. In what may be an effort to buy their loyalty away from Thomas Marik, Sun-Tzu has dropped hints that he is willing to provide military equipment and spare parts to the Word of Blake. Continuing the complex political dance between Liao and Marik, Sun-Tzu has reportedly asked the Word of Blake to bid on a service contract for his own HPGs, as his agreement with our Blessed Order expires next year.

[We will control House Liao through guile, as we control House Marik. When we have marshaled all our strength, we will purify the Inner Sphere of Focht's contagion.]

Recruitment for the Word of Blake has surpassed that of our blessed Order. During the Clan war, enormous numbers of refugees fled from the path of the advancing enemy. Though in the past, refugees gladly joined ComStar, Myndo Waterly's Operation Scorpion debacle has tainted the Order's image among civilians. Despite ComStar's sincere desire to aid humankind and make reparation for past mistakes, we have yet to overcome the widespread mistrust caused by those mistakes. By contrast, the Word of Blake's rigid religious trappings and righteous mentality attract those driven from their homeworlds. Desperate for certainty in the midst of chaos, many refugees have joined the Word of Blake to find refuge from hardship and responsibility. The number of new recruits joining the Word of Blake has risen even as ComStar's recruitment declines.

[This confession proves that ours is a righteous crusade. Even the demon Focht cannot turn pure hearts to evil.]

WORD OF BLAKE PERSONALITIES

PRECENTOR BLANE OF GIBSON

Blane appears to be a rare moderate within the ranks of the Word of Blake. His level-headed method of dealing with the differing factions' objectives makes him admirably suited to lead the sect, though many among the members would prefer a fire-and-brimstone approach.

Though a shrewd, decisive commander, Precentor Blane does have one blind spot: his devotion to his long-time friend, Captain-General Thomas Marik. Years ago, Thomas served with Blane first as a ComStar adept, then as Precentor, and Blane trusts him implicitly. Evidence suggests that Thomas Marik plans to use the might of the Word of Blake to further his own political interests. Precentor Blane's misplaced faith in his erstwhile protégé may provide a weak spot for our Order to exploit.

[Lies and slanders! Primus-in-exile Marik believes in our cause and has freely dedicated himself to furthering our aims.]



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92

PRECENTOR MARTIAL TRENT ARIAN

The Precentor Martial of the Word of Blake Militia, Trent Arian has made a religion of honor. During the six days he fought on Tukayyid, two BattleMechs were shot out from under him. Though badly wounded, Precentor Arian refused to quit the field until Clan Diamond Shark withdrew. A capable, if inflexible, leader, Trent Arian is sorely missed by our Order.

Precentor Martial Arian sees no more honorable position in his new military than that of MechWarrior. Despite his love of battle, he knows that violence begets violence, often burying honor in the lust for revenge. He fears that when battle is forced upon them, his devout MechWarriors will forget their honor and remember only their hatred of ComStar.

PRECENTOR DEMONA AZIZ

A former member of the First Circuit, Demona Aziz leads the Toyama faction within the Word of Blake. Despite the strength of her radical followers, she feels betrayed by her fellow leaders' attempts to curtail her actions. Aziz believes that her personal defiance of Primus Mori and Precentor Focht alone created the Word of Blake, yet both Thomas Marik and Precentor Blane often force her to take a back seat.

Precentor Aziz acts out her anger by frequently defying Blane's call for limited use of force. Most recently, she plotted to send True Believer ROM agents to bomb Hilton Head Island, in a declaration of terrorist warfare that her fellow Precentors believe excessive. We can only hope that the few saner heads within the Word of Blake will continue to prevail.

[Precentor Aziz acted too soon, but her heart knows what must be done. We will strike as one when the time is ripe, and our blow will be deadly.]

PRECENTOR ROM ALEXANDER KERNOFF

Prior to the Reformation, Precentor Kernoff served as Precentor of the La Grave HPG and as an undercover ROM informant. Appalled at Primus Mori's sweeping acts of reform, he sabotaged the La Grave HPG transmitter with a small but powerful bomb and left the planet before ComStar could track him down. Upon arriving on Gibson, Kernoff began his new career as the Word of Blake's Precentor ROM.

Though the Reformation has torn ROM asunder, the Word of Blake retains the majority of agents. We have succeeded, however, in concealing a small number of ComStar ROM agents throughout the organization at all levels, like termites buried in rotting timber. Though few, our scattered moles cannot be dislodged en masse. To rid his organization of infiltrators, Precentor Kernoff may have to disband ROM and build a new intelligence branch from scratch, forcing him to halt his covert war against ComStar ROM.

The long-standing friendship between Kernoff and Demona Aziz has begun to sour in the past three years. After several bitter public tiffs, Precentor Aziz used Kernoff's own agents in a botched assassination attempt against him. Kernoff now firmly supports Precentor Blane.

[There is no truth to that rumor. Precentor ROM Kernoff and Precentor Aziz remain firm friends. The heretics publicize such scurrilous gossip in a foolish attempt to divide us over trifles. They will not succeed.]





NEW BATTLEMECHS

The following technical readout data supplements TR 3055A-ZETALVCLRNS and provides information on the new BattleMechs in use by both ComStar and the Word of Blake. This report carries Zeta-level clearance, Most Secret/Eyes Only.

COMSTAR NEXUS

Mass: 25 tons

Chassis: Skobel 100-ROB Endo Steel

Power Plant: 200 Nissan

Cruising Speed: 86.4 kph

Maximum Speed: 129.6 kph

Jump Jets: Rawlings 55

Jump Capacity: 150 meters

Armor: Krupp 200

Armament:

1 McArthur Anti-Missile System

2 Blankenburg Technologies Medium Pulse Lasers

1 Blankenburg Technologies Medium Laser

2 Intek Small Pulse Lasers

Manufacturer: Skobel MechWorks

Primary Factory: Russia, Terra

Communications System: Exeter Longscan 200

Targeting and Tracking System: Garret T15AJ

Type: NXS-1A Nexus

Equipment		Mass
Internal Structure:		1.25
Engine:	200	8.5
Walking MP:	8	
Running MP:	12	
Jumping MP:	5	
Heat Sinks:	10 (20)	
Gyro:		2
Cockpit:		3
Armor Factor:	36	2
	Internal Structure	Armor Factor
Head	3	4
Center Torso	8	6
Center Torso (Rear)		2
R/L Torso	6	3
R/L Torso (Rear)		2
R/L Arm	4	3
R/L Leg	6	4

Weapons and Ammo	Location	Critical
Anti Missile System	LT	1
Ammo (Anti-Missile) 12	LT	1
Medium Laser	LA	1
Medium Pulse Laser	RA	1
Medium Pulse Laser	RA	1
Small Laser	LA	1
Small Laser	RA	1

Overview:

The *Nexus* has a checkered past. Two years before the Amaris coup of the Star League, the SLDF developed the *Jackrabbit* at its Skobel MechWorks. Skobel had put the *Jackrabbit* through only preliminary testing when Amaris' troops seized the factory.

Needing more weapons to battle the SLDF relief forces, Stefan Amaris ordered the *Jackrabbit* mass-produced for his Republican army. The would-be dictator deployed more than 500 *Jackrabbits* against the Star League soldiers they were intended to protect. Blowing up a *Jackrabbit* became one of the SLDF's favorite pastimes.

General Kerensky recaptured the Skobel MechWorks relatively intact during the Liberation of Terra, but refused to use the 'Mech Amaris had sent against its developers. He shut down the factory, and ComStar kept it closed for several centuries. Kerensky's army took no *Jackrabbits* on the Exodus. Outside our Blessed Order, few records of the 'Mech's existence remain.

Precentor Martial Focht modified the *Jackrabbit*'s design, replacing the engine with the faster Nissan 200, removing the ballistic and missile weapons and installing jump jets and an array of energy weapons. The newly refitted and renamed *Nexus* was in production.

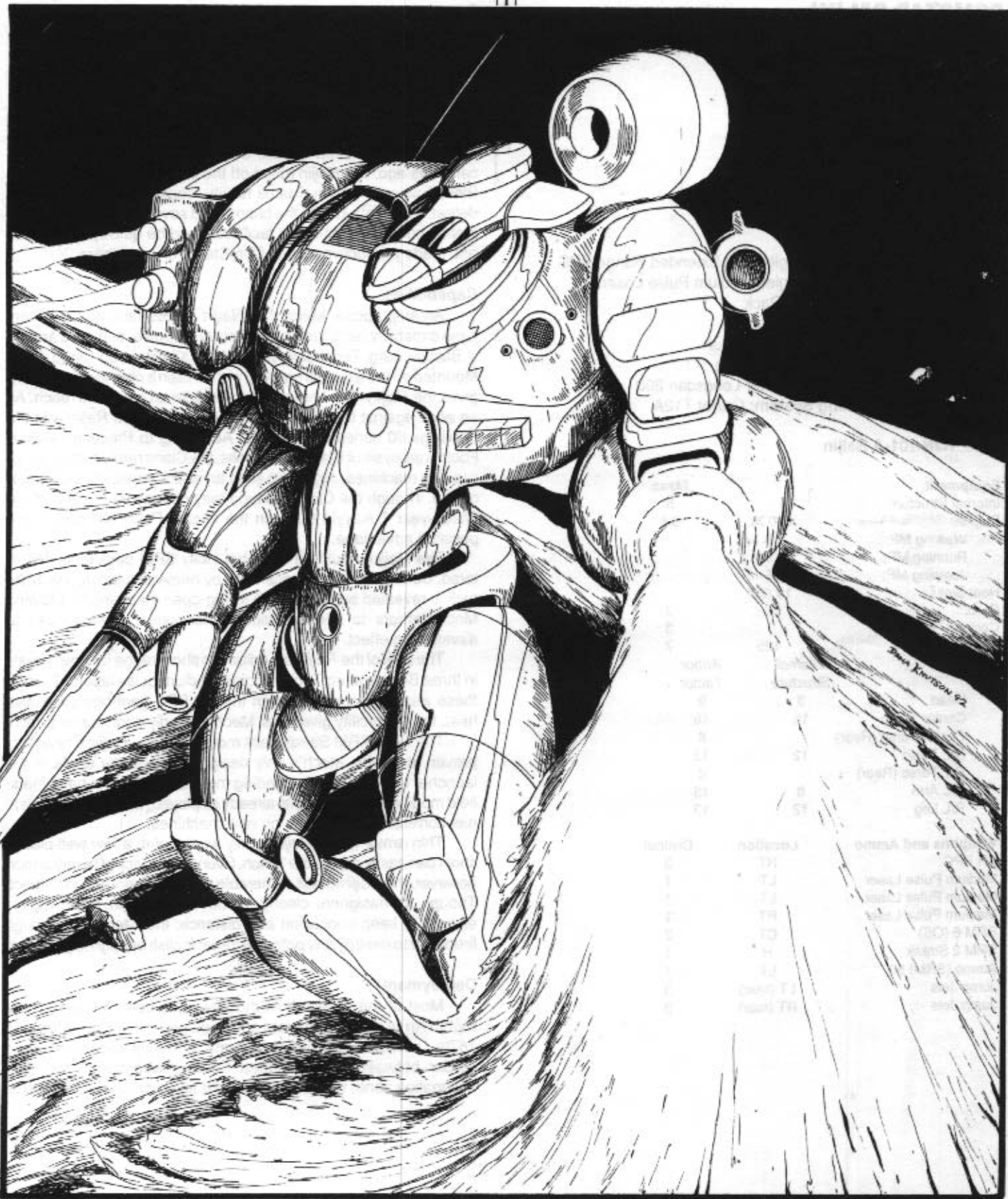
Capabilities:

The *Nexus* is a fast mover that can reach a target, deliver a good, solid punch, and get out just as quickly. Its speed, combined with the McArthur anti-missile system, makes it difficult to hit, and its Rawlings 55 jump jets make it difficult to follow.

An impressive combination of medium- and short-range energy weapons allow for good volleys in a combat situation. Blankenburg Technologies' shoulder-mounted medium laser provides the punches at a distance, and Intek's efficient shoulder-mounted small pulse lasers were chosen for force in tight situations. The main slugging power, however, comes from Blankenburg Technologies' excellent medium pulse lasers, mounted in place of the *Jackrabbit*'s hand actuators.

Deployment:

Though widely available for only a few months at the time of this report, the *Nexus* has already been deployed in the Fourth Army's 366th Division (Wolf Bait). The 366th Division, decimated by Clan Wolf hit-and-run raids on Tukayyid, used large numbers of *Nexus* 'Mechs to replace their losses. Though tested largely by raw recruits, the 366th Division's initial reports on the new *Nexus* look promising.



COMSTAR RAIJIN

Mass: 50 tons
Chassis: Krupp 200
Power Plant: Vlar 300 XL
Cruising Speed: 64.8 kph
Maximum Speed: 97.2 kph
Jump Jets: Rawlings 60
Jump Capacity: 180 meters
Armor: Krupp Ferro Fibrous
Armament:

- 1 Blankenburg Technologies 200-Extended Range PPC
- 3 Blankenburg Technologies Medium Pulse Lasers
- 1 Holly SRM-6 One-Shot Pack
- 1 Holly Streak SRM-2 Pack

Manufacturer: Krupp Armament Works

Primary Factory: Germany, Terra

Communications System: Exeter Longscan 200

Targeting and Tracking System: Garret T12A

Type: RJN 101-A Raijin

Equipment		Mass
Internal Structure:		5
Engine:	300 XL	9.5
Walking MP:	6	
Running MP:	9	
Jumping MP:	6	
Heat Sinks	10 (20)	
Gyro:		3
Cockpit:		3
Armor Factor:	125	7
	Internal Structure	Armor Factor
Head	3	9
Center Torso	16	18
Center Torso (Rear)		8
R/L Torso	12	13
R/L Torso (Rear)		6
R/L Arm	8	13
R/L Leg	12	13

Weapons and Ammo	Location	Critical
ER PPC	RT	3
Medium Pulse Laser	LT	1
Medium Pulse Laser	LT	1
Medium Pulse Laser	RT	1
SRM 6 (OS)	CT	2
SRM 2 Streak	H	1
Ammo (SRM) 50	LT	1
Jump Jets	LT (rear)	3
Jump Jets	RT (rear)	3

Overview:

ComStar designed the *Raijin* to refit depleted Com Guard units in the aftermath of Tukayyid. Precentor Martial Focht wanted a new 'Mech available to his forces whose technology would be unfamiliar to both the Inner Sphere and the Clans.

One of the first 'Mechs to be built in the Krupp Armaments Works in Germany since Amaris occupation forces razed the factory after the coup to take control of the Star League three centuries ago, the *Raijin* rolled off the line in six months. Jerome Blake had ordered the Krupps facility rebuilt after Stefan Amaris' defeat, then moth-balled the factory and several other large 'Mech plants, confident that these facilities could be quickly reactivated and made productive should ComStar ever need them.

Capabilities:

An all-purpose 'Mech, the *Raijin* moves fast, has excellent jump capability, and carries impressive firepower centered around a Blankenburg Technologies Model 200 extended-range PPC. Mounted on the external housing of the *Raijin*'s right torso, the PPC gives the *Raijin* high-energy firepower with an extended reach. As an edge against the Clans, designers outfitted the *Raijin* with the Rawlings 60 series of jump jets. According to Precentor Martial Focht's analysis of Clan OmniMechs, the Clans rarely deploy jump-capable machines, regarding such an attack capability as dishonorable. Though the Clans' attitude may change by the end of the fifteen-year Tukayyid truce, in the interim Focht will take every possible advantage.

The *Raijin* mounts a one-shot Holly SRM pack in its center torso. Concealed from IR scanning by heavy insulation, this SRM rack is revealed by activating a swing-open mechanism, allowing MechWarriors to use this hidden weapon at close ranges to devastating effect.

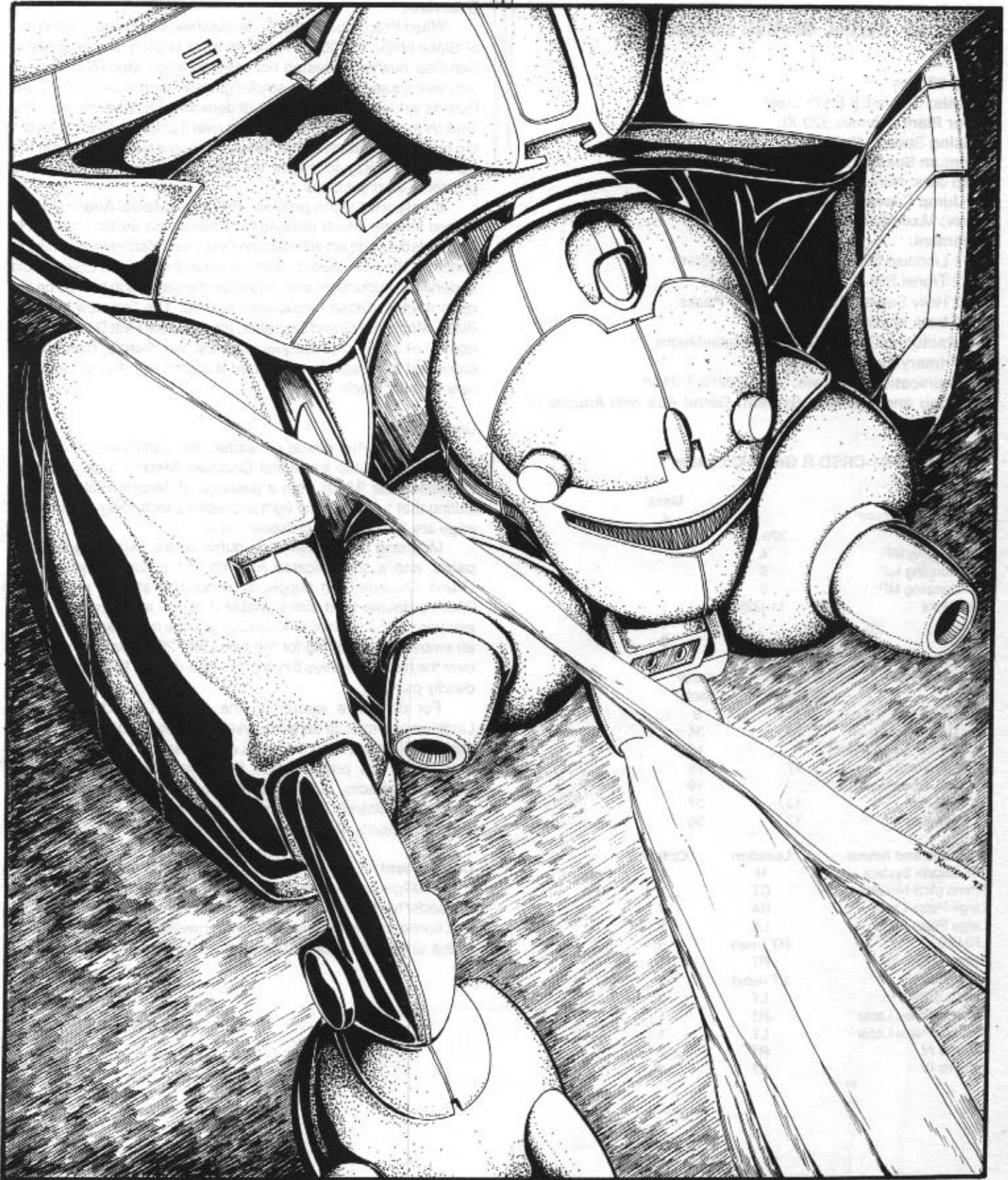
The bulk of the *Raijin*'s medium- to short-range firepower rests in three Blankenburg Technologies medium pulse lasers. Though these weapons combined with the ER PPC generate excessive heat, their reliability gives this 'Mech a deadly short-range punch.

The Holly SRM Streak pack mounted in the *Raijin*'s head has proven to be the 'Mech's only design problem; the angle of the launcher tends to jam the loading mechanism. Techs have made field modifications to *Raijins* already deployed, and the Krupp plant has corrected the problem on new machines.

Thin armor is the *Raijin*'s only weak point; a few well-placed shots can easily cripple the 'Mech. Even with its lack of heavy armor, however, the *Raijin* is less vulnerable than opponents might expect. Though its designers clearly intended the *Raijin* to be mobile enough to keep opposition at a distance, the 'Mech has enough firepower to destroy any potential threat foolish enough to get close.

Deployment:

Most of the *Raijins* built thus far have been shipped to the Eighth Army (Stern Defiance) and deployed in the Eighty-fifth and 167th Divisions. The Eleventh Army, currently deployed on the border between the Federated Commonwealth and the Clan occupation zone, will receive the next shipment of these 'Mechs.



WORD OF BLAKE GRAND CRUSADER

Mass: 80 tons

Chassis: Crucis-ES Endo Steel

Power Plant: Hermes 320 XL

Cruising Speed: 43.2 kph

Maximum Speed: 64.8 kph

Jump Jets: None

Jump Capacity: None

Armor: Maximilian 45

Armament:

1 Lindblad Shotgun Anti-Missile System

2 Tronel PPI-20 Large Pulse Lasers

2 Holly Swivel Mounted LRM-20 Packs

2 Intek Medium Pulse Lasers

Manufacturer: Gibson Federated BattleMechs

Primary Factory: Gibson

Communications System: O/P COMNET 210A

Targeting and Tracking System: Garret A99 with Artemis IV Interface

Type: GRN-D-01-CRSD-R Grand Crusader

Equipment		Mass
Internal Structure:		4
Engine:	320 XL	8
Walking MP:	4	
Running MP:	6	
Jumping MP:	0	
Heat Sinks	11 (22)	1
Gyro:		4
Cockpit:		3
Armor Factor:	248	15.5
	Internal Structure	Armor Factor
Head	3	9
Center Torso	25	34
Center Torso (Rear)		15
R/L Torso	17	28
R/L Torso (Rear)		10
R/L Arm	13	27
R/L Leg	17	30

Weapons and Ammo	Location	Critical
Anti-Missile System	H	1
Ammo (Anti-Missile) 12	CT	1
Large Pulse Laser	RA	2
Large Pulse Laser	LA	2
LRM 20	RT (rear)	5
Ammo (LRM) 15	RT	3
LRM 20	LT (rear)	5
Ammo (LRM) 15	LT	3
Medium Pulse Laser	RT	1
Medium Pulse Laser	LT	1
Artemis IV	RT	1
Artemis IV	LT	1

Overview:

When Precentor Martial Arian assumed command of the Word of Blake Militia in 3052, the forces were in sorry shape. Initially, ComStar neither protested nor resisted when MechWarriors left with their equipment. Later, stricter guidelines enforced by the Com Guards virtually cut off the flow of defecting BattleMechs from the Guards to the Word of Blake. A few Level II units left as a group, but the battered condition of their 'Mechs and other equipment after the fighting on Tukayyid meant the Word of Blake inherited more problems than solutions.

In response to the problem, Precentor Martial Arian commissioned several 'Mech designs to replenish his militia's ranks. He negotiated a contract with Gibson Federated BattleMech Works to construct the new 'Mechs, promising that the Word of Blake would underwrite production costs and allow the designs to be sold on the open market. Gibson Federated agreed. The first new Word of Blake 'Mech, the *Grand Crusader*, arrived in the First Division in the late fall of 3053. In subsequent months, the Word of Blake Militia continued to bolster its weakened divisions with this exceptional new assault 'Mech.

Capabilities:

Though called *Grand Crusader*, this BattleMech bears little resemblance to the traditional *Crusader* 'Mech. Precentor Blane christened the 'Mech from a passage of Jerome Blake's works stating that "...those who fight to preserve technology and knowledge are the grandest crusaders of all...."

Mounting two Tronel large pulse lasers, twin Holly LRM-20 packs, and a sophisticated Artemis IV fire control system, the *Grand Crusader* can cripple its opposition at long range. The 'Mech's double heat sinks enable it to fire all of its long-range weapons with little danger to its pilot, and the manufacturer created an innovative mounting for the twin LRM-20 packs that slides up over the head and gives the 'Mech a 360-degree firing range for its deadly payload.

For defensive weaponry, the *Grand Crusader* mounts a Lindblad anti-missile defense system in a pivot point on top of the cockpit. Blind spots on the sides of the 'Mech's lower legs and its rear facing are problematical for using the Lindblad to repel Elemental attacks, but as the Word of Blake has no intention of sending its *Grand Crusaders* against the Clans for many years, they have plenty of time to correct this mistake.

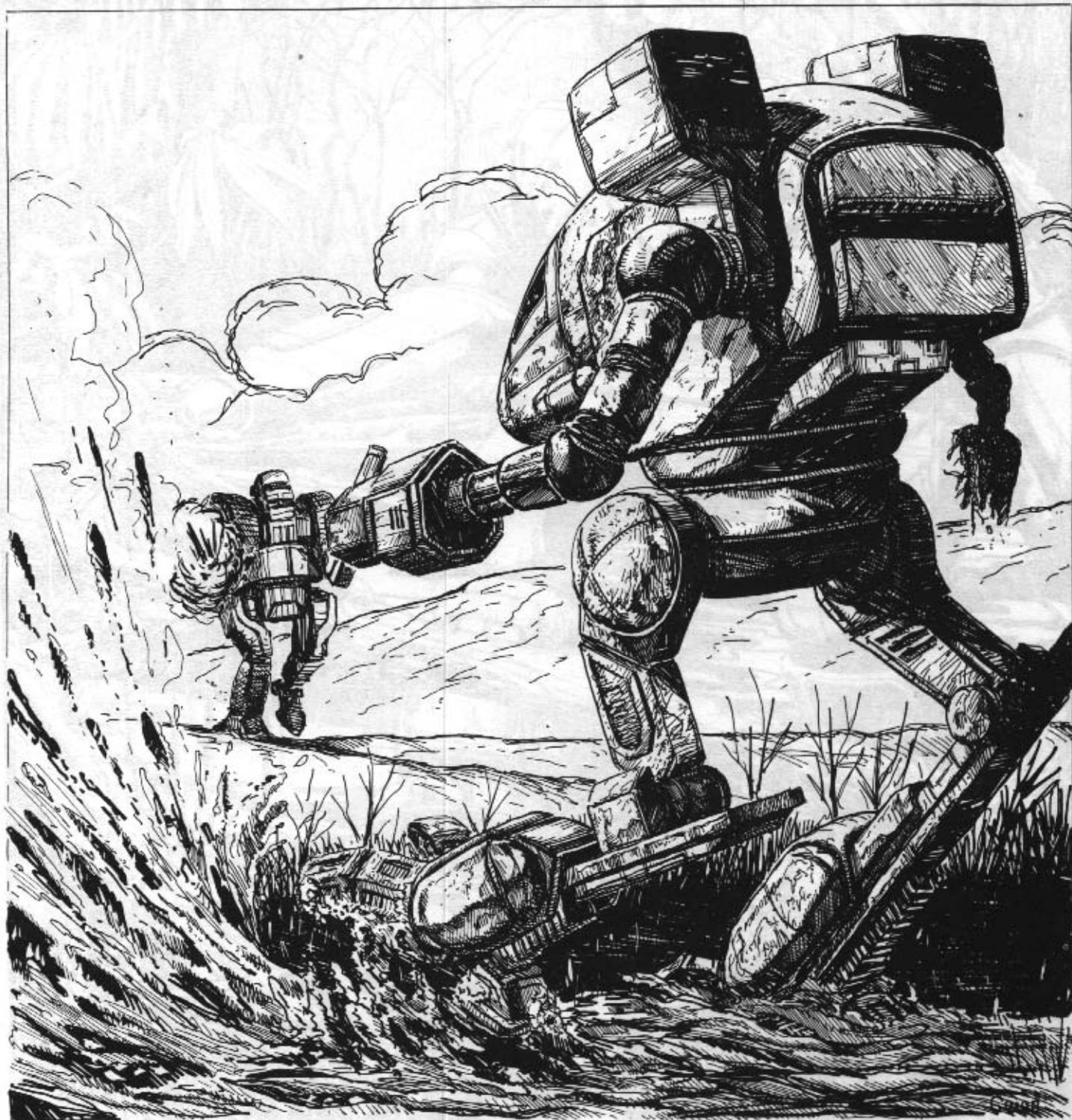
Deployment:

Intelligence reports suggest that initial orders of the *Grand Crusader* have already reached planets in the Free Worlds League that border on the Federated Commonwealth. The Fifteenth Marik Militia stationed on Berenson is known to field them at present.





GAME SUPPLEMENT



COMSTAR ARCHETYPES

COMSTAR NEWS BUREAU INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER (ADEPT DELTA)

ComStar's role as the Inner Sphere's primary news-gatherer has remained untarnished by former Primus Myndo Waterly's Scorpion debacle. In fact, the investigative reporter's job requires him or her to exercise more skills than ever before. No longer able to depend on their ROM shadows for support, reporters must learn to ferret out information for themselves.

In the wake of Operation Scorpion, the governments of the Inner Sphere have directed greater resources toward penetrating ComStar's ranks. The ComStar adept working as an undercover reporter must rely on his or her training in order to get the story, and often to survive.

Attributes	Characteristics			
BLD	3	(9+)	Athletic	12+
REF	3	(9+)	Physical	10+
INT	5	(7+)	Mental	7+
LRN	6	(6+)	Social	4+
CHA	5	(7+)		

Advantages

Sixth Sense

Skills

Alternate Identity	2	(5+)
Computer	1	(6+)
Drive	1	(9+)
Impersonation	1	(3+)
Interrogation	2	(2+)
Running	1	(11+)
Seduction	1	(3+)
Stealth	2	(8+)
Tracking	2	(5+)

Edge: 1

Assets: 6,000 C-bills

Equipment

Forgery Kit
Lock-Pick Kit (Mechanical)
Microcommunicator
Rangefinder Binoculars
Scanalyzer



COMSTAR ROM AGENT (ADEPT RHO)

Even the reformed ComStar needs to gather information, and ROM is still the most efficient way to keep ahead of events in the Inner Sphere. Whether on a mission to spy on an Inner Sphere House, or a foray into the Clan occupation zone, a ROM agent remains a force to be reckoned with.

Few ROM agents remain active in 3055. Most of the once-feared ComStar secret police have defected to the Word of Blake, and few remaining in ComStar remember ROM in its heyday. Because it possesses Star League technology, however, even the current scaled-back ROM should not be underestimated.

Attributes Characteristics

BLD	5	(7+)	Athletic	8+
REF	5	(7+)	Physical	7+
INT	6	(6+)	Mental	8+
LRN	4	(8+)	Social	10+
CHA	4	(8+)		

Skills

Alternate Identity	1	(7+)
Climbing	1	(7+)
Cryptography	3	(5+)
Computer	1	(7+)
Demolitions	1	(7+)
Disguise	1	(7+)
Impersonation	2	(6+)
Interrogation	2	(6+)
Negotiation	1	(9+)
Security Systems	2	(6+)
Small Arms	2	(5+)
Stealth	2	(6+)
Tracking	1	(7+)
Unarmed Combat	2	(6+)

Edge: 1

Assets: 9,000 C-bills

Equipment

Camo Suite (Sneak, ECM and IR)
Gripper Gloves
Gyrojet Pistol (Hold Out)
IR Scanner
Lock-Pick Kit Advanced



TRUE BELIEVER MECHWARRIOR (ADEPT EPSILON)

Veterans of the Tukayyid campaign, the True Believer MechWarriors of the Blake Guard/Word of Blake Militia have fled their former Com Guard ranks to fulfill Blake's sacred mission as they understood it before the Reformation.

True Believers devote themselves to upholding the image of the honorable warrior. Many have become obsessed with body counts and losses, a reaction to their losses against the Clans on Tukayyid. Within the ranks of this militia, high kill ratios bring rank and prestige.

The True Believer MechWarrior regards battle as the sacred center of life.

Attributes	Characteristics
BLD 5	(7+) Athletic 7+
REF 6	(6+) Physical 8+
INT 4	(8+) Mental 10+
LRN 4	(8+) Social 10+
CHA 4	(8+)

Skills

Gunnery/Mech	3	(5+)
Leadership	1	(9+)
Piloting/Mech	3	(5+)
Small Arms	1	(7+)

Special Interests

Study of Writings of Jerome Blake	3	(7+)
Tactics	1	(9+)
Unarmed Combat	1	(6+)

Edge: 2

Assets: None

Equipment

Long Range Personal Communicator
Personal Armor (Vest)
Pulse Laser Pistol

BattleMech: Assault



WORD OF BLAKE TOYAMA/ROM AGENT (ADEPT RHO)

The radical element of the Word of Blake, the Toyamas prefer direct action to negotiation with ComStar or the Inner Sphere Houses. They have begun a new age of terrorism in the Inner Sphere, directing most of their aggression toward their sister organization, ComStar.

Fanatical ROM agents who fled Primus Mori's Reformation, the Toyamas have sworn undying enmity against the Primus, Precentor Martial Focht, and the reorganized ComStar. The Toyamas believe that by wearing down Primus Mori and the Precentor Martial with repeated attacks, they can eventually lead a counter-coup, taking back control of ComStar and their beloved Terra. Until then, they continue to kill and die in terrorist operations, believing such sacrifices necessary to fulfill the sacred trust of Jerome Blake.

Attributes		Characteristics	
BLD	5	(7+)	Athletic 8+
REF	5	(7+)	Physical 8+
INT	5	(7+)	Mental 9+
LRN	4	(8+)	Social 10+
CHA	4	(8+)	

Skills

Alternate Identity	1	(7+)
Cryptography	3	(6+)
Demolitions	3	(6+)
Disguise	1	(8+)
Forgery	2	(7+)
Impersonation	2	(7+)
Security Systems	2	(6+)
Small Arms	3	(5+)

Special Interests

Study of Writings of Jerome Blake	1	(8+)
Stealth	2	(6+)
Streetwise	1	(9+)
Unarmed Combat	2	(6+)

Edge: 1

Assets: 2,000 C-bills

Equipment

IR Scanner
Lock-Pick Kit Advanced
6 Microgrenades
Pulse Laser Pistol



COMSTAR



PAINTING BY: TONY SZCZUDLO



COMSTAR

INITIATION CEREMONY



PAINTING BY: NICK SMITH

A COMSTAR ACOLYTE, CLEARLY DESTINED TO BE A MECHWARRIOR,
IS INITIATED BY A PRECENTOR, WHILE HER SPONSORING DEMI-PRECENTOR LOOKS ON.
THIS, AS CAN BE SEEN BY THE FORMAL ROBES, WAS ONE OF THE FINAL COMSTAR "RITUAL" INITIATIONS
BEFORE THE SCHISM.



COMSTAR

PRECENTOR DEMONA AZIZ



PAINTING BY: NICK SMITH

THIS IS THE MOST RECENT IMAGE OF PRECENTOR DEMONA AZIZ, FORMER MEMBER OF THE FIRST CIRCUIT AND CURRENT LEADER OF THE WORD OF BLAKE'S RADICAL TOYAMA SECT. THIS PORTRAIT, LIKE THAT OF THE INITIATION, WAS EXECUTED BEFORE THE SCHISM.



COMSTAR

COMGUARD OFFICERS



PAINTING BY: LAUBENSTEIN & ROSEMA

THE UPDATED COM GUARD DRESS UNIFORM BEARS MORE RESEMBLANCE TO OTHER MILITARY DRESS UNIFORMS, ADDING CAPES AS A STYLISTIC NOD TO THE OLDER ROBE-STYLE UNIFORM. SABERS REPLACE THE BROADSWORD OF THE OLD COMSTAR AS THE FORMAL SIDEARM.



COMSTAR

COMGUARD MECHWARRIOR & TECHNICIAN



PAINTING BY: LAUBENSTEIN & ROSEMA

A COM GUARD MECHWARRIOR CONSULTS WITH THE ADEPT TECH WORKING ON HER 'MECH. SHE WEARS A LIGHTWEIGHT TORSOTUBE COOLING VEST OVER A THIN SILKSKIN UNIFORM, AND COOL-MESH BOOTS, ALL DESIGNED TO COUNTER THE STIFLING HEAT INSIDE AN OPERATING BATTLEMECH. THE TECH IS USING A DATALINK PERSONAL COMPUTER, A PEN-BASED SYSTEM TIED INTO A MAINFRAME SYSTEM AT THE BASE.



COMSTAR

COMGUARD INFANTRYMAN



PAINTING BY: LAUBENSTEIN & ROSEMA

THESE COM GUARD INFANTRYMEN APPEAR HERE IN THEIR DRESS UNIFORMS. THE HOODS, ANOTHER DESIGN ELEMENT LEFT OVER FROM THE DAYS OF ROBES, MAKE IT EASY TO DISTINGUISH THEM FROM OTHER INNER SPHERE UNITS. THE REST OF THE UNIFORM, CONSTRUCTED OF A HEAVY, DURABLE MATERIAL, IS WELL-SUITED TO THE WEAR AND TEAR COMMON WITH GROUND FORCES.



COMSTAR

WORD OF BLAKE SOLDIERS



PAINTING BY: LAUBENSTEIN & ROSEMA

WORD OF BLAKE FIELD UNIFORMS ARE BETTER SUITED FOR USE BY MECHWARRIORS THAN INFANTRY. THOUGH WORD OF BLAKE RETAINED COMSTAR'S TRADITIONAL ROBES, THESE UNIFORMS ARE FAR MORE PRACTICAL FOR MOBILITY IN ACTION.



COMSTAR

NEW BATTLEMECHS



BATTLEMECH DESIGNS © 1992 VICTOR MUSICAL INDUSTRIES.

PICTURED ABOVE ARE THREE COMSTAR BATTLEMECHS. CLOCKWISE FROM THE UPPER LEFT THEY ARE:
THE GRAND CRUSADER, THE GALAHAD, AND THE STAR PYTHON



ComStar



NOW IT CAN BE TOLD!

ComStar has controlled the Inner Sphere's interstellar communications and other technology for centuries. ComStar single-handedly stopped the Clan invasion, then failed in its attempt to take control of the Inner Sphere. Now the organization responsible for keeping the Inner Sphere together has split into two factions.

The *Comstar Sourcebook* recounts the organization's history, describes the technology it preserved, and reveals the circumstances that broke it apart. The *Comstar Sourcebook* also describes the new ComStar order and the splinter organization Word of Blake. It includes new BattleMechs from both groups, and an 8-page color section featuring ComStar and Word of Blake uniforms, insignia, and equipment.



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