

STORM ON THE HORIZON

Storyline Book Four (1941-1943)



RECRUITED POWERFUL ALLY • LOCAL RESOURCES ARE BEING EXPLOITED • CONFIRMED • PROTOTYPE RECEIVED, WILL MAKE FUTURE IMPLEMENTATIONS EASIER • LOCAL CONFLICT IS OVER, MAY MOVE NORMALLY AGAIN • MAY FLARE AGAIN, DESPITE THE USE OF SECOND-TIER AGENTS • UNCERTAINTY IS ONLY CERTAINTY WITH PEOPLE • AN INEVITABLE CONCLUSION • MUST SUPPORT THE CURRENT TREND OF EXPLORATION • CROSS-POSS COMMUNICATION EASIER • YES • FOREIGN FACTIONS FACING DIFFICULTIES • PLAN IS LARGER THAN ANYTHING ATTEMPTED BEFORE • KEEP TO THE AGENDA, ALL WILL GO WELL • HUBRIS WILL BRING DOWNFALL • PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES CANNOT BE IGNORED • MUST SUCCEED, FOR THE GOOD OF ALL • AGREED • ARCHETYPE FIGURE ACTIVE AND WELL • HAS CODE BEEN CONFIRMED? TOO EARLY TO DETERMINE CONTROL LEVEL • CANNOT FORCE THE ISSUE • NOT YET • CONTROL IMPOSSIBLE AT THIS STAGE TO AVOID DISCOVERY • TAKE ADDITIONAL PRECAUTIONS TO ENSURE CONTINUATION IN CASE OF DISASTER • ALREADY IN PLACE • THIS AGENDA CANNOT BE JEOPARDIZED • AGREED, RECRUITED POWERFUL ALLY

HEAVY GEAR



STORM ON THE HORIZON

Storyline Book Four (1941-1943)

20 Autumn 1941 - 34 Autumn 1943

"The end of the Interpolar War, along with renewed contact with the Capricians, signaled the end of one era and the beginning of another. I remember the days when even allied leagues eyed each other with suspicion and sent their war machines to fight for control over this or that. Now they are allied once more under the banner of the Westphalia Cabinet and fighting for the good of the entire planet. It's the War of the Alliance all over again.

"But the reality is somewhat different. Nations, much less entire planets and interstellar empires, do not switch allegiance overnight based on the charisma or friendship of their leaders, regardless of what the trideo shows say. Human nature just doesn't work that way..."

— Nicos Renault

The allied nations of Terra Nova have struck the first blow for freedom by sending a daring commando mission to the CEF-occupied world of Caprice. More teams now follow on the 1st Black Talon's footsteps, chipping at the might of the New Earth Commonwealth objective by destroyed objective. The thrill of victory, however, does not mean that centuries-old grudges are forgotten, or even settled. And the Terranovans are quick to forget that the interstellar Gates offer two-way access between the colonized worlds...

Storm on the Horizon, the fourth Heavy Gear Storyline Book, is the newest installment of the critically acclaimed Storyline series. It traces the cataclysmic events on the world of Terra Nova, the setting of Heavy Gear, through a collection of journals, articles and conversations. Storm on the Horizon also features a useful appendix with a full time-line of events, advice for Heavy Gear players and profiles of important characters.

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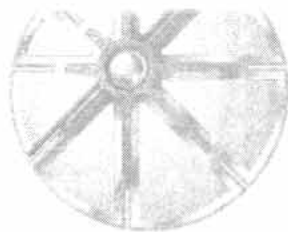
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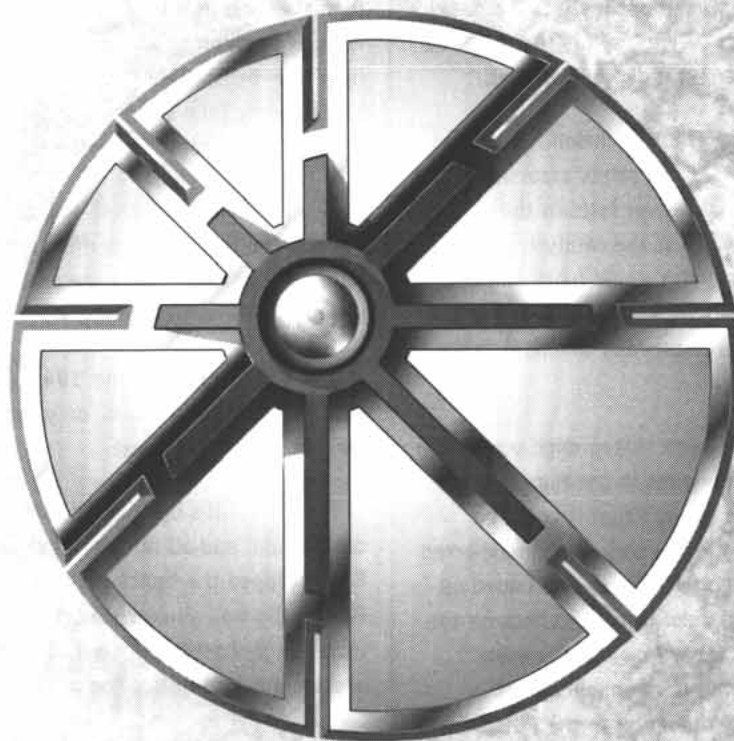


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HEAVY GEAR



Storm on the Horizon



Heavy Gear Storyline Book 4

20 Autumn 1941 to 34 Autumn 1943

Reminiscence

From the Journals of Nicosia Renault

(14 Autumn 1941) - I must be getting older. I don't feel as concerned as I used to be about the world. There is a certain... detachment... that comes now while observing the world's events and compiling data. Perhaps I've just accepted that I can't save the world all by myself. Perhaps it's just the deluge of new files I received from the Cabinet. All this data — well, surely it can yet be put to good use, provided the facts are put in the correct order and context.

Let's see. The assassination of Reverend Thor Hutchison... That was just six cycles ago, but it may as well be six centuries. I can safely assume Neel Garner Fulan is the sole man responsible. I don't think he ever foresaw the consequences of his action, not all of it. Maybe he was just the catalyst, after all. If the Reverend had not been assassinated, something else would have whipped the Northerners in a frenzy. They are so insecure about their way of life. An entire planet is not enough room in these days of global instantaneous communication and sub-orbital travel.

The Southerners have not proved to be much better, mind you. Not a cycle later, Republican special forces let loose a deadly virus in the Humanist Alliance, which they hoped would weaken the league enough that it could be annexed with ease. Unfortunately, the locals proved more tenacious than expected and the plague got harder to control, which was one of the reasons we ended up with the current mess. This must have given renewed vigor to others, because the rebellion in Basal spread to several other city-states. Emir Nigel Shirow even gained control of a Humanist city for a while. All in all, the Republican got themselves stuck up to their shoulders in a very dirty operation in the Allied Southern territories, just as they were facing troops for the North.

I guess that's what happen when you fight with a rabid dawg in the middle of a hunter vine patch.

(14 Autumn 1941) - More files. Hmmm... Those are copies of old military orders from the early days of the Interpolar War. Lang must have included them for me. Historians will probably find them fascinating in a couple of centuries.

The North declared war preemptively two seasons after Hutchison's death, figuring that the South was distracted and incapable of putting up a good defense. Northern strategy was to move into what they saw as the weak territories (Emirates and Humanist Alliance), move through a friendly (or at least neutral) Mekong Dominion and then crush the Republic on two fronts. Of course, the Dominion resisted them and the Northern forces got bogged down in the ESE and HA, far away from secure supplies. I'll give Aaron Logan this — he's a crafty one. I just hope he doesn't plan on doing business in the Federation any time soon.

The Southern Republic used the Humanist Alliance and the rebel parts of the Emirates as buffers and brought the war home to the North with lightning assaults. That's the problem with modern technology: unless one has complete orbital superiority, no place on the planet is more than an hour away.

(15 Autumn 1941) — So many documents, so many reports... I feel like a spider in a web, only the web is slowly engulfing me instead of serving me. Let's see what's next.

It's been two cycles, but it still hurts inside. So many lost, so much destruction, and all for very little. I wish I could say that the destruction of Peace River stopped the fighting and unified the planet, but that was not the case. Peace talks had already started when it happened, both sides exhausted and with increasingly hostile populations. Politicians are very protective of their own hide, and are quick to notice the pitchforks and torches being readied in their backyard.

Things happened fairly quickly after that. I was surprised at the resilience exhibited by Paxton Arms; even with their headquarters destroyed and much of their workforce gone, they are hanging on. Old Simosa must have been smarter than we thought, or just more careful. Paxton had subsidiaries, cash reserves in anonymous accounts in polar banks, hidden supply dumps left over from the War of the Alliance. I think they are going to bounce back fairly fast, and woe to the ones responsible for their pain. Knowing DuBeau-Slovenski, she'll rip this galaxy apart with her bare hands if she has to.

Reminiscence

Images from Terra Nova



15-AU-41

Maneuvers

From the Journal of Nicosia Renault

(16 Autumn 1941) — It may just be me, but it seems like the end of the Interpolar War and the renewed contact with the Capricians signaled the end of one era and the beginning of another. I remember the days when even allied leagues eyed each other with suspicion and sometimes sent their war machines to fight for control over this or that. Now they are allied once more under the banner of the Westphalia Cabinet and fighting for the good of the planet. It's the War of the Alliance all over again, which seems to please the veterans to no end. A nice image, and probably very gratifying for the families safe and sound in their living rooms in Valeria or Port Oasis.

As always, however, the reality is somewhat different. Nations, much less entire planets and interstellar empires, do not switch allegiance overnight based on the charisma or friendship of their leaders, regardless of what the trideo shows say. Human nature just doesn't work that way. Grudges will be remembered, greed for power or money will not disappear overnight...

Listen to yourself. A personal journal, one intended for your own record, and yet you drone on like an old crone. A self-righteous one at that.
>chuckle<

(17 Autumn 1941) — Re-reading yesterday's journal entries, I'm forced to say that I'm not far off the mark, albeit I used a poor choice of words to explain the situation. I've been away from the field for too long; my emotions are starting to get the better of me.

The current political climate of *détente* is, by and large, a good thing. It's nice to go to bed without having to wonder whether the raid sirens will go off in the middle of the night. Those who think that a common enemy will be enough to unite the Terranovans and make them forget their past conflicts, however, are overly optimistic.

I have been an intelligence operative for many cycles. I have seen plots and maneuvers by the hundreds, all destined to secure power over one's neighbors. I do not believe the hatred that endured for many decades or even

centuries is going to be resolved virtually overnight. There's too much bad blood, too many horrible memories, too many slights to honor, pride or ambition (real or imagined — there is little difference).

(17 Autumn 1941) — The former BRF leader, Ernesto Jaxon, disappeared not long after I met with him. I don't think he's dead, though I have no proof of that. He hasn't given any sign of life in the past cycle and a half, but I did notice that the pressure of the Badlands Revolutionary Front — or at least what's left of it — has considerably eased since then.

(16 Autumn 1941) — I've managed to learn a little more about the Liberati woman in the past few days. The fact that she has been working with the 1st Black Talon as a full member of the team really helped, record-wise. Helena Del Pulciano is a member of a resistance group called the Liberati, which operates on our "neighboring" (I use the term loosely) colonized world. Actually, this is misleading: according to the Talons' sociology file, "Liberati" actually refer to a whole social group, not just the freedom fighters. These guys just happen to come mostly from it. I'll have to see what else they have on these people; they look fascinating in their own right.

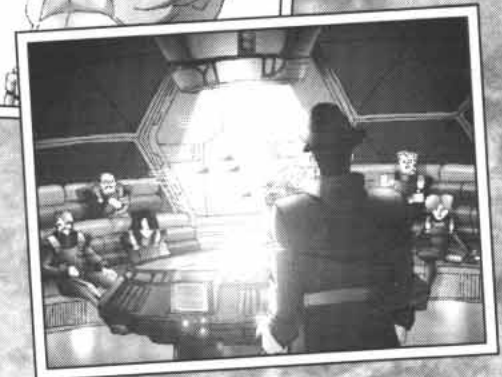
(20 Autumn 1941) — The unexpected keeps occurring lately, and in spectacular fashion. This is very, very hard to take for someone whose profession is to uncover secrets.

The *Eastern Sun* — yes, the old colony vessel worshipped as a holy relic by the people of the Emirates — took off yesterday. Everyone thought of it as a ruin, an immense building gutted by desperate people over the centuries. What we all forgot was that no one beyond the Emirates' ruling and religious castes had actually visited the bowels of the ship. We just assumed it was unsalvageable. We didn't figure in the Easterners' quasi-mystical obsession with Earth.

It only cost us half a city-state, this time. At this rate, we'll be reduced to mere nomadic tribes within the next decade.

Maneuvers

Images from Terra Nova



20-AU-41



First Look: The North

From the Journals of Nicosia Renault

(20 Autumn 1941) — The Northerners have been uncharacteristically quiet since the end of the War. I'm used to see them take a lot of room, but nowadays they seem to be keeping to their own business. Maybe it's shell-shock on a massive scale. Maybe it's only a momentary reprieve.

It's strange — I expected to see a struggle for leadership in the Confederated Northern City-States between the Norlights (historically, they have always held the upper hand in the CNCS) and the Federation. Instead, it's the Protectorate who has become ever more increasingly vocal. I guess that for all their military posturing, once they get bloodied they cry out just as loud as anyone else.

As for the Federation, their relative silence has me a little puzzled. Either Solomon Davi is craftier than I give him credit for, or the Mercantilists are too busy counting the money they got from the fat rebuilding contracts handed out by the Northern Guard.

The break I was anticipating between the secular and religious aspects of Northern society did occur, but it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. Most Revisionists seem to have realized the irony of using a religion based on peace and understanding as an excuse to wage war. First Follower Dreven Capac is most likely the true reason behind this. His fateful speech of Autumn 3, 1939 did much to appease the faithful. I don't think the Sorrento clergy is too happy about their loss of influence over the flock. . . maybe some of them will even do something about it.

(21 Autumn 1941) — The Northern citizens seem to have developed a large appreciation for the Cabinet and their troops, the Black Talon. Once the 1st Talon came back the brass tried to keep things quiet for a while, but the PR opportunity was just too good to pass up, I suppose. They've been parading select Talon troopers through the streets to raise public support and, one supposes, budget for the program. They're running on fumes as it is.

>end log<

>open file/ north 1<

21 . AU . 41

The Plan

Outskirts of Valeria, NLC

The informal meeting of the Westphalia Cabinet had been going on for some time now, and still showed no sign of ending. This was exactly why Lang Regina preferred battle to politics: expediency. Tanaka had just taken the floor to present his plans for colony liberation. Lang cleared her throat.

"You know a lot of our support depends on how things are doing here, on this world."

Tanaka looked tired. "I know that," he answered, "and I wish the general populace could understand the danger of what we are facing."

Colonel Elden coughed; his uniform was becoming wet with sweat and his mood was quickly souring. "I don't think they missed that, Prefect," he said, stabbing the armrest of his chair with his finger. "Many of our troops fought in the War of the Alliance. We remember, we just don't know if we should be sticking our necks out for another planet right now."

"Gentlemen, please." Lang said as politely as the heat would allow. "We are here to hear the plans for Caprice and the other colonies. Kenichi, you have the floor."

Tanaka nodded. "Thank you, Regina." He took a sip of water and continued.

"Once we have Caprice, there are several other colonies that intelligence indicates will be vital to our efforts. Using this information we have worked out a long-term plan of attack. I now leave the floor to Sous-Commandant Jasmine Eloi of the Southern Republic Colonial Defense Corps, who is much more familiar with the colony situation than I am. Sous-Commandant?" Tanaka stepped aside and a tanned young woman stood up. Regina noted, a little bitterly, that Eloi showed no signs of perspiration or discomfort.

"Thank you sir." Said Eloi, waving a slender wand. The table hummed and a holo-projector in the middle of it flared to life.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this display shows the Gate web that you are all familiar with." Eloi indicated several sections of the map with a laser pointer in the wand as she spoke. "As you can see, our options are somewhat limited in choosing allies. At least for now.

"Our first target will be Atlantis. According to intelligence reports from our Liberati contacts on Caprice, Atlantis is not truly in the grip of the CEF. The planet is mostly covered by water and the CEF was unable to match forces with the Atlantean navy. Because of this, it would take a minimal amount of force to remove the enemy presence."

Elden raised a hand. "What good are we going to be on a water planet, Sous-Commandant? I don't know where you grew up, but Terra Nova is—"

"Our objective is limited to the small amount of land present on the planet." Eloi interrupted politely. "It is painfully obvious that the Atlanteans can take care of their own waters. May I continue?"

Elden seemed suitably humbled, but he smiled. "...Please." Lang tried not to do the same. The young Republican had proven herself, but Lang could see that Tanaka was uncomfortable with Eloi's show of disrespect.

"Thank you. Once we have secured Caprice and Atlantis, we will have cut CEF supply lines to half of the known human colonies. Our next objective will be the removal or mop-up of CEF forces on the colony world of Home, New Jerusalem and Eden — provided, of course, that these colonies still exist." The display shifted, expanding.

"After these are secure, our next sweep is to Utopia and her Gate-sisters. Utopia will be much more of a challenge than the other planets because her ruling government has accepted Commonwealth occupation, at least according to the sketchy reports we have. Fortunately, not everyone on the planet agrees and we may face a variation on the Caprice scenario.

The Plan

Outskirts of Valeria, NLC

"Beyond Utopia lie Botony Bay and Jotenheim. We have little to no information on these, but it is not unreasonable to assume a repeat of the other side of the web. Once these colonies have been freed, our work is done. Then the politicians and merchants can take over." Tanaka winced.

Milani DuBeau-Slovenski stirred to life from her seat in the corner. She had said nothing for the entire meeting, and Lang was beginning to wonder why she had come at all.

"It isn't quite that easy, is it, Sous-Commandant?" DuBeau-Slovenski said quietly. Eloï hesitated and flipped the wand again.

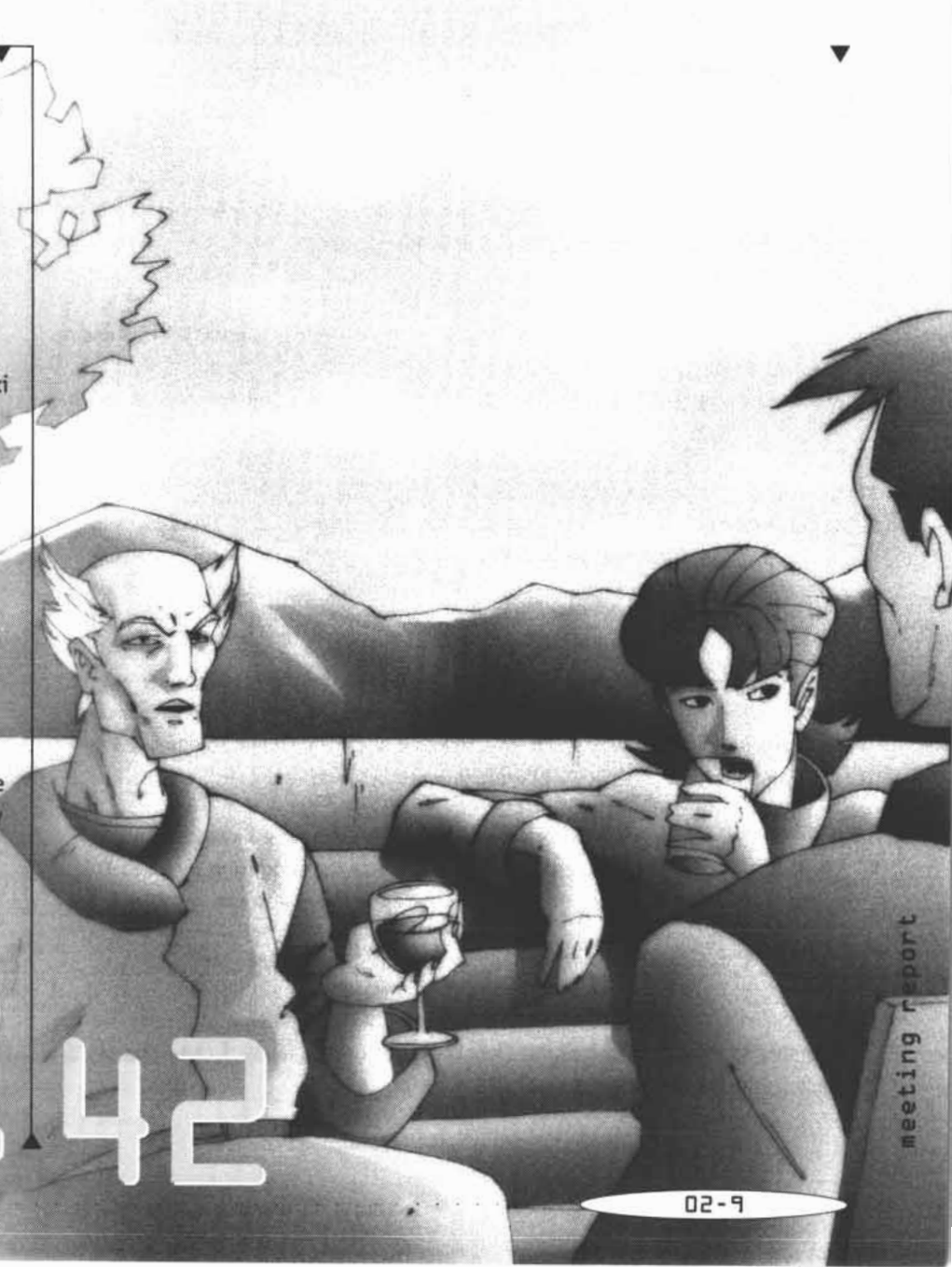
"No ma'am, it is not." She answered. "Which leads me into my next section. The variables.

"There are two major issues that will effect the timetable of this operation. The first are the Micro-Tannhauser Gates and the CEF's ability to use them. Observe..."

Another display appeared.

"The green circles are the Gates that we know exist in our system. The red circles are the micro-Gates found so far by Dr. Di Smit and her team. There are probably more out there. I believe the problem is obvious. The CEF has already used these Gates as a backdoor into our system, repeatedly. As long as we cannot match this capability, we are at a severe disadvantage. Please see the logs on Operation Starchaser and Project New Frontier for details on how we are handling this problem.

"The second variable is much more nebulous and long term. It involves the possibility of other colonies beyond the ten that we know of. No one knows how many Gateships were captured during the Colonial Wars, but in five hundred cycles and with the right resources, any one of the known colonies could have established a new settlement."



The Plan

Outskirts of Valeria, NLC

Everyone was quiet for a moment as Eloi's words sunk in. DuBeau-Slovenski spoke up again. "It seems unlikely that such an expensive effort could have been successful during that time." She looked around the room. "From all reports, Terra Nova has fared better than most, and we wouldn't have dared to set up another colony... even if we did know where to look."

Eloi was quick to answer but she seemed nervous in front of the Paxton politician. "This is true, but the effect that a hidden planet full of allies or enemies would have on our plans is too critical to overlook." No one argued her point. "If there are no further questions?" The room was silent and Eloi sat down.

"Thank you, Sous-Commandant." Tanaka took the floor again. "That's the overview anyway. A more detailed analysis of the operation and our intelligence research is contained in the info-packets in front of you." Tanaka was about to sit down but Lang interrupted him. "Kenichi... I think I speak for more than one member of this assembly, when I say that this plan is more than a *little* ambitious."

Other members around the room nodded and grunted in agreement. Lang continued. "We have undertaken the liberation of Caprice and I understand the need for that, but why should the freedom of all the known colonies fall on our shoulders? Our populace will want to know, why us?"

Tanaka looked even more tired than before. He answered slowly, "Because Miss DuBeau-Slovenski is right: even with our infighting we are better off than our colonial brothers. I believe we are the only ones who can."

Elden sighed. "With all due respect, that's hubris, sir."

"Pride is the furthest thing from my mind, Colonel Elden. We are planning to liberate entire worlds from the clutches of tyranny. I can think of no nobler work for the redemption of our own sins."

Lang frowned. Just what was that supposed to mean?

Raid!

Eyewitness Account

>Recording

"They came out of nowhere, I tell you! There's a small airport just on the other side of the ridge, maybe thirty clicks away. They use it to fly support hoppers that ferry supplies over the mountains — the roads over there ain't worth spit."

[gesture towards the horizon]

"Date back almost all the way to the colonization days... Mud trails, they are. So I was on the horn with the airport, because of the routers blew a board and we were all out of spares for that type. They were supposed to fly me one earlier in the day, before the sun went down, but the maglev was late. They never saw anything on their screens."

"Then all of a sudden there's this loud 'bang' and this shuttle appears far up in the sky. Now I've been in the war, sonny, I know what a re-entering suborb sounds like. And this wasn't one of ours, no sir."

"Black as night, they were. They landed just about two clicks away, on the other side of the powerplant. No, we didn't see them land — we went to check later. So everyone's sitting there, wondering what's going on, when the monitor sounds the alarm. Could have spared itself the trouble, because the fireball made it plain that something was wrong. We were under attack!"

"Fight back? With what, spitwads against Gear armor? Yessir, Gears... or something damn close to them."

Renewal

Sorrento, NLC

>Recording of a speech given at a Revisionist revival meeting

... I present the Reverend Father Gudrick Ansgar.

[applause]

My thanks, Brother. Brethren, hear my words. We stand here in the middle of a war which has gone on for far too long. We stand here in the midst of devastation, in the midst of ruin, in the midst of hardship the likes of which the world has not known in decades. We stand here amidst the ruins of our cities and our land, and what have we gained? Absolutely nothing.

Our sons and daughters still die in the empty wastelands to the south. Our politicians still feast in their ivory towers and claim that everything will work out. Our church — our most holy church — now speaks of nothing but the blasphemy of revenge! Words of poison spill from the lips of those who had sworn to guide and teach us; words of death which destroy all who listen.

I say that this must end.

[cheers]

This must end now, for the good of our cities. For the lives of our children. For the sake of our church and our Prophet, we must rise up and reclaim the message that has been forgotten for so long. When Second Follower Thor Hutchison, Prophet guard his soul, spoke, he did not speak of revenge. He did not speak of hate.

No. He spoke of love, and of life! He spoke of the love which binds us together as a people. He spoke of the love which the Prophet held for every one of us. He spoke of the life everlasting that comes to those who live in peace!

It is our responsibility, my brethren, to remind the world of his message. It is our most important task to spread the teachings that have been forgotten as the bombs drop around our heads. It is our *sacred duty* to bring peace back to this fractured world.

We must take up the banner of Thor Hutchison, Blessed Martyr of the Prophet, and guide our people back into the truth and the light!

We are the Hands of Thor, and we have all been blessed!

[cheering, shouting, applause]



Rhetorical

Classified Holding Facility, NLC

>Westphalia Cabinet Security Recording<

>Time Code 07:32:46<

Voice 1 [Identity Eliminated]: Welcome, Mr. Jaxon.

Ernesto Jaxon: Wha... What? Where am I?

VV1: It makes no difference. What we want to know is where you want to be.

Jaxon: Who are you people?

Voice 2 [Identity Eliminated]: Raise the lights, please.

V1: Surely you recognize Lord Chancellor Tanaka and Proconsul Lang.

Jaxon: ... The Cabinet. I thought you guys were fighting Earthers, not small hoppers like me. What do you mean, where I want to be?

V1: I'll spell it out for you. As far as the rest of the world is concerned, especially the Southern Government, you are still on the loose. No one knows that we have you. We're offering you a choice to work for us. The alternative is a Republican prison.

Jaxon: [laughter] I don't believe this! First getting blamed for the Peace River...

V2: We know who was responsible for Peace River.

Jaxon: Excuse me?

V2: I assume you know this man?

[See datafile 227-34.2]

Jaxon: ... Yes, yes of course... but...

V1: We need you to track him down. Find him and bring him to us.

Jaxon: Look even if I could pull off this spy crap, I'm not going to be any use to you. The entire planet is looking for me...



Rhetorical

Classified Holding Facility, NLC

V2: You won't be on this planet.

Jaxon:... You're joking.

V2: No. If you agree, we will be sending you to Caprice.

Jaxon: This is crazy...

V1: You have a better chance of finding him than anyone else. You both operated covertly in the Badlands for cycles; you understand his ways and his motivations.

Jaxon: You mean anyone else at your disposal, right?

<pause>

Jaxon: I have two requests.

V2: You are in no position...

Jaxon: The hell I'm not! You knew how this was going to play out when you dragged me in here. I'm not going to prison but I am not going to let the world remember my people as the worst mass murderers since Masao.

V1: What is it you want?

Jaxon: Clear their names. Release a report absolving the BRF of any involvement in the Peace River bombing. Send it to the press, the governments, the churches, everyone.

V1: We will consider it. What else?

Jaxon: I'm not a soldier. Gentle spirit help me, I'll need someone at my side when things get violent. Somebody I trust, not one of your barnabies.

V1: That can be arranged. Are you agreeing to help us?

Jaxon: Clear my people and I'm all yours.

V1: Good. Keep in mind you will be officially dead before this operation gets underway.

Jaxon: I thought as much... Mind if I write the report, though? I've always wanted to know how I was going to die...

>End Recording<

BRF Logo, Badlands p. 56

audio recording

What Price a Hero

Valeria, NLC



>Westphalia Cabinet, Medal of Honor Presentation

>Key Speaker — Captain Carlson Nash

>Transcribe Timecode: 04:55:55<

[Applause]

Thank you for such a warm welcome, ladies and gentlemen. Good evening. In my lifetime, through my work, I have had the chance to meet a lot of great people. Leaders, actors, heroes... Hero. Now there's a word that gets bandied around a lot. How do you define a hero? Valor? Dedication? Sacrifice? When do we cross that line for the greater good?

Ladies and gentlemen I give you your answer: the 77th Black Talon Squadron!

[Applause]

As you know, the Earth forces that once threatened our world are still at large. They have shackled entire star systems in their tyranny and are now poised to strike at our home world once more. In the interests of planet-wide freedom and peace, the Westphalia Cabinet has assembled combat teams of the best warriors our lands have to offer. Collectively known as the Black Talons, these protectors are our first line of defense against Earth aggression. They are also a force of liberation for the trampled populace of the invaded colonies.

Unfortunately, the Earth forces have us at a disadvantage. The powerful drives that we use to open Gates to other systems are outmatched by their advanced technology. With these advanced drives, they have access to unprotected backdoors into our system, to our home. But not for long. In a super secret operation dubbed Starchaser, the 77th, the 52nd and the 68th Black Talons were sent to Caprice, the viper's nest, to retrieve key components from their advanced drives.

What Price a Hero

Valeria, NLC

With their mission underway, there was no retreat and no cavalry to ride in to their rescue. Now, I'm not sure how many of you have seen a Gateship. They're big, really big, and the drive itself is deep inside, literally the heart of the vessel. The Black Talons couldn't remove the entire drive, they had to settle for the vital components that had our engineers stumped.

I can almost see the firefights lighting up the cold expanse of space as the Black Talons moved in on their target: the CEF Gateship *Valiant*. Our folks had the advantage of surprise and after a few short exchanges the 52nd and the 68th were well into their jobs of lasering through the hull of the ship to the drive, while a lonely 77th was left to defend their position.

Just then, an Earth destroyer moved in from the shadows with a compliment of drones. Against a force like this, many a commander would have called a retreat, but Captain Udall of the 77th knew that this was the one and only chance our folks would have to get what we needed without a much larger fight. He chose to stand fast and boldly face the enemy.

Had he ordered his troops to attack they would have, but they would have been blown from the sky in a hail of lasers and particle beams. Instead Udall and the 77th charged the destroyer and clung to its hull, delivering point blank heavy weapons fire. When the panicked officers aboard the destroyer tried to use their drones to clean the hull they did more damage to themselves than to the 77th. It didn't take long for the Gears' weapons to hit something critical and blow that ship to dust.

The Black Talon teams brought home the parts our techies need to start to catch up to the Earther's Gate drives. We won't have to worry about Earth ships sneaking around our system, attacking our ships and bombing our homes. With the new Gate drives we will be able to help our colonial brethren find the peace they so richly deserve. However we should remember the price.

Only three out of the seven members of the 77th survived the mission. One of the lost was Udall himself. What they gave us was more important than a few spare parts from a spaceship. It was the ability to face our would-be aggressors on equal footing. They will always be remembered as the heroes responsible for our freedom. The heroes we want to be.

[applause]

>end transcription<

Kenichi,
Thought you might like to see this. The
press ate it up. I don't know whose
idea it was to get Nash for the
ceremony, but they should be promoted.
Isn't he running for office somewhere?
-L.R.

Black Talons on the Couch

Pioneer, UMF

To: Halban Kiskess, Head of Personnel, Westphalia Cabinet
From: Dr. Christopher Debuque
Re: Welcome to the Team

As head psychiatrist of the Black Talon Program, let me be the first to properly welcome you to your position. Welcome to the cuckoo's nest.

If this loose attitude offends you, you should quit now. The Black Talon program is full of turmoil and greatness, often found side by side. Not only is it an overly ambitious, expensive, improbable military operation but a living example of human chaos theory in action. As the new Head of Personnel for the Talon program, you should learn right away to be as flexible as possible.

I will admit that I thought this project was doomed to failure from day one. Please, don't get me wrong; I wanted the program to work as much as anyone else, but after seeing the kinds of people that were being placed in such volatile situations, I expected the worst... and I have been constantly surprised.

As an example, let me walk you through the profiles of the Seventh Black Talon squadron, "The Crows."

The Crows pulled their name from Earth mythology; specifically a pair of birds that sat on the shoulders of the Norse god Odin, telling him of the things they had seen in their day's flight. The Crows' specialty is scouting and forward observation. When they do engage in actual combat, they allow their enemies to make the first move, taking their weaknesses into account. Though a dangerous tactic, they have used it with success many times over.

The Crows' leader, Lieutenant James Anders — a Norlight native — can almost never be found with the rest of the team until a mission comes through. He is a withdrawn and cerebral officer, probably due to his training as a Dorothean Monk. Anders would still be with the monks if he not had what he described as a "crisis of faith." I believe that his crisis was less with his faith and more with the Northern Revisionist Church and their penchant for manipulation.

Two of Red Team's members, Corporal Collins "Freak Dawg" Matthew and Soldat Chet "Willy" Cole, have made it their job to break through Anders' shell. Fortunately they seem to be having about as positive effect as they can considering their debauchers ways. This odd couple, Collins from the Protectorate and Cole from the Republic, have formed a strong friendship and can often be found chasing women in the cantina.

The other member of the Crows' Red Team, Penarch Philius Underhill is a former Protector from the Humanist Alliance. Underhill is a shy quiet man until he gets into the cockpit of his Gear. Then I've heard things from him that would make a spacer blush. His only hobby is electronics and he acts as the teams on-site tech. I haven't heard Underhill say one nice thing about his teammates.

If Red Team is the physical side of the Crows, Blue Team is the spiritual side. Blue Team is led by Yalin "Jolly" Wesk, a Rebel Dreamer also from the Alliance. Wesk tends to be very easygoing, to the point of flippancy. Her Gear is covered with traditional hand paintings that, she says, allow her to communicate better with her machine.

Lance Wolf was a Badlander duelist and member of the Khayr ad-Din Army until he was recruited by the Westphalia Cabinet. Wolf is open, friendly and noble to a fault. His calm disposition and optimistic outlook have kept a few of the team members afloat during the more difficult missions.

Michelle Dunaway, also from the Badlands, would rather be painting. Her works, based mostly on the teachings of the Revisionist Prophet Mamoud, have been seen in Northern galleries and churches. Her training as a Gear pilot came abruptly during the Interpolar War when she had to defend Badlands towns against the Polar forces. Dunaway and Wesk have an ongoing debate on the nature of faith and belief. She designed the dual crow logo that appears on all the Crows' vehicles.

Black Talons on the Couch

Pioneer, UMF

Psychologically speaking, only a few of these people should be able to work together. Were these normal conditions, they would have chosen sides and beat each other to a pulp by now. Instead, when they operate as a team, each of them does their job and does it remarkably well. This model has proven true for virtually all of the Talon teams that I have had contact with.

I can only hypothesize that the idea of "doing something for the greater good" has pulled these otherwise incompatible people together. Then again I could be wrong. Suffice it to say the Black Talon program has produced some of the most interesting group dynamics I have ever had the pleasure of working with but I have no idea why the members aren't killing each other.

Sincerely,

Dr. Chris Debuque



Breaking News

Valeria, NLC

>time index: 08:14:59<

We interrupt this broadcast to bring you an important announcement from the Westphalia Cabinet's Press Room.

[Speaker — Margarie Felano, Executive Assistant]

Thank you and good evening. If we are ready... Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen Proconsul Lang Regina of the Western Frontier Protectorate.

[Speaker — Lang Regina, Proconsul WFP]

Good morning, members of the press and honored guests. We have called this meeting to announce that the Westphalia Cabinet, through intense investigation and aid from world governments, has discovered the location of the person believed to be a party to the bombing of Peace River.

[intense noise]

Please, please — I will answer questions after the announcement.

Ernesto Jaxon, one-time leader of the movement known as the Badlands Revolutionary Front, was found dead late last night.

[murmurs]

In all of our investigations, we found no evidence to establish further BRF involvement; while we do not in any way condone the past or future actions of this group, we do not believe they should be blamed for this heinous crime. The details are as follow...

>Next Page<

New Frontiers

Marathon, UMF

To: Westphalia Cabinet, Special Projects Committee
From: Iandens Astro Development Laboratory
Re: Project New Frontier, Status Report

Dear Sirs,

I am writing to give you a first hand account of our progress on the new Intersystem Gate Drives you commissioned us to develop based on the captured CEF design.

First and foremost, allow me to extend my personal thanks along with the thanks of my associates at IADL. We know that you had a variety of independent researchers to choose from when you decided not to involve the polar governments. We fully understand the importance of the research you have assigned us as well as the need for a speedy completion of the task before us.

Now, for the progress report.

IADL has completed the first stage of Project New Frontier, wherein we have incorporated all of the data provided by eyewitnesses, intelligence reports and the expert insight of Dr. Di Smit. From this information we have been able to determine the operational parameters and capabilities of the Commonwealth's Gate drives.

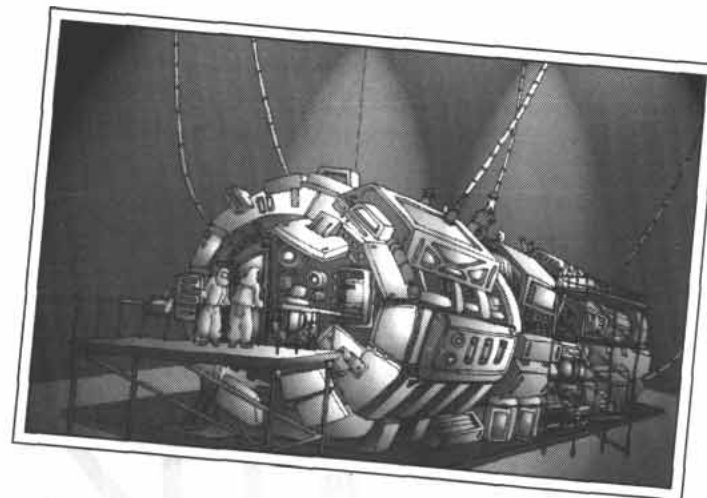
We are now deeply involved in stage two wherein we reverse engineer the captured drive you provided us. Along with the data from stage one we have a very clear idea of how to proceed. Everything should go smoothly and we have only a few hurdles in technology translation left before we can move on to stage three and begin testing your new drive.

At this point I would like to make one small request. We here at IADL understand your need for secrecy and security on this project. However, having your security personnel around the captured engine at all times, especially when we are working on it, is becoming cumbersome. It will take us far less time if we can remove them from the clean rooms and testing labs when we are doing our work. Please consider this inconsequential change in procedure for the benefit of the project.

Other than this small matter, we are finding our accommodations quite comfortable. The station is large enough for us to work and still have room to relax, when need be. Some of us, including myself, are just happy to be living, and working, in space. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jathan Micha
IADL Director



Keeping the Faithful

Sorrento, NLC

>Provenance: Watchers' Database<

>Ref.: Prophet's Shield Activities<

>Note: This letter was sent to all the local reverends and church heads. While we do agree with the message, we cannot help but be suspicious of their motives. This bears further inquiries.<

Reverend Follower of the Faith,

We hope this letter finds you well and at peace. You, and others who have received this package, have been chosen by the church to take part in a great and blessed movement for your people, the faithful followers of Mamoud.

You have no doubt noticed that your congregation shrunk during the war and is still yet to return to its previous numbers. The people are suffering. The war with its confusion and loss has distracted people from the word of the Prophet. Their hearts are searching for answers. Answers that only you can give them.

We would suggest the following plan of action to help draw the people back to your guidance and comfort.

1. With so many dead, people are starting to question life after death and the unification with the Gentle Spirit. Do not allow outside philosophies to infest your congregation with false ideas. Adjust your sermons to address these things in the Prophet's Words. The people need to be comforted by your faith in the death cycle.

2. There are complaints that the war was a useless waste of life. Remind your congregation of the glory of the North, that life is a small price to pay for the Prophet's land. Enclosed in this package are several biographies of soldiers and descriptions of their acts beyond the call of duty in service of the Northern military. Please speak of them in your sermons to remind the people of

our faithful heroes. Also, keep in mind that there are elements that seek to debase them, defiling their histories with so-called truth. Trust only these biographies.

3. Also enclosed are several detailed reports on the losses we suffered at the hands of the Southern armies. Please use these facts in your sermons to remind the people of Northern sacrifice and their own mortality.

4. To assist you with any difficulties, Church officials will be visiting some of you to observe your situations. Please provide them with any assistance they might need to understand your difficulties. They are there to help you.

We hope you find these suggestions helpful and know that you will be doing your best in the eyes of Mamoud to revive interest in the church. The church must serve as a rallying point of Northern rebuilding, and we have a unique chance in this post-war period to be more supportive than ever by keeping with the Prophet's words and spreading them to all regions of the Northern lands. A strong church makes a strong nation.

With the Prophet's grace go into the world,

Reverend Mother Maya Fajil



Confession

Valeria, NLC

>Location: Blessed Soul of the Prophet Chapel, Valeria

>Audio Level: Boost Pick-Up 5

Monk: Reverend-Mother! >unidentified noise< How may I help you?

Reverend-Mother Fajil: please, brother, get up. Let me take care of our sister. I believe she is in need of assistance.

Monk: I shall leave you alone then. She is waiting in the chapel.

>voice ident: Grant Marshall Victoria Edden-Smythe<

VES: Reverend-Mother? What brings you here?

R-M Fajil: A friend told me one of my charges was troubled, so I came to help. Step into the alcove, so that you may confide in peace.

>ruffled sounds; change in ambient sound levels. Auto-adjusting<

VES: Blessed Spirit, bring wisdom to my brethren so that she can comfort my soul.

R-M Fajil: Blessed be the Prophet. Speak, my child.

VES: Reverend-Mother, my faith is causing me great pain.

R-M Fajil: How so, my child?

VES: My wife... Our relationship has changed. We've always been busy, and we never did spend the time together that we should have, but... Since the War, she's *changed*. She consorts with Southerners and unbelievers; I don't think she brought the girls to service once in the past cycle.

R-M Fajil: These are grave matters you speak of, my child.

VES: I know. I... I don't know what to do. I've soldiered on for many cycles, I've defended my faith and my league. But this... this is too different. I can't raise armies against my family. I don't know what to do anymore.

R-M Fajil: Would the Prophet have wanted the North to ally with godless heathens?

VES: ...No, of course not.

R-M Fajil: Then it is your duty to help us bring your wife back to the fold. I don't think she means harm to you, your children or our people.

VES: ...

R-M Fajil: A unified world, blessed by the shining light of the Church, would be a boon to all, yes?

R-M Fajil: You can be part of it. Just let us into your life. We can help.



Rise Up, All Ye Faithful

Fort James, WFP

>Fort James Evening News
>Main Plaza, Palacio de Crystal

We are presently heading towards what appears to be an impromptu demonstration on the main plaza of the Palacio, here in the heart of the city. We will attempt to get closer to the action to see what the commotion is all about.

[indistinct noises]

We can see better from where we are now; it seems that an orator is making a speech to an assembled group of people. No clan affiliations seem to be exhibited, and it's hard to say whether or not this is indeed a clan event, as was previously announced. We can confirm that no permits have been given out for this location today; this came as a complete surprise to the clerks we have just contacted at City Hall.

We can hear the speaker now. He exorting the workers to rise up... — the noise level here is unbelievable, ladies and gentlemen — and fight against prejudice. We can't get audio for you, folks, we can barely make out his words ourselves. He's — he's telling the gathered throng to claim their rightful places beside the clans. His words are creating a commotion on the other side of the crowd, it seems. A fight of some sort has broken out and...

[loud noise]

The local constables have just arrived on the scene along with a crowd control vehicle. I can see the Gear's head looming over the bushes to my right. The protesters — or whomever they are — are scattering in disorder now. Some of them... Yes, some of them are coming to blow with the first rank of the police.

Anna, we're going to move away now to a safer location. We'll be back in a few minutes with more information.

Memo — Peters, Sanchez and Walker

>To: Laurenz
>From: Adamo
>Note: Eyes Only

Laurenz,

For Prophet's sake, get your people back in line. Yesterday's little show could have had a lot more serious repercussions than just a few bruises. I appreciate your efforts, especially against Lang, but stirring trouble among the clanless — what were you thinking?

Don't go and get smart. I know you too well.



Second Look: The South

From the Journals of Nicosia Renault

(34 Autumn 1941) — I'm starting to wonder if there is something in the water at the Southern pole that makes people want to scheme and plot. The situations I outlined in my journal last year are far from resolved.

At least the situation in the Emirates has quieted down somewhat. Now that Bhravo's gone, Shirow has free reign of the place. He married one of the last remaining Masao women, and when their first child is born, a new dynasty will be established. Or at least that's the plan. There are a lot of people who feel that the days of the noble ruling class are numbered.

The clean-up of Skavara is ongoing. A fusion torch designed to propel a million-ton spacecraft through space generates as much energy as a nuclear warhead — you can imagine what that did to the city-state. There's now a big gash filled with cooled lava crossing the city like a malevolent scar.

Fortunately, most of the population was evacuated before the launch, with a whole lot of them just herded up into the ship like cattle. The Emirates' biggest concern right now is the ragtag groups descending on the crippled city like vultures. The reports I've received aren't pretty.

(34 Autumn 1941) — I've received a distressing number of reports from Saragossa lately.

The SPFI is on the move. They've kept back, quiet, for the past few cycles, and many believed the city-state would finally see peace. But they're returning to the political scene with a vengeance. I suspect there is much more to this than just the desire to win independence and bring back their ancient league. Their operations are well planned, and all of them seem aimed at crippling some aspect of the Southern military might in the region, not just kick them out of Saragossa. It just doesn't fit the pattern...

Speaking of patterns, our old friends in the Southern Republic leadership are at it again. I knew it would pay off one day to save the life of that young staffer, but never that much. She's been bringing me snippets of conversations and copies of memos that could put the Republic in a state of civil war should they get out. I've warned her that she was risking much more than her life, but she seems to think that it's just the usual Republican mind games. I may have to ask a favor to someone in Port Oasis and have her forcibly relocated, for her own safety.

>end log<

>open file/ south 1<

34-AU-43

A Soul in Conflict

Saragossa, SR

Who am I?

That is the question that haunts me now. Damien. Melanie Fontaine. Teresa Piepho. Masks within masks within masks, and I am no longer sure of which I truly wear and which are merely fictions.

Five cycles ago (when did I stop thinking in years?), when Jarad first came to me and told me that my long patience and servitude had come to an end — that our one-time masters had returned from Mother Earth to lead us, once again, into a bright new age — I felt nothing. Nothing. Twenty cycles of work and there was nothing.

Memory: 1916. We'd just lost the Battle of Baja, and I was standing in the office of the new Intelligence Director for Terranovan Operations. She (I've long since forgotten the bitch's name) laid out the Golab Plan. And I knew the war was lost. Golab was so far-fetched and impossible and impractical that it was utter foolishness to even hope for its success.

Yet here we are, twenty-six cycles — eighteen years — later, and it's about to come true. Every word of it and more. I infiltrated the SPFI. I became its leader. I increased its base of power. Forged connections with every major terrorist group in the southern hemisphere. Turned Terranovan against Terranovan. Laid the groundwork for the Return. And in forty-two days it comes to an end. I win. We win.

So why does it feel like everything has gone wrong? Why are there times when the only thing I want to do is scream, at the top of my lungs: *it wasn't supposed to be this way!*

I've watched men and women and even children bleed and suffer and die for Saragossa. Because they believed in the cause. Because they believed in freedom. Because they believed... Because they believed in me.

How do I tell them they were wrong? How do I look into the face of Lily Artaud, who lost everyone she ever loved to those Republican butchers... How do I look into her eyes and tell her it was all for nothing? That it was all a lie? That *I* was a lie?

I don't know. There's a part of me — Teresa Piepho — that knows this is all meaningless. I'm just identifying with my cover. Perfectly natural after eighteen years in the role. But there's another part of me — the part of me that is Melanie Fontaine — that asks how half of my life can be a lie. I don't know how to answer her, and until I do I just need to keep moving — the same way I always have. Pack it away for another day, as Scot says.

I think Hypolite is really on board this time, but I'm going to have to keep an eye on him until I'm sure. His participation in this is vital, and it's helping to convince Dominic that we need to keep our activity tightly focused on the Republic. If he had his way he'd try to use the SPFI as a bludgeon against the whole planet — despite the insanity of it.

The new shipments from Peace River will start coming in next week, so I'll need to start activating the rest of the sleepers. Combined with the stuff we got out of the compounds before the Talons hit them, we should have more than enough to make a really big bang. 02.SP.42

We lost two more cells to ambushes last week, and another was nearly wiped out while off duty. That's the most so far. I'm beginning to believe we may have a bigger problem on our hands than I first thought.

Prodigal Child

Mekong Dominion

"Misery attracts more of the same. It's an old Mekong saying that my grandmother used to say all the time. And it does seem to be true — look at what's been happening here! War, plague... but take our burden, and pray to our ancestors for strength in adversity.

"I have news for you. I have heard that you seek the man known as Khan. For what foolish purposes I do not know, nor do I care to. Khan and I have crossed paths in the past, which is surely why you have sought me out...

It is true that I have kept an eye on him throughout the cycles, if only to avoid him. I have no wish to lose another arm. Beware, you may not be as lucky as I was.

"Khan and his men have not been heard from in these parts for at least a season. There are murmurs and rumors that they have been seen traveling West toward the Serpentine Mountains. For what purposes I do not know.

"A man from a trading caravan that was attacked last season said that he overheard two of his lieutenants talk about 'how screwed up the boss seemed, and he'd have to make up his mind whether he should claim his dues.'

"What? No, you can't talk to him. He died of his wounds last week. Now leave an old man alone. I must rest."

MD/ESE Border

"I can see them now. They are moving due North-West in the direction of Skavara. No, I don't know who they are. Listen... >static< ...yes, Gears. Yes, I know we don't have anyone in the region except my group. That's what I'm trying to tell you!

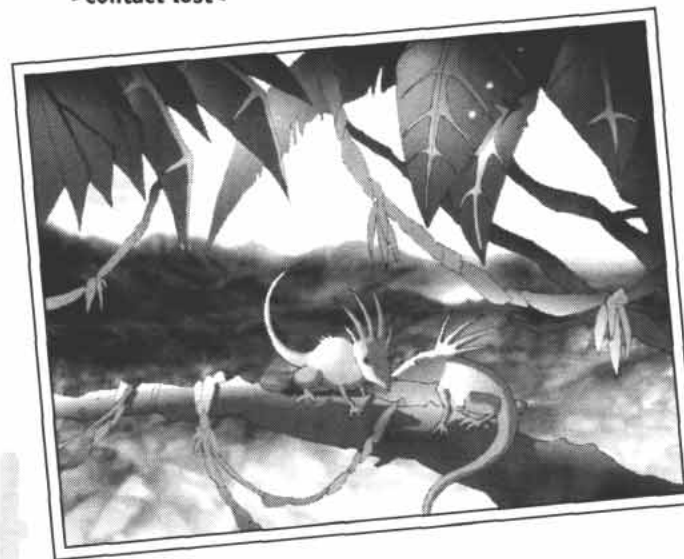
"We've been tracking them for about half an hour. It was hell trying to find a higher ground to regain contact with you. Even now the comm...>static< ...bad. No, the sat uplink is busted. Look, we can't deal with them all by ourselves — we're a recon group, dammit, not a bloody attack force! We... Wait one.

"Luang says he think they've spotted us. We're changing >static< ...ositions and >static<

>static<

"...nder indirect fire! Repeat, we are under fire! We are... >static<

>contact lost<



Chasing Shadows

Bethany, SR

>Receiving File<

>Decryption Enabled<

Project Log of Sandrine Locouer

Day 3

Okay boss, this is a good one. You asked me to find and catalogue all the cabals working against the Republic government. Not an easy job but you don't pay me for easy work. I did what I could to track down the obvious ones; those are listed in the attached datafile. However, in the process of collecting this information, I discovered another string of clues emerging. Seems like there are some new players in town. I'm in the process of tracking down this new group through the usual contacts.

Day 6

Had dinner with Xavier again last night. As I've said before, he's charming but a little overbearing. I gave him the instructions you prepared and asked him if he had heard anything on the new cabal. He said he had a lead. His lead went right to his bedchambers, of course. Silly man didn't have anything, and I mean *anything*, of interest.

Day 7

My contact in the Order of the Falcon reported that a new leader had been discovered in the Bethany SPFI cell. I am enroute and will have another update in a few days.

Day 12

I should get a raise. These damn SPFI folks are about the most paranoid I've ever seen. They'd fit right in at the Estates General! The large amount on the expense tab is the result of buying two crates of illegal weapons from the

Bethany cell. I don't know what I'll do with them just yet, but I have a few ideas. On the upside, I managed to meet with the cell leader. Not my best evening.

I asked one too many questions and was almost killed on the spot. Luckily I was able to convince them to check my alias. They had good intelligence information, and my old revolutionary reputation saved my behind. The cell leader pointed me in the right direction of this new cabal. I am a little concerned that I am on a wild dawg chase.

Day 15

Found them! It's not a true cabal but a collection of group politicians and rebels with a single goal: usurp the current Republican power structure. I saw people I recognized from half the groups I catalogued earlier, including the SPFI, of course. They don't seem concerned with the obvious negative side effects their goals would have for the rest of the world, considering the Cabinet and the new Earth situation.

I have been asked to extend an invitation to you to join their group. I would recommend it at least for now. What they are planning will definitely affect your interests. Call it damage control. I'll be waiting for your reply.



Activation

Saragossa, SR

To: Rising Sun
From: Dark Albatross
Code: A32-56787

Alyssa Sampon, Mark Kae, Jaene Bertaud, Dayvid Arcad and Michelle Snowe have been contacted. Cell 32 should be activated by week's end. We'll swap them in for cell 11 on the PDC job. You've got to stop grabbing my best units. I don't know what you're using them for, but if we keep training in newbies at this pace something's going to snap sooner or later.

To: Dark Albatross
From: Rising Sun
Code: S32-94576

Confirm receipt of A32-56787. Drop point Alpha K7; 22:00 5 Spring.

About the newbies: I know. Something big is coming down, though, and we need all the experienced hands we can get. That's all I can tell you. Bear with me, okay?

To: Rising Sun
From: Dark Albatross
Code: A32-67898

You know me. I'll do what needs to be done. Just like I always have.

02.SP.42

First Contact

Mission Briefing

Sharp: My name is Rabert Sharp. You may call me Captain. I am your sole connection to the SPFI. This is both for your protection and the protection of the organization as a whole.

Alyssa. Jaene. Mark. Dayvid. Michelle. You are cell 32. If you open the sealed packages in front of you, you'll find a list of confidential drop points. Do not share these with one another or with me. They will be used to contact you on an individual basis as needed. Check them regularly, but not predictably. Do you have any questions?

We operate through specific missions. You'll be contacted by me through a set of prearranged drop points — either with a mission briefing or a meeting place, like this one, to receive your missions. Now that you've been activated you'll be sent out on missions on a fairly regular basis.

Mark: What about equipment?

Sharp: Equipment will be provided as necessary. Any more questions? [five second pause] All right, let's—

Alyssa: Do we have to give up our lives? Our jobs? Our friends?

Sharp: No. Absolutely not. In fact, it will be best if you continue your lives as normally as possible. Anything else? All right, let's get down to business, then. You're going to be piggy-backed for your first mission — that means you're going to team up with another cell. Two cells, in fact. You'll rendezvous with them at one of our covert supply depots in two days. Once contact has been made you're to coordinate and decide on a plan to carry out the mission parameters: three bombs need to be planted at specific locations in the solar collector fields and set to detonate at 32:00 on the 5th. Here's the drop location — memorize that because you're not going to be taking any of this paperwork with you. And remember: do not discuss your personal identities or any details of your life with the other cells. We survive through precaution.

Republic vs. Republic

Recording

>Spybeam Recording<

From the depth of my soul I love the Alliance. The Alliance is my mother and father, my lover and child. Now this grand and glorious nation that I treasure has been violated by the despicable shadow that is the Southern Republic.

Republican scientists released the Theban Blight into our lands and people, Republican troops killed our proud leaders, and now Republican politicians plot to cut our land apart and feast on its resources to fill their own pockets.

Yuri Gropius gave us an unparalleled system for living and like all living things the system will evolve. We will evolve. This evolution will not be one of complacency and surrender as before, it will be an evolution of confrontation.

Now I know that this disturbs some of you; violence is not the way you lived your lives, but that was before the Republic took our lives from us. If we want peace, we will fight.

However, we will not fight alone. In the last cycle I have traveled to many people, hidden conclaves like this one. Once we may have called them many things, religious fanatics, deviants... The time for names is over, they are now our brothers and sisters in pain. We are all Alliance born and shall be an Alliance free.

>end recording<

Spy Report

To: SRID

From: Agent Colburn

Re: New Leadership

As you can see from the attached recording, the once-scattered remnants of the Humanist Alliance are becoming a force to be reckoned with. This new leader of theirs has surpassed the so-called limits of initiative and non-violent programming that our psych boys told us about.

His commentary about traveling is not exaggerated. We have checked into several of the known resistance cells and they are beginning massive organization as well. The Free Alliance Movement, the Gardenan Underground, even Rebel Dreamers near Raleigh. I don't have to tell you that these are groups that would never have worked together before now.

These groups are going to become even more dedicated and organized. With the troubles at home we may not be able to deal with this primed head when it finally goes off. I have a feeling that the collective nature of the HA is beginning to rear its nasty side... and we have it by the tail.

Fox's Claws

Port Oasis, SR

>Personal Recorder Log<

>Planning with deRouen<

>recording on — secure<

>time index: 30:15:22<

Molay: Getting impatient, dear woman?

deRouen: Not impatient, busy. The Alliance basically useless and Mekong obviously making a move for power, I have a lot of work. Add to that the Cabinet and the constant shadowplays by other Republic leaders and even you might be overwhelmed.

Molay: Are you saying you can't do the job?

deRouen: I'm saying, get to the point.

Molay: I just wanted an update on your father's retirement.

deRouen: Cute. There is no update, why would you think —

Molay: You don't know an agent named Gelpsi? You didn't assign him to watch your father's safe house in Bethany?

deRouen: How dare you! Which hussy was it this time? Marcus, Katrine...

Molay: Neither. My agents discovered this printout floating around the offices yesterday. Look familiar? <pause>

Molay: Sloppy work. Had your father discovered this—

deRouen: I know my job, old man. The person responsible will be removed. But you didn't bring this up out of the kindness of your heart, did you?

Molay: Of course not. I simply wanted to remind you that you are not alone in your schemes. That your moves are being watched carefully. That is all.

deRouen: Well... you have my utmost thanks.

Molay: Of course I do. <pause>

Molay: She's gone. Did you get all of that?

Voice [unidentified] I heard. She's getting more and more irritable.

Molay: Yes. I wonder if the time has come to switch sides again, with the current state of affairs in the north.

Voice: Not yet. She will stumble again. Wait for it.

Molay: I am taking an awful risk in trusting you.

Voice: You don't trust me and that's why we work well together. The time is almost right for the Estates General to be swept clean.

>end log<



recorder log

The Mission

Saragossa, SR

- >Operation Planning Refence 67
- >Notes included — see text
- >Excerpts from the facility's Operation Guide:

The wide expanse of the solar collector fields have been broken into several sections for easy maintenance. Each section is about the size of three or four city blocks and is surrounded by an electrically charged barbed wire fence to keep the wildlife and casual visitors out. A guard tower, manned with a minimum of three guards at any given time (referer to section 7.8, *Security Assignments*), is placed every hundred meters on the fences that run along the outer edges of the compound.

A grid of narrow dirt paths, which are used for routine maintenance, is found in each section. This is also where the guard patrol, consisting typically of five guards, circulates (refer to section 7.8.3).

A single gate is built in each fence to allow access out of the collector fields or into the next section. Gates allowing access into the compound are found only in one out of every five exterior sections and have a guard tower placed on either side of them.

The solar collectors themselves are fairly standard models. The collector plates are mounted on large posts which allow them to be individually rotated to follow the path of the sun in the sky and maximize their exposure. Each plate is about two meters off the ground, but this varies depending on the angle of inclination at any given moment.

>Check the attached map for the exact position of the device.
Also attached is the map of the current guard patrol route.

Malfunction

Solar Collector Fields, Saragossa

>Solar Collector Field Security Cameras D5-11A, D5-11B

Vid-capture 1:

Mark: Field is clear. Gamma team move into position.

Vid-capture 2:

Alyssa: Take up point positions.

Vid-capture 3:

Alyssa: How long, Mark?

Mark: Give me another twenty seconds. I just need to—

[sound of explosion]

Vid-capture 4:

Michelle: What the hell was that?!

Alyssa: I dunno.

Jaene: It sounded like it was Beta team. You don't think—

Mark: Sweet Prophet!

Alyssa: What is it? Report, dammit!

Mark The timer on this thing just went active! We've got thirty seconds to detonation!

15.SP.42

Ambush

Solar Collector Fields, Saragossa

Vid-capture 5:

Michelle: We've got to get out of here!

Mark: There's no time. This thing packs enough punch to take out a city block. We'd never get clear.

Alyssa: Can you deactivate it?

Mark: I'm working on it.

[ten-second pause]

Jaene: Dammit, Mark—

Mark: There, I got it!

Vid-capture 6:

Dayvid: That's it, I'm outta here!

Alyssa: Hold your position.

Dayvid: Screw that! I'm—

Alyssa: Hold your goddamn position! [five-second pause] Mark, can you still set that thing to go off the way it's supposed to?

Mark: I dunno. Maybe. I'll try.

Dayvid: You're crazy!

Alyssa: We're going to finish this mission. Everyone be quiet and keep your eyes sharp.

Vid-capture 7:

[96-second pause]

Michelle: Alyssa, if the bombs were rigged to go off early—

Alyssa: I know.

[49-second pause]

Mark: Got it!

Alyssa: All right, let's get the hell out of here.

Michelle: I've got movement... It's Alpha Team! They must have—

[gunfire]

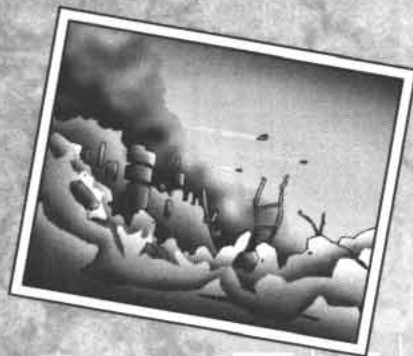
Vid-capture 8:

Alyssa: Michelle! Michelle answer me! Dayvid, Jaene — lay down cover fire! Mark, help me with Michelle! We've got to get out of here!

>data lost<

Husk of a City

Skavara, ESE



To: SRID

From: Agent Penelope

Re: Skavara Mop-up

There are several layers of irony surrounding the recent situation in Skavara. Since the dramatic departure of the Eastern Sun, the burnt out shell of the city-state has garnered more attention than in recent decades as everyone tries to figure out why they couldn't anticipate this move. Several survey teams from scientists to our own Directorate have scoured the city for clues. Now, while the city is a pile of ash, they pay attention.

Patriarch Shirow sent his troops in to occupy the city-state two days ago, "before anyone else can lay claim to it." At least that was his announcement to the Northern Press. I am assuming "anyone" is a reference to us. Very funny. I think he'll have a little while to wait before we show up.

Shirow's troops have ended up fighting the survivors of the ES liftoff. Refugees, trying to eke out a living amongst the ruins, are mixed together with scavengers and Outland bandits. In his paranoia, Shirow is fighting himself. If he doesn't get aid to his countrymen soon, they will join sides with the bandits and he will have finally created the enemy that he so fears.

I will do my best to keep you up to date but I do not think that the ESE will be in any shape to cause us difficulties.

Change of Plans

Phone Log

>phone log<

>connect Alyssa Sampon, civilian, Saragossa<

>connect Rabert Sharp, civilian, Saragossa<

Alyssa: *It's Alyssa.*

Sharp: *What the hell did you do? Two of my best teams are missing, the mission is a complete botch job — What happened? If you've screwed up and gotten good men killed, I swear that you'll—*

Alyssa: *We were set up.*

Sharp: *What?*

Alyssa: *One of the other cells rigged the bombs to go off early. We think they took out the third cell that way. We managed to disarm ours, but when it didn't go off they showed up to finish the job.*

Sharp: *Jesus... Are you sure? No, never mind. Of course you're sure. What's your team's status?*

Alyssa: *Michelle got shot. In the leg. Not bad. Mark patched her up. Dayvid's freaking. We're holed up in Jaene's apartment. What the hell is going on, sir?*

Sharp: *I don't know... We need to talk in person. Meet me at the Blue Moon Café on Rue Algeron.*

Alyssa: *Alright. When?*

Sharp: *Now. I'll meet you there.*

>disconnect<

Sudden Death

Blue Moon Café, Saragossa

Vid-Capture 1:

Dayvid: Where is he?

Alyssa: He'll be here. Give him time.

Dayvid: We shouldn't have left Michelle alone.

Alyssa: There wasn't much choice, Dayvid. She wasn't in any—

Vid-Capture 2:

Mark: There he is.

Dayvid: It's about time.

Vid-Capture 3:

Alyssa: Rabert! Over here!

Vid-Capture 4:

[sounds of gunfire]

Jaene: Oh— !

Mark: What—

Alyssa: NO!

Vid-Capture 5:

Dayvid: We've got to get out of here!

Mark: Alyssa! We've got to go!

Mother's Tears

Personal Letter

Dearest Favia,

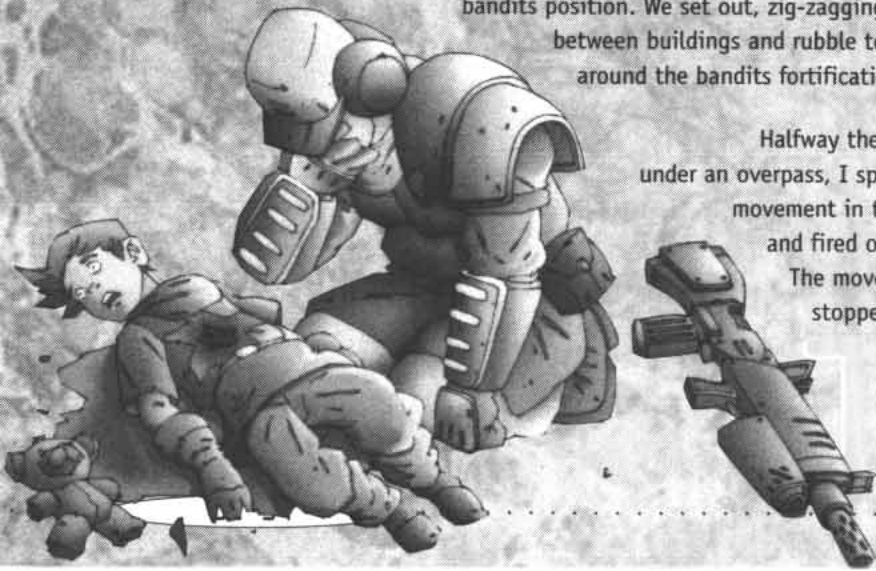
I write to you with a heavy heart and a mind in chaos.

We have been holding Skavara for two weeks now. Bandits and homeless have been scavenging the city's abandoned sections for anything to live on. Our job is to keep them from establishing any permanent positions that can be used by enemy forces. If we keep them scattered they cannot be a threat. Unfortunately they recently found a cache of weapons, so now we have real firefights instead of just sticks, rocks and knives.

Yesterday it rained for the first time in months and, of course, we were called to roust a group of bandits from one of the many abandoned factories. A firefight broke out as soon as we were in range and there were twice the number of bandits then we had been told.

I am used to being under fire but with our being outnumbered and a delay in reinforcements, I was beginning to get a little edgy. Ten eternal minutes into the fight the bandits had already killed six of our men and wounded twelve more. My commanding officer gave me orders to take a group of men and flank the bandits position. We set out, zig-zagging between buildings and rubble to get around the bandits fortification.

Halfway there,
under an overpass, I spied
movement in the ruins
and fired on it.
The movement
stopped and



we proceeded, keeping an eye out behind us. We didn't have time to involve ourselves in another exchange. God help me my love, we didn't check on the position.

We were able to take the bandits by surprise and force them in the direction of our main group using volleys after volleys of grenades. The men say that I was brave, that I kept them from being afraid with my heroic manner. All of that meant nothing to me when we returned to the underpass. I checked for the bandit I had shot at earlier. I did not find a bandit but a small boy.

He was laying twisted in a puddle of muddy water, clutching a wooden toy, probably something he found in the ruins. His blood mixed with the puddle in a cloud of deep red. There was more blood, a metre away on a stone slab, running with the rain. One of my bullets had caught him in the side and taken half of his belly with it on the way. The bubbles at his pale blue lips told me that he had lived for at least a little while.

I couldn't move. I just stood, looking into his eyes and hearing my mother weep for my sin. Something inside me screamed for him to get up, to run and play. I don't remember how I got back to our camp. I couldn't sleep at all last night so I went through all of my weapons and emptied them of ammunition. Then I found a tree and buried the bullets as I should have buried the boy.

I do not think that I can fight any more. It has become far too difficult to face each day without your gentle comfort. I know that before leaving, I preached to you the importance of the new regime and of the loyalty we must all have to Patriarch Shirow. I still believe these things but I fear that I myself cannot live up to them. Please place this letter on my mother's shrine and pray to her to forgive me. I miss you and I miss my home. I miss the days before I murdered a child.

God bless you, my love,

Laheen

Moment of Desperation

Recorded Meeting

>recording time index: 08:40:00<

>open log<

Mark: Okay, what do we do now?

Alyssa: I don't know.

Dayvid: What do you mean you don't know? Aren't you supposed to know everything? Wasn't all of this your stupid idea?

Mark: Lay off her, Dayvid.

Dayvid: Oh, that's right! Step up and protect her!

Mark: Look you little punk, if you want to—

Jaene: Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! Both of you just shut up!

Dayvid: Why don't you shut up, you little—

Alyssa: That's enough.

Dayvid: Who the hell—

Alyssa: That's *enough*. [five-second pause] All right, we know that something has gone seriously wrong. And we know that our drop points have dried up. So, the way I see it, we can either start running and never look back... or we can get to the bottom of this, right here and now.

Dayvid: Yeah, sure. And how are we supposed to do that, genius?

Alyssa: I don't know. We should... Let's start with Sharp's apartment. He's the one connection we've got.

>close log<

Unexpected Enemy

Phone Log

>connect Mark Kae, civilian, Saragossa<

>connect Jaene Bertaud, civilian, Saragossa<

Mark: Jaene?

Jaene: Mark! Thank god! Are you all right?

Mark: I'm fine. Is Alyssa there?

Jaene: Yeah. Let me grab her.

[twenty-second pause]

Alyssa: Mark? Where are you? You were supposed to be here two hours ago.

Mark: The team I was following is dead.

Alyssa: How?

Mark: Another cell assassinated them.

Alyssa: Sweet Prophet...

Mark: It gets worse. I tailed the assassins back to a warehouse in Midtown. I think they've been posting all their ops out of there — but the problem's bigger than that. I was just getting ready to take off when they got a phone call from the last person I would've expected.

Alyssa: Who?

Mark: Damien. [ten-second pause] I'll be there in half an hour.

>disconnect<

Protector

SRID Report

They are back, just like I said they would be. They were just marshalling their forces, waiting for us to lower our guard. Well, there we have it. At 0700 this morning, we got it by a fast strike that came from the east, reinforced two minutes later by another flanking force moving on the opposite side. They ground us for a few minutes before leaving with a bunch of supplies.

They were quite bold about it as well. Seems they repainted part or most of their machine in white, with a large blue Humanist icon prominently displayed on the chest or hull. It's either for recognition or bravado, but it works. Some of the local workers we've hired for the camp have started to call them *les démons blancs*, and I can't really blame them. It's been near impossible to keep the workers around because of that.

Field Report

>**From:** Lieutenant Emily Sanguines
>**To:** Westphalia Cabinet
>**Re:** Humanist Alliance protectors

Forces believed to be of Humanist Alliance origins are rallying and have been observed counterattacking Republican positions in the area around Gardena and White Rock. In fact, we've seen strikes as far east as Oxford. It's not a full-fledged war, because the Alliance protectors are cut off from their support structure, so it's more of a well-executed guerilla operation.

We're not entirely sure where they come from. A number of them seem to be survivors from the battle at White Rock, back in '36.

>see attached reference file<

Satellite surveillance lost track of many fleeing units in the Tobian Plain in the week that followed. They may have been hiding underground, or even in the MacAllen Network. We've spotted a group leaving an orbital tracking in the Northeast. They seem to be composed mostly on the Humanist's hover tanks; even with all their dust clouds, it's only by pure chance that we've seen them. I wonder what they were doing this far North?

Someone had proposed they would try to link up with the Free Emirates, but that doesn't seem to have happened. Maybe they didn't have the resources to travel that far; more likely, they analysed the situation and failed to see how it would advance their cause.

I do wonder how the protector caste managed to survive the destruction of the command structure that give meaning to their lives, though. Perhaps their fabled "social processing" isn't as deep as we all thought it was. Maybe they really have — had, sorry — a quasi-utopia.

Bullet Without a Name

Audio Capture

Soundbite 1:

Alyssa: I'm in position. Is the camera working?

Mark: Yeah, I can see them. Any sign of our target?

Alyssa: No, not — Wait. There's a car coming.

Soundbite 2:

Mark: Get set.

Alyssa: Prepping my shot.

Soundbite 3:

Mark: That's our boy. Wait 'til he's in the clear.

Alyssa: Check.

Mark: Hold it... Hold it...

Soundbite 4:

Alyssa: I'm taking it!

Soundbite 5:

Alyssa: Dammit!

Mark: Can you get another shot?

Alyssa: No... No, I don't think so.

Mark: Then get the hell out of there.

New Orders

Drop Mail

To: All Neo-Golab Operatives

From: Dominic Jarad

Date: 29 Spring 1942

On the 21st an attempt was made to assassinate Golab. Although unsuccessful in their action, the assassins escaped the scene before they could be apprehended. Our initial assessment of the event suggested that the perpetrators were most likely SRID or SIU agents, seeking to disrupt SPFI operations.

Over the course of the last week, however, our follow-up investigation a more disturbing possibility: we believe that a renegade SPFI cell — comprising Alyssa Sampon, Mark Kae, Jaene Bertaud, Dayvid Arcad and Michelle Snowe — has discovered at least part of Operation Golab.

At this point in time we believe that *their communication* with other SPFI cells has been cut off, and it is doubtful that they will seek to pass on their knowledge to legitimate Republican authorities — but there is no way to tell when this situation may change.

If you should make contact with any of these individuals you should, if it does not conflict with your existing duties, pursue and execute with extreme prejudice. If this does conflict with your other duties you should use your best judgment as to which has a higher priority — and make contact with another Golab operative as soon as possible to pass on any relevant information you may obtain.

To: Damien

From: Dominic Jarad

Date: 29 Spring 1942

Enclosed you'll find the order that I'm passing on to the other Golab operatives. I think it may be a wise idea to pass on a similar order to the legitimate SPFI cells — prejudicing them against any contact with these rogues and multiplying our eyes in the field.

internal memo

Unexpected Savior

Saragossa, SR

>To: Nico

>From: Sarago-buddy (Encrypt Confirm 769A)

>Re: Last week SPFI incident

[I thought this short film would interest you. These images are from a helmet cam worn by the assassination team. It was recovered after the incident. The point of view in the first shot is from a roof opposite the patio outside the apartment where the targets are holed up. You can see two more assassins rappelling down the wall on either side of the patio.]

Vid-Capture 1:

Voice 1: Confirm positions.

Voice 2: Position confirmed.

Voice 3: Position confirmed.

[Extreme close-up of targets; they're obviously arguing about something. We can see the door of the room behind them. Keep an eye on it.]

Vid-Capture 2:

Voice 1: Okay, make the move!

Voice 2: Check.

Voice 3: Check.

[The two rappellers have swung inwards and are firing into the apartment. Note their techniques — remind you of anything?]

Vid-Capture 3:

[sounds of gunfire]

Voice 1: Okay, take up positions on the deck and prepare to move in.

[more gunfire]

Voice 1: Do we have a confirmed kill zone?

Voice 2: I don't —

Voice 3: Wait - Who is that?

[The door to the apartment has been kicked in. Someone is walking through in full combat armor with a gun raised. My first thought was reinforcement, but keep watching.]

Vid-Capture 4:

Voice 3: What the hell is going on? Who is that? Is that one of us?

Voice 2: I don't — Sh . . .

[sounds of gunfire]

Voice 1: Beta! Gamma! Get out — What?

Vid-Capture 5:

Voice 1: No! Don't!

>static<

Truth and Lies

Saragossa, SR

Alyssa: All right. You saved our lives, so I'm willing to give you five minutes. But that's all you get.

Damien: I can understand that you'd be hesitant to listen to me, all things considered—

Dayvid: There's a freakin' understatement, lady.

Jaene: Dayvid, shut up.

Damien: —but if you don't, then the Earthers win.

Mark: You're an Earther.

Damien: Yes. No. Look... All I really seem to know any more is that I don't know. **[three-second pause]**

Mark: Just who the hell are you?

Damien: My real name is Teresa Piepho. I was an undercover agent assigned to Saragossa during the War of the Alliance, under the cover identity of Melanie Fontaine. As Melanie I became Damien. Then Earth left, and I didn't really think they were ever going to come back. But I kept up the pretense because... well... what else was there to do? **[three-second pause]** Five cycles ago a man named Dominic Jarad came to me and told me that the CEF was preparing to return to Terra Nova, and they were looking to use deep cover moles like myself to spread dissension and chaos across the planet. **[five-second pause]**

Alyssa: Go on.

Damien: I had a plan, called the Day of Terror. I was going to get as many rebel groups across the southern hemisphere as I could to cooperate — only for a day, but with a collective purpose and drive to strike a blow against the tyrants of the Southern Republic that would never be forgotten.

Mark: But?

Damien: But the plan was subverted by Jarad and his masters. Now the Day of Terror is being used as a tool to destabilize Terra Nova's infrastructure and unity as a part of an overall strategy for the eventual invasion. Instead of being a blow for freedom, it's a tool for tyranny.

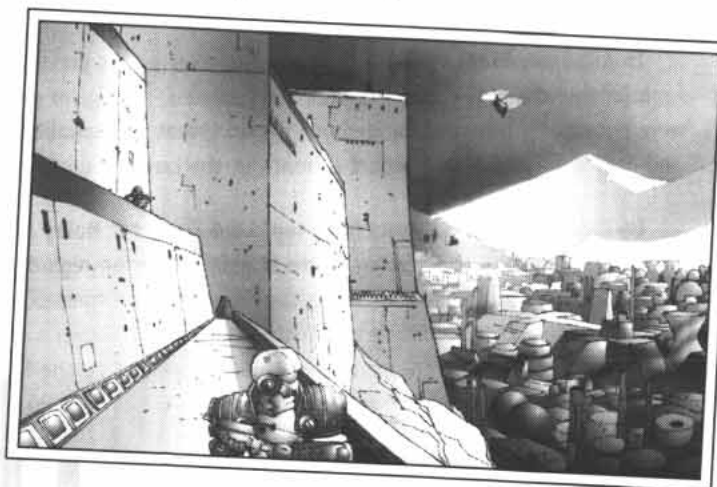
Alyssa: So where do we come in?

Damien: I need your help. It's not too late to set this thing right. If I can root out the CEF elements that infiltrated the SPFI, then I can avert the damage that doesn't need to be done — and keep the project focused on freedom, not destruction. But I can't do it alone. Jarad has riddled my base of power with his own men. But you... you're outside of his equations. Will you help me?

[15-second pause]

Dayvid: Okay. I'll bite: When does the big boy go boom?

Damien: Ten days. The first day of Summer.



Saragossa Burns

The Port Oasis Review

SARAGOSSA — At 06:00 today an explosion rocked Remembrance Plaza here in Saragossa, destroying the monuments that had stood for three centuries as a shining reminder of the Republic's efforts to rebuild this fine city and incorporate it fully into Republican life.

Worse, this tragic incident was only the beginning of today's horrific events. Over the past eighteen hours approximately 112 separate terrorist attacks, with claimed coordination by the SPFI, have plagued communities across the southern hemisphere.

Saragossa itself has been hit particularly hard, with the Republican installations in Hightown apparently being targeted specifically for a concentrated assault by the terrorist organization. Multiple fires continue to rage out of control, and will most likely continue until dawn.

The SPFI have referred to these vicious attacks as a "Day of Terror," with their leader — the enigmatic figure known as Damien — issuing a public statement describing the bombings as "a clarion call ... heralding a new era of freedom and awakening the citizens of the Republic to their reality of their vaunted nation."

In response, Prime Minister deRouen has reversed his previous position of minimizing the SPFI's effect on domestic policies, saying, in part, that the SPFI "were potentially the most dangerous internal threat to Republican interests" and calling for a renewed "effort to root out the traitors in our midst."

By contrast, today's events have sent Lord Protector Molay on veritable warpath. In addition to stepping up his standard position regarding the SPFI, Molay has also apparently been targeting the Prime Minister himself in his statements this evening: "If the existing administration had not shown a deplorable lack of responsibility towards the persistent threat presented by the SPFI, then the events of today would never have come to pass."

Officials with the Westphalia Cabinet have withheld comment at this time.

Endgame

Golab Safe House

Jarad: I don't give a damn how many men we've lost! I want those targets eliminated!

Damien: It's over, Dominic.

Jarad: What? How did you get in here? Where have you been?

Damien: Hang up the phone.

Jarad: I -

[sound of gunshot]

Damien: Hang it up.

Jarad: What the hell do you think you're doing?

Damien: I'm cleaning house.

Jarad: What are you— ? You're behind this! You're the one who's been wiping out our agents!

Damien: Not our agents, Dominic. *Your* agents.

Jarad: I'll report you to high command! Your life won't be worth a half-geld! Who the hell do you think you are?

Damien: Melanie Fontaine.

Jarad: What— ? I'll see you—

[sound of gunshot]

Damien: No. You won't.

Lysia

Strathclyde, ESE

>file opened

>ident code received

>Greetings, Victoria. Recording begins.

Things have been relatively quiet for a while now. The Skavara incident has been the main focus of all the news programs, leaving the oh-so-grand Emir alone to build his new empire. Except that he's not really alone, is he. He's got that Masao witch to take up the reigns with him, to sit with him, to sleep with him... he's trading an empire for an heir.

Strange, how it's all worked out. I was there when his father died, and I sat with him when he was cramming for exams. I was there for every illness, every problem, every time he needed a warm hand or a warm bed.

And now *he* rules by his side for no other reason than her name. If I had been a Masao, things would be different. We've been together long enough for me to have given him a houseful of healthy children.

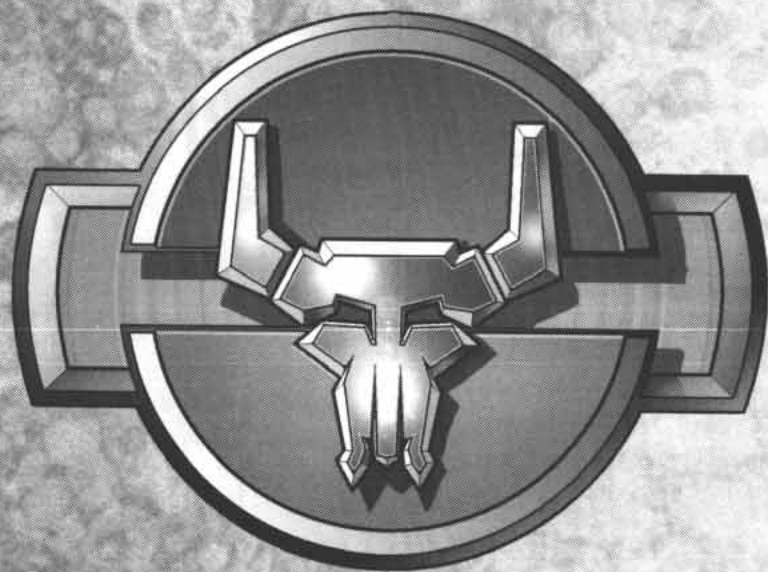
There was hope, at first, when months passed and she showed no signs of pregnancy; I prayed every night that she would prove sterile... then he'd have no choice but to return to me. If she couldn't give him a child, there'd be no point to that union. He doesn't love her.

But there's no point to my prayers now. She's conceived, which means that even if this child doesn't survive they've got the potential to have more. Who knows. Maybe by the time he's finally mine again, I'll be too old to give him children of our own; wouldn't that just be the most poetic of ironies?

It wasn't so bad, at the beginning. Working as the palace solicitor meant that I saw him every day, and he still set aside time for us to be together, for us to pretend that things were just the same as they were. I was a fool to believe that it could continue like that forever.

Now that she carries his child, there's nothing Nigel won't do for her; no request or imperious command he won't drop every task to fulfill. He puts up with her crying fits and screaming tantrums on a daily basis, waiting for that moment when she produces his precious child, a child of the Masao and Shirow lines. With the way things are beginning to degrade around here, I wonder if the child will turn out as mad as his uncle... and his mother?





Third Look: The Badlands

From the Journals of Nicosia Renault

(40 Autumn 1941) — The Badlands... Strange that such a desolate land has played such an important part in the history of our planet. It is the crossroad to everything, and the birthplace of most of the events and people who have changed the course of history.

Now that the Interpolar war is a thing of the past, and the primary conflicts engendered by it have subsided, people have started to rebuild. I've seen holos of the new settlement Paxton is building for their people. It's very decentralized, this time, with numerous Oasis towers linked by armored subways and covered roads. When finished, the complex will sprawl over an area nearly six times as big as the old city used to be. This time they are not taking any chances.

I didn't know Paxton had so many resources stashed away in numerated bank accounts — and judging from their reactions, many of the bankers were surprised as well! With the desperate energy Paxton's people are putting into this, I expect the Riverans to be back on their feet within a few cycles at the most. I'd advise anyone to get out of their way then: they are going to go looking for answers, and they won't accept "no."

The momentary power void left behind by Peace River seems to have been filled nicely by the New Coalition. With the Port Arthur Korps protecting them on one side and the KADA standing guard on the other, they had little to fear from polar meddlings. In many cases, the confederations themselves recognized this: the final pullout from Lance Point was quick and discrete, the better to preserve Republican pride, I guess. I wonder if that means the workers' lot will improve? I don't know what will happen with the Coalition, but they will be worth keeping an eye on.

Speaking of the Khayr ad-Din Army, those are going to need watching as well. What does a warrior do once the war is over? The people who used to flock to see them fight have found new heroes, and in any case, will they want to clash with those whose side they fought on not so long ago? Maybe some of them will become lone vigilantes, or will join up with the standing militias of NuCoal. Some may even decide to retire.

(41 Autumn 1941) — That's strange. Normally, my data filters have no problem adjusting the tactical map based on the intelligence reports I get (it was a good idea to automate the process). But I've been getting reports lately that do not make any sense — troops that cannot be present at that location, or an objective with no immediate tactical value. Either someone is not filling mission plans with the main tactical computers at headquarters, or we've got a new faction all set to make trouble.

>end log<

>open file/ badlands 1<

41 . AU . 41

Desert Wind

Jasmine's Hope Oasis Tower, BLD



Nathan Matthews stood at the very top of the oasis tower Jasmine's Hope, looking into the night. Dry winds caressed his face, whispering secrets of the deep desert into his ears.

"Storm's coming," he said to no one. The steel and ceramic structure of the tower's main solar array creaked in response. Transformers and junction boxes thrummed in steady conversation nearby. Nathan would miss those sounds.

He had lived in Jasmine's Hope for six cycles now, having been welcomed with open arms even though he arrived without a dinar to his name. He had repaid his new family with hard work and loyalty, helping to rebuild the once-abandoned tower into a home for more than twenty families and many other outcasts.

During the Interpolar war Nathan had seen action against Northern and Southern forces alike. The Khayr ad-Din army couldn't be everywhere, and he and his rag tag crew of mercenaries and duelists were the only defense the oasis tower had. For reasons that were never clear to him, the others had made him their combat leader. Too many men and women had died under his command before he took the role seriously.

One of the access doors banged open behind him. He didn't turn around. Only one person would ever bother him during one of his reveries, and soon her arms slipped around his chest, her head pressing against his back.

Delilah Ambrose was Nathan's second in command. A strong young woman with the spirit of an armadillo beast, her wealthy Peace River breeding had been worked out of her by years of harsh desert life. A long, quiet moment passed, then:

"You're leaving, aren't you," she said. He turned in her arms and embraced her.

"Yes." He thought of more to say but nothing came out. She let go and stepped away from him, her face showing mixed emotions.

Desert Wind

Situation

"What did they say to you? Are they threatening you with something?" The reason had to be out of his control, he would never leave on his own...

"It wasn't like that—"

"Then what?"

"These guys were from the Westphalia Cabinet. They're asking me to go out to Caprice to fight the Earthers, Delilah. I guess I impressed them with my work here during the war, I don't know."

She just looked at him, frowning.

"They gave me a chance to make...", he stumbled for the right word, why was he doing this? "a difference, to be important. I don't know really."

Delilah's frown deepened. She balled her fists at her sides. She would not hit him... yet.

"Are you kidding me? You don't think you've proven yourself a big enough macho Gear-jock with the crap you went through here, you have to go a... a thousand whatever light-years away to do it again?" Her voice had risen to a hoarse menace, her soft eyes hardening. "What the hell are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking that I need to take part in protecting this planet," Nathan said sharply, "that this is too important to pass up... and that somebody has to take revenge for your father." Her fists unclenched as the fight drained out of her. He swallowed hard and placed his hands on her shoulders.

"I'm thinking that I'll miss you," he said softly. He wrapped his arms around her shivering body and held on tightly.

"I love you..." Delilah whispered into the wind.

Exploration

Lab Report

Report: 9-806-112

Paxton Environmental Laboratories

Date: 16 Spring 1942

Team Leader: Dr. Melusina Cuvier

Attached Files: botan-37; atlan-221; utopia-490

Staffing Changes: Paxton Technician Sonja Grazzi has been removed from the project, due to suspected security breach. A replacement has not yet been assigned.

We are ready to move into the final series of tests on the extraction device, what the lab technicians have recently dubbed 'Project Stinger.' The latching mechanism on the storage compartment has been replaced and is now functioning within specifications; the containment fields still present something of a problem, however, and at this time I recommend bringing Dr. Edwards back onto the main project team, so that his work will not be hampered by the various levels of classification involved.

Tests show that the 'Stinger,' when operated remotely, performs its function under all required conditions, as denoted in the introductory project documents provided by our sponsors. However, the 'Stinger' has not yet been tested for rejection, nor has it been ascertained that it will perform as required once it has been implanted. I request that we be allowed to move into proper testing of the device, including, but not limited to, the recruitment of human and GREL volunteers. It is vital that we ensure both the safety of the carriers and the functionality of the device before it is released for use in the field.

See attached files for results of remote tests in various environmental conditions. Budget update to follow.

The Price of Secrecy

Jasmine's Hope Oasis Tower, BLD

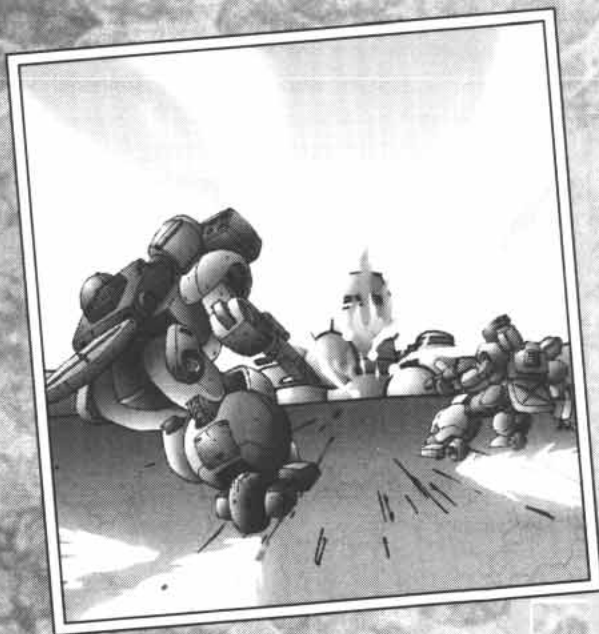
MOST SECRET - EYES ONLY

To: Deputy Minister Claude Faure

From: Lieutenant Rochelle Phiya, SR Military Intelligence

Re: Recent actions of Sous-Lieutenant Gerard Fontaine

Honored sir, attached please find the incident report generated by Sous-Lieutenant Gerard Fontaine detailing the attack on the oasis tower Jasmine's Hope. Also please find reports generated by myself during my investigation of the incident. I believe that these events could have been better controlled and the needless slaughter of hundreds of Badlanders avoided. Allow me to shed some light on a few of Sous-Lieutenant Fontaine's claims.



Sous-Lieutenant Fontaine had been assigned to establish one of our quiet supply depots. According to his report, the depot encountered repeated harassment from a group of "heavily armed rovers" who "refused all attempts to communicate." Sous-Lieutenant Fontaine then states that his scouting mission to determine the origin and/or base of operations of the mysterious group led him to an oasis tower long thought abandoned by its parent corporation. "An oasis tower rebuilt as a fortress" and "place of refuge for criminals" who "attacked with lethal force." Sous-Lieutenant Fontaine's answer to this was an all-out attack on the tower resulting in its structural failure and collapse.

I was assigned to investigate this gross display of force during a time of desperately needed discretion. Immediately upon hearing Fontaine's name I knew that something had gone wrong, that the truth of the matter had been twisted.

As you know, I attended DeGarmo academy with Fontaine. During this time I discovered him to be a high strung man of violent temper. How he became an officer in our fine military I'll never understand. With all due respect, sir, I blame politics.

Sous-Lieutenant Fontaine had, in fact, set up the supply depot with expert efficiency. When a group of unknown Heavy Gears appeared on the perimeter, Fontaine ordered his men to open fire, thinking they were Northern scouts. Honestly, sir, I would have done the same. The Gears retreated and at this point it was obvious they were one of the random Badland militias that sprouted up during the Interpolar War.

The Price of Secrecy

Jasmine's Hope Oasis Tower, BLD

The next night the Gears returned. It was my belief, based on the testimony of witnesses, that they were attempting to set boundaries and attempt a truce. Again Fontaine ordered his men to open fire. This time Southern soldiers were wounded as the unnamed party returned fire. Fontaine himself was grazed by a light caliber round. Apparently, this infuriated him to the point of launching a full sortie to find the renegades. Undoubtedly, the battle at the oasis tower was short and brutal considering the amount of firepower Fontaine had arrayed against it. (See copy of munitions requisition forms attached.) It is impossible to determine who fired first.

I visited the tower this morning and found no evidence of either criminal activity or the armored fortress Fontaine spoke of in his report. Just an old oasis tower and the corpses of fifty or so families and dozens of other Badlanders.

My agents are currently removing evidence of Southern involvement and tracking down any escapees of the event. This is not a part of the job I enjoy; unfortunately the secrecy of our movements must be maintained.

It is my hope that this report along with the other files attached, will prove to you that I was within my authority when I ordered the execution of Sous-Lieutenant Fontaine earlier today under the charge of Negligence with Fatality. Taking back the Republic is the most honorable work I have had the pleasure of doing in my career and I will not see it jeopardized by fools and madmen. All other officers involved have been appropriately reassigned and the situation is now under control.

Humbly in your service,

Lieutenant Rochelle Phiya

03-WI-43

Business as Usual

Wounded Knee

>Encoding Type: 898Y Enable
>Passkey: 65959500sfgh999
>Welcome, sir. You have new messages.

>From: Hank
>Re: New Biz

Hi Dupree,

Glad to hear you're doing well — it's been a while since we talked. I hope the war didn't put too much of a cramp on your import/export business. Now that the kids are done squabbling, there are some golden opportunities to be had picking up the pieces. I've got a golden shipment for you waiting south of the border, but I don't need to tell you I've got some rival offers. The easy money is attracting more daks than ever.

But you and I are old friends, and I'd rather you get it, eh?

That's if you're still in the business, of course. I hear your political ambitions have taken you down south, and with all the attention NuCoal is getting, you must be getting some good action on that side. At least I hope so — I haven't seen you on the last trideo report. Careful not to turn into an honest politico; you'll never get anything done.

How's Sundra doing these days?

— Hank

personal message

Emerging Power

NuCoal Status Report

The New Coalition, also known by the shortened name NuCoal, has grown over the past few cycles from a simple trade alliance into a small Badlands league. It has gained much strength, mostly through its association with KADA and its reluctance to get involved in North/South conflicts.

This independent attitude is pervasive in Badlands societies, and the Coalition endures only because it takes this into account. NuCoal is the brainchild of Royz Malkom, former mayor of Fort Neil; Royz created it as a cooperative trade coalition that would allow the city-states of the Westridge Range to keep their markets and resist pressure to align with one of the polar powers.

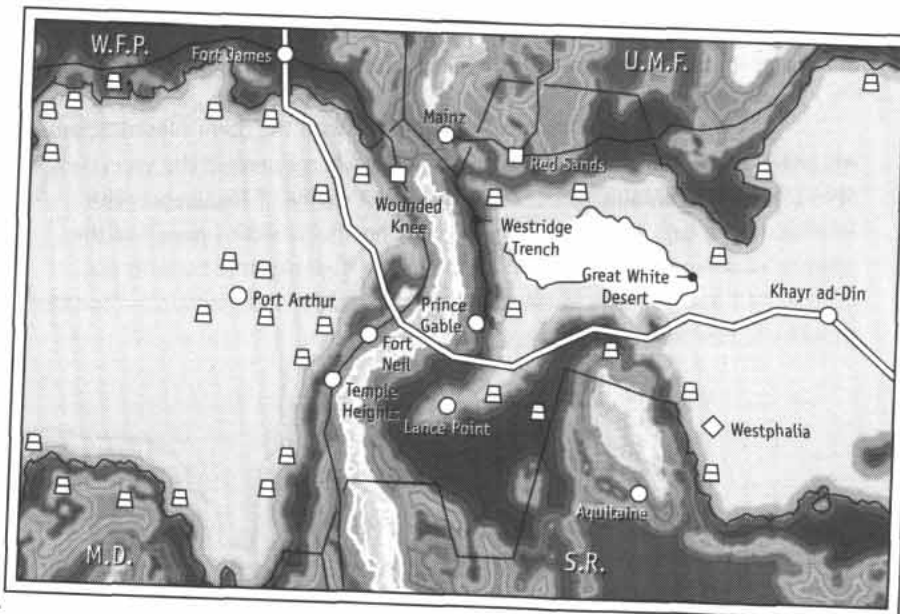
Though the negotiations took over six cycles to complete, the alliance united Port Arthur, Fort Neil, Prince Gable, Temple Heights, Lance Point and several small Westridge towns and counties into a single trade and defense entity. Port Arthur's pledge of the Arthurian Korps as the deterrent necessary to allow NuCoal to survive polar aggression made it possible to convince virtually all local governments to take part.

The NuCoal Agreement established a free-trade zone between all the signatories and a joint policy of low tariffs to outside trade. No partner may raise trade tariffs or enter into exclusive trade agreements without the accord of all other signatories, and cannot withdraw from the free-trade zone. The joint trade policy remains governed by the New Coalition Council of Trade that sits in Prince Gable.

The Arthurian Korps provided much of the early defensive power of the Coalition. It remained somewhat distant, and could effectively patrol the western half of the territory included in the accord. The purchase of weaponry from Paxton Arms has allowed smaller communities to gradually transform their militias into viable forces. The creation of the Khayr ad-Din Army proved to be the decisive moment in the history of the fledging league. Now under the protection of two powerful armed forces, and with weapons of their own, the NuCoal city-states were in a position to defend themselves effectively for the first time.

The effects were felt almost immediately. Southern MILICIA stationed in Lance Point were quickly recalled home; the Interpolar War gave the Republican government a suitable excuse to do so without losing face, which probably saved thousands of lives. Similarly, the Northern Guard regiment assigned to keep watch over Prince Gable returned north in the summer of TN 1938. The combined efforts of KADA and the Arthurian Korps would keep a nearly 5000 kilometers stretch of the Badlands mostly safe from aggression throughout the Interpolar War, though only the immediate areas around the main settlements and city-states of NuCoal were truly protected.

Today, NuCoal stands stronger than before, and may yet ask to take its place among the other planetary governments. The Coalition's main worry at this time concerns the remnants of the New Human Republic, Colonel Proust's former nation of 'supermen.' Proust and a core group of followers have escaped the destruction of the army, and are now in hiding somewhere in this quadrant.



Forgotten

Khayr ad-Din, Western Desert

>Interview with Jose Darron, Scavenger

"We've certainly struck it rich, all right. What with the war and all, there are broken vehicles all over the place, ripe for the picking. You only need to bend down almost anywhere there's a road, a well or something of 'tactical significance,' whatever that means. Sometimes you can even find fuel and ammo, if you're lucky. So, yeah, life's a bit easier since a couple cycles back.

"Rovers? Sure, they're around. I still sleep with my gun, and so do my sons and associates. They still want the stuff we find to repair and reload their own weapons. But they don't have free reign of the place anymore, unless you're in one of the really, really isolated backwaters. See, now that the KADA boys and girls don't have the polar idiots — hey, no offense — to shoot at, they've started hunting rovers instead. Got quite a few, too.

"The smart ones packed up and moved elsewhere, where the picking's easier. Like way elsewhere. KADA's stretched pretty thin, but each of their guys can handle a whole rover pack on his own. The Earthers rule the Barrington Basin, so forget that; and Paxton is flexing muscles in the Karaq Wastes, just to show they ain't dead yet. So the rovers have moved to more isolated corners, trying to get people to forget them for a while. The brave ones — or at least the more desperate — have started hitting towns on the edge of the polar areas. I guess they figure the big boys will be too busy fighting the Earthers to deal with them.

"Myself, though, I think they're pretty safe. Earthers, pffa — we gave them a sound licking back in '16, they ain't coming back. Just an excuse to control people a bit more, is all..."

Sport

KADA Patrol Route 26

We were out on a standard perimeter patrol when we came across what looked like a caravan at first. We decided to investigate, since there were no caravans logged to pass through the area for at least two weeks. According to the log, however, a small trade delegation was supposed to check in three days ago, and we'd seen neither hide nor hair of them.

When we came closer, however, we realized this caravan was no trade delegation. The small column was made up of a series of patched-together vehicles, all of them armed with at least a light machinegun on the roof. They had two Gears with them, one Iguana and one Hunter that appeared to have been remotorized with another engine. They took one look at us and decided that we were easy pickings. Give my thanks to Myra's techs — their 'hidden improvements' worked wonderfully.

For all the rover group's armament, they didn't put up much of a fight. We flanked them and roasted them quickly enough. We salvaged what we could from their equipment; most of it was in pretty shoddy condition to begin with, so there wasn't much we could use.

The interesting thing is what we found in the wagon attached to the caravan. We thought it was just another supply cart, but when we opened it up we found people inside — a young couple and an older man. He's pretty badly beaten; the scar tissue's stiffened his joints up but good. The couple are all right, if a bit traumatized. Farm folk don't take well to being sold into slavery.

Warriors

From the Journals of Nicos Renault

>Personal Notes of Nicos Renault

The Khayr ad-Din Army, the ragtag group assembled by Katryne Sanz to protect Badlanders' interest during the Interpolar War, has succeeded. They have managed to spare the scattered communities of the Western Desert from the worst of the conflict.

I have to admire the work of Sanz: she took a bunch of loners and exiles and forged them into a powerful fighting force that managed to stand up to much greater numbers. They compensated for their low numbers through raw skill, and indeed many among their rank were either Duelists or veterans of previous conflicts.



They kept the Gamma MagLev open and out of the hands of the polar armies, which ultimately probably helped to bring a quicker end to the fighting. To most people, the Gamma MagLev is just a rail line, devoid of tactical value. They forget, or just don't know about, the enormous quantities of supplies that a modern army needs to keep in fighting shape: fuel, food, ammunition, spare parts. The initial loads can be brought by shuttles or landships, but for extended operations a more secure (and reliable) road is needed. The polar armies would have attempted to use the MagLev as one such route, inevitably smothering or strangling the small towns and communities living along it.

The only people who aren't really happy with the KADA, besides their enemies, are the arena promoters and the fans. The former have lost much of their star power and must now do with second-stringers, while the latter miss the old glory days of the dueling leagues. It's not all that bad for the fans, though — a new trideo show out of the Southern Republic follows the exploit of a crack dueling team in "Trash City," where they constantly compete against their opposite numbers on the Northern side. Though the show is heavily romanticized, the action sequences are unbelievable. The fans are eating it up; at this rate, there won't be any need for the real duelists to go back to the arena!

What will happen to the Army now? They fought the Interpolar War; they fought the so-called "White War" on the edge of the Great White Desert. They've proven themselves many times over. I don't think they will remain as a standing armed force, though — the regional economies are not set-up to support more than their usual defense militias unless there's a threat on the horizon. But they will be around, should they be needed.

Paxton Returns

Progress Report

>From: Jibril Haig
>To: HEO Milani DuBeau-Slovenski
>Re: New Facilities
>preceding page<

Relocation effort is proceeding apace. It's been almost two cycles, so I think we've located virtually all possible survivors. We're relying heavily on external help, as both our medical supplies and trained staff are in perilously short supply. Finding shelter space to accommodate extended families has been one of the more difficult tasks to date.

The new Oasis towers and other facilities are being assembled according to the schedule. Your insistence at having a decentralized urban design is proving to be a cause for concern, as it has split our work groups and has generated a lot of duplicated effort. I'd advise a consultation with one of the urban planning groups (see attached file); they may be able to come up with a solution that produces the same results with a more efficient division of labor.

The food supplies continue to be rationed according to need. We'll be able to cover the basic minimum daily caloric requirement for everyone for quite some time, but that won't keep us healthy for long; just alive. We've had offers of aid from one of the Revisionist sects lately; some group calling themselves the 'Hand of Thor' has promised shipments of grain and various proteins, on condition that they be allowed to send down some preachers to 'succor the lost.' It's your call, Ma'am, but I recommend that we take their offer. We can always stick them in the shelters and set them to changing bandages if we have to.

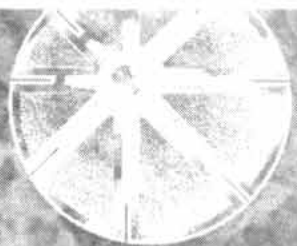
We're opening up some of the cleaner compounds as hostels for the moment. We've had teams sweep, and all sensitive and/or dangerous materials have been removed. As long as there's a roof overhead and a clean floor to lay blankets on, most people don't seem to care where they're put for now. The docs from Medecins Sans Politique say that there don't seem to be lingering physical effects from the disaster, so it shouldn't be too much of a problem.

We've set a couple of teams to work on reattaching the plumbing pipes throughout the core and routing them to the new locations. Once we can get fresh running water and some basic sanitary facilities operating again, we'll start to see the cases of dysentery and food poisoning drop. That'll allow us to focus our medical personnel, such as they are, on the people who are truly in need. We'll also get increased productivity.

Upon your approval, the road team is set to conscript all non-essential vehicles to work on the repaving and reconstruction efforts near the MagLev Link. They need a huge amount of building materials to make any kind of difference, and the vehicles they have now simply aren't up to the task. Sure, some folks will complain about having their personal vehicles taken away, but without roads, they aren't going anywhere in the first place.

As for those shipments that the Cabinet sent through last week, don't get too effusively thankful. This couldn't have been more than some massive PR exercise from the polar states; the shipment contained nothing but crap. The toys are poor quality at best — some even need power sources! — and candy bars aren't going to keep the kids from getting scurvy or lice. Lang and Tanaka are just playing to the crowds while we do all the dirty work.

>next page<



Fourth Look: Caprice

From the Journals of Nicosia Renault

(06 Winter 1942) — Access to the Cabinet's files has been a boon and a bane at the same time. Or maybe it's just that I'm too curious. Del Pulciano had brought a whole lot of data files with her, and they've all been uploaded into the Talons' general database.

It's been a fascinating read: the Capricians are humans like us, but they sometimes seem so... alien in their attitude and single-minded drive and zest for life. The closest I've seen is perhaps the Mekong mindset, but even they are not as stubborn or single-minded. In comparison to most of them, Del Pulciano is one of the calm ones. I don't know how they can constantly live their lives in the fast lane, but it seems to work for Caprice. One of the Cabinet's analysts promised to compile a file about the corporations for me. It should prove interesting.

Besides the Caprician sociological files, there are also several reports of the Black Talon missions that have been sent in the past cycle. They're sending them in small batches now; it's just too hard to open a Gate for just one ship, and it increases their survivability once they get to the other side. Not all of them make it, it seems — they haven't heard from at least three teams, and one is currently overdue. Whether they hit a mine on exiting the Gate, failed to reach the Liberati pick up area, or got nailed on the surface, who can say?

The teams that do make it bring back some exciting news and reports, though. It must be my old voyeur streak, but I've started to download battle logs of various engagements to reply on my trideo sets. Some of them have gotten pretty hairy, and not all are pleasant to watch. But when they succeed, you can almost feel the soldiers' thrill through the commlink.

(33 Winter 1942) — Interesting. One of the latest downloads from the Liberati included a set of police reports from Gommorrah — the city that makes up most of their world. They seem to feel the information is important, though all I see for now are reports about gang fights, kidnappings and covert surveillance. Maybe I just lack the social background needed to tie it all together, or they're sending us on a wild hopper chase.

Speaking of police reports, here's an interesting one. A few seasons back, an eyewitness saw an unidentified vessel leave the outskirts of his town... Ragged Rock, smack in the middle of the Badlands. Why did the computer bring that one up — ah. Correlation with an unknown launch report. The date match, the location as well. What could this mean?

>end log<

>open file/ caprice 1<

33.WI.42

Cold Fates

Jeppar Asteroid Cluster, Helios System

>Excerpted from the Log of Captain Leung Wu of the NLCSS *Regis*

Day 1

Due to several reported sightings of a large ship near some of the asteroid groups, my crew and I have been assigned to scout the trouble areas and report our findings to central. I can't believe command's decision to pull us from our Tannhauser patrols for a wild dawg chase.

Day 12

We have completed our first deep scan of the Herdson group. We'll be moving on to the Jeppar group tomorrow. I wonder how the early miners came up with these names? Like the Daophon group. What the hell is a Daophon?

Day 30

Three regions and still nothing. Apparently we're missing the big send off of more ships into Caprician space. Now that's an assignment: a real battle against the CEF. I know Dad said it's not right to wish for glory through battle, but just once I'd like to have the chance.

Day 42

Finally looked up the etymology of Daophon. It is a misspelling of the word Dolphin from old English. The Dolphin was or is a water mammal found on Earth. I've spent all week looking for more references on these funny creatures. Found quite a lot considering we would rarely see one on Terra Nova.

Still no reports of this ship we're looking for.

Day 57

Finally, another report came in this morning. The crew and I fell all over ourselves trying to get there in time. Nothing. Just an old husk from the colony days. Miners should've gotten the salvage rights but because of the Caprice situation the Westphalia Cabinet wants to pick it clean first. They already have a team on the way.

Strange, I would've thought that between half a dozen space directorates and all the miners, we would have found something this big before now. I guess its true that you can hide anything out here. A good reminder.

Day 62

Got a reading on the long rangers today but it vanished before we could get a positive lock. Spent the rest of the day tracing and retracing our steps trying to find it again. We did find another husk. This one was a warship, a destroyer like the *Regis* called the *Persephone*. It was a Southern ship lost early in the War of the Alliance. We radioed our Southern Republic contacts and dropped a beacon.

The ship had apparently run across an old minefield from the colony days. Someone's idea of staking a claim, I imagine. I can still see the bodies still floating inside. They'd been chipped at by micro-meteoroid and general bouncing around. The Captain was still in his chair on the bridge. There was a hole the size of my fist right through his chest. His eyes were still open. More than a little disturbing.

I don't want to die like that.

Cold Fates

Jeppar Asteroid Cluster, Helios System

Day 68

Another contact today. This time it stayed right on the edge of our sensors for hours as we tried to maneuver closer. At first we thought it was a sensor shadow and I cursed the sensor officer for being a fool. I'm not used to losing control like that. The nightmares haven't stopped since the Persephone.

When the signature began to move closer the entire crew was on edge. We waited on full alert for hours trying to maneuver into a better position amongst the asteroids and debris. The signal was huge but scattered. We were unable to get a real lock on it.

Just as the ship came into short sensor range it vanished again. We were not sure whether to be happy or not. Then the sensor officer told me we were sitting in a mine field. The debris had been disguising another old booby trap.

I put in a promotion request for my pilot and navigation officer.

Had the same thing happened to the Persephone? Had she been led to her death by whatever it is we saw out there? I have been remembering my grandfather's stories all day. A lot of people have died in space, most of them unhappily. Maybe their spirits are vengeful.

I am going to call Mari as soon as I get back. I should spend more time with her.

Day 70

We're being rotated out of watching the asteroid groups. No one on board is complaining. I'm not sure what to write in my final report but I'll contact the Captain of the next ship going in. If only to wish him luck.



28. SP. 41

The Battle of Harrid's Ridge

Harrid's Ridge, Caprice Highlands

A strange quiet — strange even for the thin Caprician air — had settled over the irregular terrain around Harrid's Ridge. The Seventh Black Talon Squadron, the Crows, were waiting there, nestled behind the cover of chasms and boulders. The squad was split into two groups: Red Team was on the ridge and Blue Team was one hundred meters across a rough road that served as a Commonwealth supply route.

Kilometers away, a Colonial Expedition Force company of troops, Armored Personnel Carriers, hover tanks and the new Gear-like battleframes were marching toward a Liberati encampment. The Crows had discovered the small army on a scouting run and changed their mission to intercept. The CEF force was too big for the encampment, which was mainly supplies and noncombatants. The Crows were the only thing standing in the way of a wholesale slaughter.

The Crows' leader, Anders, sat in the cockpit of his Kodiak wondering if the silence was a phenomenon of war. The quiet before the storm; the gods hushing nature in anticipation. He crossed himself and recited the Prophet's Words.

"Anders, this is Cole." Crisp tones bit into Anders' reverie. "How much time do we have?"

"Just enough, Cole. Pick a short one."

"Does he have to?" That was Underhill from Red Team, hiding to Anders's left in a Cheetah. "I mean really, every single mission?" In the Kodiak Anders smiled. He swore he could run a mission timetable on Underhill's mouth.

"Shut up Underhill, it's good luck." Collins was below Anders in a Support Cobra. Despite his crude manner, Collins enjoyed Cole's monologues.

"You're outvoted, Underhill." Cole cleared his throat.

"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. For he today that sheds his blood with me, shall be my brother;" Cole began, his voice clear and strong over the radio.

Across the field Wesk, Blue Team's leader, was streaking her face with paint. The black and green curling design matched the one painted on her Warrior's head. Her calm deliberate strokes belied the storm rising in her spirit.

"...be he ne'er so vile, this day shall gentle his condition..."

Dunaway's Jaguar was behind Wesk. Dunaway was praying, her hands clasped tightly in front of her. Too many of her recent cycles had been spent fighting, but she could not leave the path of war until she knew she was no longer needed.

"And gentlemen in England now in a-bed shall think themselves accursed they were not here..."

The last member of Blue Team was Wolf in his Warrior. Wolf was quiet as always, letting his thoughts flow without tension, without notice.

"...and hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks that fought with us upon St. Crispins' day."

A moment passed.

The Battle of Harrid's Ridge

Harrid's Ridge, Caprice Highlands

"All right, thank you, Cole." Anders said while checking his instruments. "We've got a column of Keffs coming just like we thought. Kill the squawking and shut down your non-shielded systems just in case we get any residuals from the EMPs."

As the Crows powered down, the silence returned for a short time then was replaced by a low, low rumbling. Slowly, in the dim evening light, forward troops began to appear, then tanks and a few Frames, then the APCs. Anders rolled a detonator over in his hand. He could see the battered markings on the hoversuits, the faces of the infantry. Finally the main column moved into the improvised minefield.

EMP and high explosive charges went up like oversized firecrackers, one right after the other. Dust and debris immediately obscured the CEF forces. Anders flipped his sensors back on but the electromagnetic pulses were still playing havoc with his readings. He broke radio silence.

"Begin fallback and sniping. Watch the outskirts of that smoke, they may not all be down." As soon as the words left his mouth a half dozen Frames charged out of the smoke straight into Blue Team's position. Anders cursed; the Frames were undamaged. They were much faster than the tanks and obviously more heavily shielded against the EMP.

"Blue Team they're on you, check your three!"

"On it." Said Wolf.

Wolf swung around to see the air fill with rocket trails. The ground shook and billowed with fire. Wesk's scream was cut short and her Gear burst into fragments. Dunaway dodged the Gear-shrapnel only to be blind-sided by another rocket. Her Jaguar bounced roughly into a chasm and vanished. Wolf kept moving, redlining his secondary movement system as he dodged between jagged rocks. He yelled into the mike.

"Lost Wesk and Dunaway! I could use some backup here!"

One of the Frames crossed his reticle. Wolf squeezed the trigger and the Warrior's arm pumped with automatic fire. The Frame's leg was torn off in a gout of sparks and the vehicle collapsed, cartwheeling across the ground. Wolf sneered. It was not enough; the other Frames were still on him and he could only dodge and weave for so long.

Along the ridge, Anders looked for a way to support Wolf but a group of tanks had made it through the ambush.

"Wolf, hold on a sec. Cole, Underhill, keep those tanks off of us." He lined up his sights on Wolf's pursuers.

"We got four APCs and infantry trying to flank us right." Collins reported. Anders lobbed mortar-fire across the field. "Don't let them box us in, Collins. Go get dirty!"

Collins plowed into one of the APCs with jarring force. It lifted onto its side, dumping supplies and ammunition. The Cobra's main omnicamera seemed to flash as it drew a vibro-sword. Collins began a stuttering dance between the APCs, whipping the blade back and forth. Fireballs erupted around him and the CEF soldiers scattered like panicked rats.

Across the field, Wolf had run out of room. He slipped behind a boulder and sprayed wild suppressive barrages at his attackers. The boulder was being chewed away and Wolf's magazine ran dry.

Just then, one of the Frames popped as rockets rained onto the field. Dunaway's Jaguar blasted out of the chasm on a column of rocket fire, autocannon spitting death. In the cockpit, Dunaway could taste blood from her busted lip. She focused through the sharp pain in her head and cut her jump jets.

The Battle of Harrid's Ridge

Harrid's Ridge, Caprice Highlands

The Jaguar crashed into one of the Frames, which drew a huge knife and slashed at the attacker's head. The two machines rolled into a boulder. Sparks flew around Dunaway's helmet and her HUD went dark. She fired the Jaguar's AP-minigun point blank, ripping the Frame's cockpit to shreds. The slashing stopped.

"Wolf!" Dunaway furiously tried to right her machine. Something was pinning her to the dead Frame.

"I'm here." The staccato of weapon's fire. "Thanks, thanks for the save."

Dunaway glanced up. The Frame's blade had pierced her Gear's "face," stopping a mere five centimeters from her skull. She closed her eyes in thankful prayer.

Back on the ridge, Red Team was just finishing off the last of the tanks when there was a flash. Underhill's Gear collapsed, literally cut in two. A large pack of Frames had flanked their position, moving fast. Anders flipped his Kodiak's particle cannon on-line.

"Frames on left!"

The star-bright beam burned through the head of one of the Frames. Cole spun his Gear around to face the new threat, a pack gun blazing in each manipulator. Anders tried to keep the Frames at bay with quick bursts from the particle cannon, but the weapon would not cycle fast enough. Cole's Gear lost an arm, then most of its head. There was a puff of escaping atmosphere and the Jaguar crumpled to the ground. "Cole's down!"

Collins' Cobra shot in the direction of the offending Frames, dirt spraying up behind him. Anders saw the impossible charge and unloaded a few mortar rounds to cover Collins' approach. The Frames concentrated their fire on the Kodiak. Anders cursed as his Gear rattled and systems went down.

The Cobra burst from the smoke, firing like a mechanized demon. Collins stuffed the mouth of his Cobra's VHAC into the first Frame and blew it in half. At the same time he lowered his field mortar and fired into another. The high powered shell ripped through the Frame, the concussion taking its partner behind it as well. Both machines collapsed in burning husks.

Further up in the field, Wolf's Warrior skidded to a stop near Dunaway's Jaguar, unleashing another volley of rockets.

"Still with us, my friend?" Dunaway's eyes snapped open. She checked her breathing gear then yanked the cockpit's emergency release lever. Explosive bolts ripped the Jaguar's head away in a rush of air, causing the Gear to snap away from the dead Frame. Wolf's Warrior was there to catch it.

"I was afraid you..." he began. Dunaway hefted the Jaguar's autocannon onto his shoulder. The Warrior shook violently as another Frame was torn to pieces just behind him.

"Sorry." said Dunaway.

Anders' voice crackled in their headsets: "Crows, sound off!!"

"Dunaway."

"Wolf."

"Collins."

Silence.

"Wolf, Dunaway, drive those bastards this way. Burn ammo if you have to!"

The Battle of Harrid's Ridge

Harrid's Ridge, Caprice Highlands

Blue Team forced their attackers backward with a chaotic bombardment at the same time Red Team angled across the top of the ridge. Too late, the two squads of Frames realized they were caught in a crossfire.

All four Gears let loose at once. The zone between them filled with round after round of rockets, slugs and the thunder of energy beams. The air was thick with fire and smoke as the remaining Frames were pounded into scrap. James pried his fingers from the triggers.

"Cease fire!" he bellowed. His sensors indicated more enemy units on the move. "We've got more hostiles on the edge, in front and behind."

"Behind?!"

"I don't know, Dunaway." Anders swallowed hard. "Let's regroup and prepare for their incoming."

The remaining Crows limped into a circular formation. Anders took a deep breath and watched the approaching blips. The sky lit with mortar-fire but the shells arced over the Crows and into the approaching CEF tanks. Two more volleys and the CEF forces were retreating.

"What... just happened?" said Dunaway. Anders answered.

"Transponder's green. Reading a Talon team and Liberati units." He let out a heavy breath. "They were using maskers to get close."

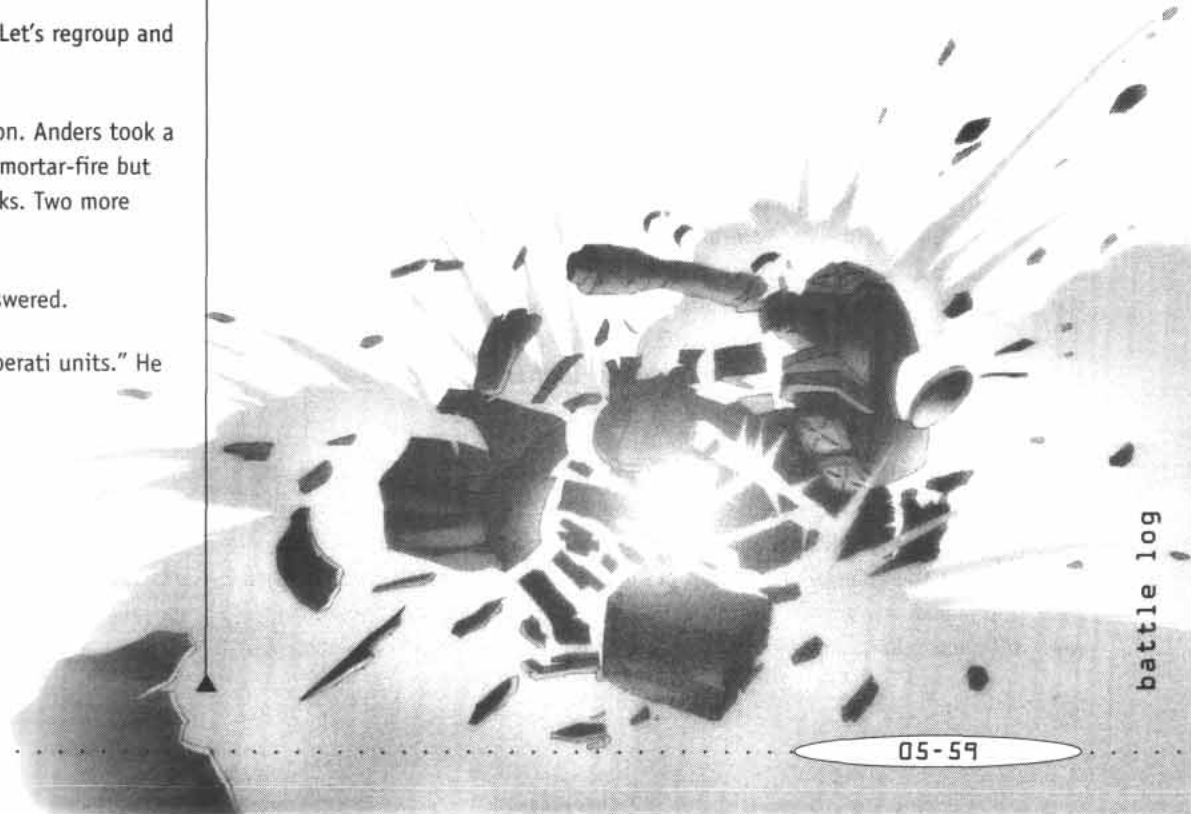
The headset barked.

"Lieutenant Anders, this is Lieutenant Ericks of Deathrow. You guys need any more help?" Ericks sounded a bit too jovial for Anders' current tastes.

"Just with our dead, Lieutenant." He answered. The headset was silent for a moment, then:

"Hey... we're not *all* dead..."

It was Cole. His voice sounded clearer than ever.



Belly of the Beast

Monolith Station, Loki System

"Nice night," said Jophell Taverson to the lounging guard. The guard looked up from his work but his eyes stopped at Jophell's chest. Jophell smiled and pulled her cap down a little further.

"Here's the maintenance schedule," she said handing the guard a data-pad. "I need to check a negative condenser inside." Technobabble always confused people. There was no such thing as a negative condenser.

"Huh? Oh, yeah sure." The guard disabled the locks on the detention center door.

"Thanks," said Jophell, pulling the door closed behind her.

There were parts of Monolith Station that should have been rebuilt years ago. The dilapidated detention center deep in the bowels of the structure was one of them. Three blocks of two large cells each formed a square on the front door. Jophell went to the control panel in one corner, deactivated the cell alarms and looped the camera watching her. The camera never saw her face.

She checked the cells on monitors set into the wall near each door. One cell was full of prisoners. According to the records they had been captured as they evacuated a Terranovan assault shuttle. They would have been transferred off station to more torture and interrogation, like the other invaders, had Jophell not hacked the delivery records, pushing their transfer back two days. She knew next to nothing about maintenance, but being a head quartermaster had its advantages.

A battered man sitting near the cell's door caught Jophell's eye. He looked in better shape than the others and could survive for a while on his own. She held her pistol in full view and punched a code into the keypad on the cell door. The door slid open to reveal a set of electrified bars. The stale smell of dried blood and human waste wafted into the hall. Some of the prisoners stirred, many were still unconscious. Jophell locked eyes with her chosen through the bars.

"I am deactivating the current in the front wall. Only you will approach. If anyone else moves I will land a round in your sleeping friend." The prisoners looked at each other. Jophell waved with the pistol and the man stood up. Jophell tapped another code and the bars retracted.

When he was outside Jophell locked the cell and holstered her pistol.

"Don't get any ideas," she said, "there's no way out of here unless you trust me and trust me quick." As an afterthought she added. "Sorry about the threat." The man narrowed his eyes and looked her over.

"Who sent you?" he asked. Jophell noted his accent and grinned.

"No one," she said removing a powerdriver from her jumpsuit. "Well, I sent me... it's hard to explain." She began working at screws on an air vent grill near the floor. The man was quiet. He was probably considering taking her pistol and freeing his friends but he didn't look stupid enough to act.

"What's your name?"

"Nathan."

Jophell pulled the grate free and stood up.

"Okay, Nathan, it's a bit of a squeeze but you can make it. Go down the shaft and take your first left. I'll meet you there." Nathan did not move.

"No"

"No?"

"Tell me why you're doing this," he said. Jophell started to get nervous. The guard outside thought she was doing a routine maintenance check, if she was in here too long...

Belly of the Beast

Monolith Station, Loki System

"I don't have time right now; I had to schedule this a little tightly," she said quickly, waving toward the vent. Nathan still did not move.

"I am light-years from my home," he said, "I have people counting on me to get them through this crap alive. I'm not going to abandon them so you might as well put me back—"

"All right," Jophell hissed. She glanced toward the door and crouched down pulling Nathan with her.

"I *am* from Earth but I operate with the Liberati network *against* the CEF," she explained, avoiding any references to the fifth column. "You are on Monolith station, you and your unfortunate friends are being transferred to the CEF central command in..." she checked her watch, "twelve hours. You follow?" Nathan nodded.

"Only you, Nathan, aren't going to be here when the transfer happens. I can only fudge the records for one of you without being noticed. I have a place for you on an ice mining ship outbound to the belt."

"What good—" Jophell shushed him.

"You will be contacted when you reach your destination, a small refueling station two days from here. Give your contact this." She handed him a small memory stick. "This has all the information about where the other captured Terranovans are being held." With a gesture to the closed cell she added: "Your group won't be far behind." Nathan nodded and looked at her for a quiet moment.

"Thank you..."

"Will you get yourself out of here? I'll explain the rest outside."

Nathan scrambled into the vent. Jophell quickly replaced the vent cover and nearly tripped over herself getting back to the control panel to un-loop

the camera. She realized that she was breathing in short little puffs.

"Easy girl ..." she said to herself, cursing her fumbling hands. Jophell smeared some grime on her face and buzzed the guard to let her out. The impossible part was over. From here on out it was simply very difficult.



Torture

Bastille Alpha, Caprice

Jason had been screaming for a solid ten minutes. His throat was raw and he could taste blood on the back of his tongue. The pain stopped. Jason slumped into unconsciousness only to be awakened a second later as an acrid smell assaulted his nostrils.

He was straddling a metal chair, its back pressing into his neck. His hands were tied behind his back with sharp plastic restraints. Someone pulled a pair of wires out of the back of his neck. The wires had been inserted into his spinal cord and when an electric shock was applied to them Jason felt his whole body burning. None of his muscles worked anymore and his sight had been reduced to blobs of light and dark. He heard footsteps through the ringing in his ears. Colonel Hendricks had returned.



"Is he a little softer now?" said Hendricks. A mumbled response from one of the guards.

"Boy?" Jason felt a gloved hand on his jaw, "Can you hear me?" His head was twisted from side to side. Unfortunately, his vision was returning and he could make out grim visage of his torturer. The grip on his jaw vanished and Jason's head flopped forward.

"Give him another dose." Hendricks crossed to a corner of the small room and sat down. Jason could feel people touching him as he floated in and out of consciousness, always aware of Hendricks' gaze. Hendricks watched him for half an hour as Jason's senses returned.

"I enjoyed listening to your screams," he said finally. "However, there are a few things that I would rather hear." Jason braced himself for more pain. In a drowsy blink Hendricks was before him, unwrapping a slender blade.

"I had these blades made especially for sessions like this. They're made from some material our starships use in their hulls, honed so sharp it can cut through stone," Hendricks passed the blade in front of Jason's eyes. "Flesh is not a problem. In fact you should barely feel a thing."

Jason prayed to die for the hundredth time. He had nothing left; the nerve-shocks had taken the last of his resistance. Hendricks slid the blade across Jason's arm. It came away crimson and there was the sound of something wet slapping the floor. Jason didn't look. Tears filled his eyes.

"We know that there is a fifth column operating inside the Expeditionary Force. Are you part of it?" Jason waited, praying his mouth would stay shut. Hendricks dragged the blade across his arm again. That sound...

"Yes..." Jason's voice was horse and barely a whisper. He could not take any more. He nodded in case Hendricks hadn't heard.

Torture

Bastille Alpha, Caprice

"That's better boy," Hendricks seemed disappointed that it had been so easy. "Now who was your contact?" Jason couldn't speak. The idea of condemning anyone else to this chair was beyond inhuman. His soul could never rest.

Hendricks dragged the blade across his arm another time. Jason's weight shifted and he almost fell over. The sound that followed was meatier this time. Jason's mind stumbled to find a name, any name. Someone who he could live with damning.

"C... Cassidy.... Mike Cassidy." He croaked. Hendricks glanced at his guard who consulted a data pad. The guard nodded.

"Thank you," Hendricks said, "you have done a great service to the Commonwealth." Hendricks unholstered his pistol and casually shot Jason in the stomach, knocking the chair over.

"Did the recorders get all of that?" Hendricks asked, rewrapping his blade and handing it to a guard. He was shaking. "My God, what has happened to our pride, gentlemen. What the hell has happened to our pride."

No one dared answer him. On the floor, Jason's body tried to fight the inevitable and he visualized the storm that was coming to the CEF. The Integrity Directorate would tear apart the command structure of the CEF forces on Caprice looking for other members of the fifth column and a dead end lead like Mike Cassidy would only make them more vicious. He hoped the others had covered their tracks well enough to avoid his fate.

Colonel Hendricks watched Jason's blood drain into the grate at the middle of the room. This was going to get ugly. Hendricks liked ugly.

"Get me the Directorate HQ on the box," he said calmly, "We've got some more people to kill."

Unrest

Gommorrah, Caprice

To: Fleet Admiral Winthrop
Cc: CEF Central Command
From: >password required<
Re: 3rd Fleet Status

The situation we discusses is worsening among the human personnel of the 3rd fleet.

The Infantry Divisions currently occupying Gommorrah itself are showing signs of unrest. The lack of combat is making the troops complacent; they rely more and more on the local constabulary to handle the daily crises, and are spending most of their time in the barracks rather than out on the streets, enforcing our rule.

What's more critical, however, is that the military discipline itself is starting to wear off. The disappearance of the Liberati has convinced too many troopers of their safety. The decadent pleasures this world offers are starting to affect the minds of our men and women, who are normally used to more mundane surroundings. Despite specific instructions, we have witnessed personnel entering Gommorran bars and fraternizing with the locals. This cannot be permitted — until such time the population of this world is fully converted to the Party's cause, we cannot relax our grip.

The Commonwealth Integrity Directorate has been notified of this. I must report with great satisfaction that they have responded promptly, setting up constant surveillance of the more problematic officers. They have also noted the presence of unknowns engaged in much the same surveillance activities. We can only suppose the local criminal underground is tempted to make use of the situation to either blackmail or even traffic with our troops.

I advise we take action swiftly, lest we fall prey to our own weaknesses.

The Missing Fleet

Deep Space Tracking Network, Loki

To: Fleet Admiral Winthrop

Cc: CEF Central Command

From: Deep Space Tracking Network, CEF Fleet Division

Re: 7th Fleet Status

This memo is intended to keep you updated of this department's operations with regard to the current status of the Colonial Expeditionary Force's 7th. For your reference, the 7th fleet was tasked with the re-annexation of colony world NP5410DD, known colloquially as New Jerusalem.

NP5410DD was last registered as having a peaceful, agrarian society. Our sociologists see no reason why this should have changed, as there would be limited or no competition for resources in the small colony that would lead to the emergence of armed conflicts. This is not to say that the possibility does not exist, merely that it is very small.

The 7th Fleet was supposed to keep in contact with us through the use of regular messenger Gate-drones. The current stalemate at Atlantis and the expedition to Home should not have affected these operations, which were conducted separately from the colonial re-annexation efforts. The last three scheduled arrivals have not occurred as planned, which is a strong indicator of a problem. Whether repeated mechanical failure (highly unlikely, given the highly redundant design of the K-series messengers) or a more critical situation is to blame is currently unknown. It might be simply that the distances are greater than we first estimated.

In order to correct the situation, orders have been relayed to the Atlantis group to launch additional messengers to try and resume contact with the 7th Fleet. As you are aware, our previous suggestions of sending out a search party has been vetoed by Fleet Command until such time as the Atlantean system is secured and pacified.

01-SU-43

status report

The Girl

Friednam-Serrby, Gommorrah

>Friednam-Serrby Corporate Security Department
>Report #9686F-5689-A-2200
>Response Team ID Number: 5689
>Location of Incident: Hakkar Mall South
>Extended Report Form ID Tag: #9686F-5689-A-2200-L

>previous page<

Response Team 5689, along with backup team 5692, was called to the old Hakkar Mall region on 2200 hours local time yesterday on report of gang fights. Upon arrival, the disturbance was immediately located as one building crumbled in flame (please refer to attached extended report #9686F-5689-A-2200-L for detailed damage listing).

Following standard operating procedures, we spent the next ten minutes circling the area outside of weapon range. The fighting seemed to subside for a time. We followed a pair of ground vehicles moving along highway 56-B for six minutes, when they were ambushed by an unknown group of assailants. The latter were well-armed, perhaps too well for a mere gang. We set our vehicle down on a rooftop to observe the battle until such time additional units could reach the scene.

We then noticed a peculiar event. A woman, evidently an unwilling party to the group traveling in the cars, managed to escape their attention (see telephoto shot attached to extended report) when the man watching her was killed. She was seen running extremely fast to the cover of a nearby building. When one of the ambushers tried to physically stop her, she immobilized him with a bounding kick that is beyond what any of the officers witnessing the incident had ever seen.

She was last seen escaping the side of a building, free-climbing to a sixth-story window with apparent ease. Her escape, coupled with the arrival of a pair of Fat Men on the scene, led both sides of the skirmish to vanish into the night. We were unable to apprehend anyone; DNA and data-rig analysis of the bodies left behind yielded no useful information.

There is currently no additional lead in this case. Full descriptions of the perps, along with datalogs of the entire incident, are contained with the extended report (#9686F-5689-A-2200-L).

>next page<

Gather all copies of this report and remove them from the central archives. The agents involved should be advised to forget about the incident. If possible, have them transferred to the more dangerous ground patrols, just in case.

If any other report about Gina turn up, follow the same procedure and contact us immediately at

Strange Bedfellows

Colosseum, Bastille Alpha

The noise inside the Colosseum was deafening, but Sendra did not hear it. She concentrated instead on picking her way through the thick crowd, pushing past waves of unwashed bodies in tan and purple. She had been here long enough to get used to the smell by now.

It seemed easy enough at first — the message had told her where to meet her opposite number exactly — but once there she realized that she could not tell one GREL from another. Around her, rows after rows of bald, thick faces were avidly following the action down on the distant floor, completely ignoring her. She stood there in confusion, looking here and there in the hope of finding what she was looking for through raw chance.

A strong hand gripped her upper arm. Sendra was halfway through a defense move when another hand blocked it easily. She whirled around to find herself face to face with a Jan-class GREL showing no effort on his face, despite the fact that he was holding her in a vise-like grip.

"My apologies," the stranger said as he released her. "I do not wish you harm. I am Dmitri. Follow me."

Sendra did, mutely. Years of experience, and he had surprised her just like that. Good thing they were on her side.

The Jan cut through the crowd easily, GRELS parting before him automatically, humans doing so out of respect for his size. He brought her to a quieter corner where another Jan was waiting for her. She knew him well enough by now that she recognized Samson through his body language.

"Greetings, Falcon." He motioned to her to sit beside him, though his eyes followed the combat in the center of the arena.

"Greetings. What could be so important as to meet me here, now?"

The GREL nodded impercibly. "I apologize for the dangerous setting of this meeting. This could not wait until the next work shift." He paused as one of the gladiators sent his opponent sprawling. "One of my men broke through the rock last night."

"He has?" Hope shone in her eyes. The fabled Nomardiss Slip. They could bring tools, weapons inside. *If* they could keep it hidden from the guards.

"It is currently covered. We have taken great precaution to hide it."

One of the two combatants on the floor expired. The crowd roared its approval, making Sendra shudder.

"They're killing each other down there. Doesn't it bother you? Don't you value your lives?"

The GREL turned toward her. His eyes were surprisingly soft. "Yes. But look around you."

She did. The GRELS around seemed joyous, but there was a strange, almost solemn feeling to their cheers.

"They are not celebrating the winner." The GREL said softly. "They are greeting his opponent, for he struggled to the last. He refused to die like a lab animal or a beast of burden. He may be dead, but at least he died free."

Sendra looked at him and realized for the first time that perhaps, the GRELS were closer to the Capricians than she thought.

Step One

North Tachyon Hub, Gommorrah

>Encoded Transmission<

To: Lt. Colonel Kryn Rassul, CID

From: Special Operative Sam

Below is the recorder log you asked for. I don't think I'll have any problems winning their confidence if you keep your part of the bargain. You were right; they seem to have a weak spot for Terranovans. We are their legendary warriors, their saviors. I will be out of touch for a few days. I can't do anything mysterious just yet.

[Recorder log]

[BGN filters active.]

[Insert note - I'm at Hooblers Pub, North Tachyon Hub, Gommorrah]

Sam: I thought you were coming alone? I see the two gruffs at the bar. If you're going to start by lying to me, I can just go...

Voice one: [Voice recognition active - Identity: Holli, Liberati contact] Did you think I'd come to a meeting like this without backup?

Sam: Whatever, kid. Do you want to see this or not?

Holli: That's why I came.

[Insert note — This is when I handed over the package you prepared. It took him a while to get to the good data.]

Holli: This isn't... Is this what I think it is?

Sam: It's exactly what you think it is.

Holli: How did you get it?

Sam: Luck mostly. But now that I've done it once, I can do it again.

Holli: Just a second. My people are going to ask a lot of questions about you. The only Terranovans we seen so far are from those strike teams and a few advisors. If you're not with them, how did you get here?

Sam: Not everyone on our planet is happy with the way things are being handled out here. Some of us want to do more than just send a few strike teams. We beat the CEF on our world, you think we couldn't do the same here?

Holli: I... I don't know...

Sam: Politics, Holli, that's what's making the real decisions back home. Not what's right but what will get who elected fastest.

[Insert note — Like water in dry hands. This kid is may be clever but he's very naïve.]

Sam: I'll be waiting for your call. Then maybe you'll let me watch when you take down a few Keffs the right way.

[End log]



recorded meeting

Operation Icarus

Gommorrah, Caprice

To: Fleet Admiral Winthrop
Cc: CEF Central Command
From: Rear Admiral John Gresfield
Re: Operation Icarus

In light of recent events there is no doubt in anyone's mind that we should find a way to keep Caprician space free of Terranovan combat teams and other such harassment. What I propose below is just such a way.

The goal of Operation Icarus is the destruction of the Terranovan space fleet and their shipbuilding capabilities. We have enough intelligence data to give us a clear and detailed picture of the ships, stations and groundside facilities that can be found in Terranovan space. My Tactics and Planning department has already organized this information into a priority list and threat evaluation briefing. We have located an area in orbit of Terra Nova where much of the fleet involved in the invasion of Caprician space congregates. We have code-named this area Crete for security purposes.

Our strike force will be made of three main groups: Alpha, Beta and Omega. All three groups will enter Gate 667-744, an unguarded micro-gate twenty-four AUs from the main Gate system. Just after entering Terranovan space, Omega will break formation and attack any ships separated from the main Terranovan fleet, which can be found at Crete. Omega's goal is not to destroy the ships they find, but to cripple them. The Terranovan forces will spend what little resources they have trying to rescue their stranded crews. Alpha and Beta groups will make a concentrated strike on the main fleet. Once Crete is secured, Alpha group will attack groundside facilities using orbital bombardment and Beta Group will hold the main station and provide reinforcements when necessary.

The ships I plan to use in the strike force will not threaten the defensive structure of the Caprician fleet. I have already spoken to the commanding officers involved and have run simulations with them. They stand behind this plan one hundred percent.

>attached file — T0&E, ref. Icarus 89-786a<

This operation can be ready to move in less than three weeks, including travel time. In two months we can have the operation finished and our ships back on line. I know that you are hesitant to send another fleet into Terranovan space but this operation will only be attacking their space naval power and planetside resources, we will not be involved at all with a ground assault.

The Terranovan fleet has not yet become a serious threat but we both know that given enough time it will. The recent crippling of one of our gateships is only the beginning. I believe that this is the best plan for the immediate defense of the Commonwealth and Her rightful claims. Thank you for taking the time to look over this mission proposal.

— Rear Admiral John Gresfield

Revelation

Sacred Mercy Hospital, BLD

>**From:** Nurse Dominic N'ga
>**To:** Hospital Council
>**Re:** John Doe File Final Report
>**Attached:** MED-97654-967854-43

We are still no closer to finding our missing patient. We did discover a couple of possible ways he could have left, but the fact remains we are probably never going to find him unless he wants to be found again. He took some supplies, so he should be okay.

To put a bit of perspective for Dr. Heller and Ramenstein, who are new here, here's a quick summary of the dossier. Approximately four cycles ago, a badly burned man was brought to us in the middle of the night by one of the Paxton search and rescue teams. The heavy burns sustained over 70% of his body were consistent with the type of wounds suffered by the Peace River victims, and he was found in the region. We put him with the rest of the burn victims and tagged him as one of the many John Does we received that week. The difference, however, was that nearly three cycles later, he was the only one still unaccounted for. We simply assumed his family and friends were killed in the disaster and concentrated on bringing him back to health (see the attached medical file — standard grafts, regrowth and rehabilitation, nothing out of the ordinary).

It wasn't until last week, however, that we got some new development on the case. One of the students was running standard blood tests for practice using some of the samples left in the laboratories (yes, he's been put on report — you can get the details at the next staff meeting). One of the sample used was from John Doe. According to the student, it's perfectly normal blood, but some of the markers are way off. You have to dig for it, but this guy's family has definitely been apart from mainstream population for a while, given the drift. Way apart.

We were still pondering what that meant when he got wind of it. He must have been hiding a deep secret, because Lucy (Assistant-Nurse Lucy Disora she'll file her own report) said he looked worried. He started to confide how he felt like a failure, that he needed revenge for all the dead and redemption for himself. It didn't make much sense, though the same themes were repeated several times: revenge, redemption. Then he thanked her and went to bed. That was the last we saw of him.

We still don't understand the last words he told her, however: "I will not fail a second time."

What did he mean by that?



Appendix

References for Readers of *Storm on the Horizon*

Storm on the Horizon is the fourth Heavy Gear Storyline Book and like its predecessors, it reveals the critical events unfolding in the Heavy Gear universe through the thoughts, conversations and journals of the characters involved. Like the previous books in this line, **Storm** eschews the traditional roleplaying game book format of game statistics and omniscient narration to present a more atmospheric and involving approach to Heavy Gear's epic story. This style can be a little disconcerting, however, and this appendix has thus been provided to help keep everything straight. The *Who's Who on Terra Nova* section (pages 71-75) gives brief profiles on 30 of the most important people appearing in **Storm on the Horizon** along with indications of where to find more information about them (see abbreviation guide, below). The *Timeline of Events* places all the events in this book in strict chronological order, along with page references. They appear organized by region in the main text. Following are a few other elements to help in the reading experience.

What Has Gone Before: Terra Nova was once a rich colony of Earth, but was abandoned by an isolationist government centuries ago. Twenty cycles (local years) ago, Earth returned and tried to invade. Normally warring enemies, North and South patched together an alliance and repelled the invading Colonial Expeditionary Force. Old tensions soon started to erode any goodwill that had been built by the conflict, however.

In **Crisis of Faith**, the last hopes for peace died out as chaos grew across the planet. The rebellion in the ESE spread to two more city-states, creating the Free Emirates. The North, meanwhile, became more fervent in its Revisionist faith and came to see the South as an immoral enemy. Northern leaders received information that the economically powerful Mekong Dominion would break with the South and side with them in case of a war. The Southern Republic became aware of espionage by the Humanist Alliance. In the Badlands, Colonel Proust (a former Earth supersoldier) established a desert league of his own and recruited many other GREL supersoldiers to his cause. This growing chaos reached new heights when Thor Hutchison, the charismatic leader of the Northern faith, was assassinated on live trideo.

In **Blood on the Wind**, the Interpolar War exploded after a skirmish between North and South in the Badlands turned ugly. The Mekong Dominion trapped the North with its false promises, while the Humanist Alliance, stricken with a deadly bio-engineered agent, was all but absorbed into the Southern Republic. A few individuals banded together to try and prevent innocents from becoming victims, but their efforts were partially successful. As a peace conference came together, the powerful but neutral city-state of Peace River was razed by a mass destruction weapon.

In **Return to Cat's Eye**, the arrival of a visitor from the neighboring colony world of Caprice, along with the revelation that Earth forces might be responsible for Peace River, led to the creation of a global committee called the Westphalia Cabinet. They in turn created the Black Talons, a supra-national commando force designed to perform deep strikes against Earth-held territories. The 1st Black Talon succeeded in pulling off a daring raid in Caprician space, destroying an enemy doomsday weapon in the process. Back on Terra Nova, an ancient interstellar craft was launched once more, its destination unknown.

Advice for Gamers: This book is not intended as a gaming aid in the traditional sense. It is much more like a novel or comic book. Heavy Gear is a roleplaying and tactical game, however, and many of the events in this book are designed to be fodder for game ideas. For example, many of the key battles of the Interpolar War are portrayed in various tactical supplements, mainly the Tactical Pack series, and a number of stories offer plot hooks.

Useful Abbreviations: All page references in this appendix are to this book, except when noted. To save space in the character profiles, we have used abbreviations for our main books. They are as follows: **CC1:** Character Compendium 1 (DP9-021); **DH:** Duelist's Handbook (DP9-005); **HALB:** Humanist Alliance Leaguebook (DP9-032); **HG2:** Second Edition Heavy Gear Rulebook (DP9-101); **ITB:** Into the Badlands (DP9-018); **LoC** Life on Caprice (DP9-047); **MDLB:** Mekong Dominion Leaguebook (DP9-036); **SB1:** Storyline Book 1; **SRLB:** Southern Republic Leaguebook (DP9-030); **TN2:** Second Ed. Life on Terra Nova (DP9-102).

Who's Who on Terra Nova

Characters of Note

Charles Arthur III

The exiled Earth officer who built Port Arthur, Charles Arthur is living through difficult times. His allegiance with the Humanist Alliance has been undone, while his people are seen with growing distrust by the rest of the planet. Only his alliance with the desert communities of the New Coalition, and through them the Khayr ad-Din Army, has proven fortuitous. The latter even managed to break the renegade GREL leader Proust, one of Port Arthur's greatest opponents. See **TN2**, p. 123.



Eva Bukharin

A military officer in Port Arthur, Eva Bukharin is also the leader of the secretive Yakut Brotherhood. This shadowy order of expatriate Earthers maintains loyalty to the New Earth Commonwealth and its ruling party. They fully expect to aid in a second attempt to conquer Terra Nova. Bukharin thinks of Col. Charles Arthur as a traitor, and maintains contacts with loyalists across the globe. See **TN2**, p. 129.



Damien

Damien is the mysterious leader of the Saragossa People's Front for Independance (SPFI). Her real name, however, is Teresa Piepho, and she is a member of the highly secretive Hooded Knights, an *agent provocateur* unit created by the CEF for underground operation in the Terranovan leagues. Over the cycles, though Teresa has come to bond with the people she associated with, and is now throwing her lot with the Terranovans. See **TN2**, p. 78.



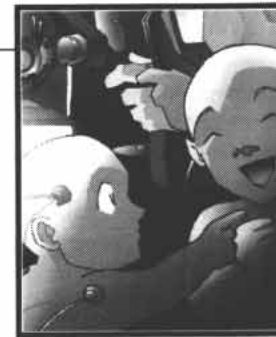
Solomon Davi

Minister of Defense of the United Mercantile Federation, Solomon Davi assumes the position of interim Treasurer when Yves Banderas dies. Davi is a consummate soldier and an ally of the conglomerate Northco. He is rumored to dislike Grand-Marshal Victoria Edden-Smythe, the overall Northern commander. He supports the war effort for the time being, however. See **TN2**, p. 54.



Derek and Tara

The product of the GREL fertility program in Jan Mayen, these twin GREL-human hybrids are perhaps the only chance for a future for the displaced supersoldiers. Indeed, their design stripped them of the ability to reproduce. When Jan Mayen was destroyed during a North-South battle, Derek was rescued by Soldier Sebastopol and Tara by Colonel Proust. Their whereabouts are currently unknown. See **TN2**, page 113.



Louis Philippe deRouen

The ruthless Prime Minister of the Southern Republic, Louis Philippe deRouen does not hesitate to eliminate his enemies. Indeed, with the revelation that the Humanist Alliance had been plotting against the Republic, he ordered the use of the "Twin Falcon Contingent," a deadly biological weapon that results in the Theban Blight. The Republic quickly annexes the devastated Alliance. DeRouen seems unaware his own daughter is plotting against him. See **TN2**, page 74.



Who's Who on Terra Nova

Characters of Note

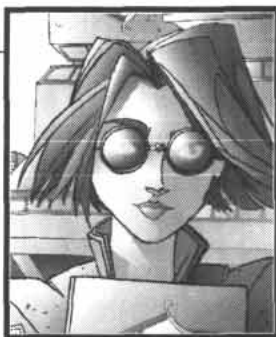
Louise deRouen

The only child of Prime Minister deRouen, Louise is his heir, confidante and most dangerous enemy. Unwilling to simply wait to inherit leadership, she has used the ancient and secretive Order of the Falcon (and the cover identity of the "Dark Fox") to act against her father and bring about his downfall. She believes he is leading the Republic to ruin and she has made deals with army head Victor deBourgogne and AST Lord Protector Molay. See **SRLB**, page 29.



Gawaïne Di Smit

A renowned Northern astrophysicist, Gawaïne Di Smit discovered the possibility of micro-gates: very small Tannhauser anomalies that could link Terra Nova to new worlds. An admirer and ally of Proconsul Lang Regina, she has overseen tests aboard the Gateship Laban Emuros to detect these micro-gates. During one such test, she helped rescue the Caprician rebel Helen del Pulciano. See **TN2**, page 44.



Milani DuBeau-Slovenski

The Head Executive Officer of Paxton Arms, Milani has a reputation for utter ruthlessness. The terrorist bombing on the city-state of Peace River has been a terrible blow from which she has only just recovered. DuBeau-Slovenski's main concern at this point is to keep her corporation and people safe and rebuild their empire. Once this is done, she will see that they get just recompense for the horror that has been perpetrated against them. See **HG2**, page 41.



Victoria Edden-Smythe

The Grand Marshal of the CNCs, Victoria Edden-Smythe has led the North to war against the South. A devout Revisionist, she sees the South as a dangerous enemy responsible for the death of Second Follower Hutchison. Married to Proconsul Lang Regina, the two women have separated due to personal, religious and political differences. See **TN2**, page 39.



R.M. Maya Fajil

A highly placed member of the Revisionist Church, Fajil is also a prominent member of the secretive organization known as the Prophet's Shield. Now that Thor Hutchison is gone, she has forged the group into a powerful tool, intent on bringing the church back to what she and her cohort see as the true heart of the faith: that Mamoud was the living incarnation of the Blessed Spirit. See **SB1**, page 104.



Ernesto Jaxon

The charismatic leader of the Badlands Revolutionary Front, Jaxon wished to see the Badlands free of Northern and Southern domination (and of the corporations who serve as their proxies). He led a loose coalition of revolutionaries stretching across the Badlands, including Peace River, until they were framed for the Peace River bombing. Captured by agents of the Westphalia Cabinet, he has agreed to work with them to find and punish those truly responsible. See **ITB**, page 57.



Who's Who on Terra Nova

Characters of Note

Lang Regina ♟

A hero of the war of the Alliance and the Proconsul of Fort Henry in the WFP, Lang Regina was not convinced that war against the South was in the best interests of the North. In cooperation with her Southern ally Kenichi Tanaka, she built the Terranovan alliance known as the Westphalia Cabinet, all the while keeping her eyes trained on the skies, where the threat of Earth still looms. See **CC1**, p. 18.



Arron Logan ♟

The Taipan of the Mekong Development Corporation, Logan is utterly ruthless and was partially responsible for the Interpolar War, leading the North to believe that the Dominion would side with them. A prudent man, he also made side deals with various people, including Badlands revolutionaries. The recent events, such as the bombing of Peace River and the formation of the Cabinet, have cause him to pause in his plans to gain control of yet more territories and resources. See **MDLB**, p. 22.



Lysia Masao ♟

The sister of ESE Patriarch Oliver Masao, Lysia was also the wife of Farzahn Hemami. She was unaware of his espionage activities until it was too late, and narrowly escape assassination in the same strike that killed Farzahn. She took refuge in Raleigh and eventually agreed to marry Emir Shirow of Basal and give him an heir. As one of the few surviving members of the Emirates' former ruling family, she is closely watched by several factions. See **HALB**, p. 35.



Jacques Molay ♟

The Lord Protector of the AST, Molay was once head of the dreaded Southern Republic Intelligence Directorate, and still holds sway there. An enemy of Prime Minister deRouen, he has entered into an agreement with his daughter Louise to eliminate him and take power with her. Despite Louise's craftiness, Molay believes he can discard her later to rule on his own — for the good of the Republic, of course. See **TN2**, page 73.



Colonel Proust ♟

One of the GREL supersoldiers abandoned by Earth, Proust has become convinced that the GREs must make their own destiny, as befits superior beings. He founded the New Human Republic and embarked on a campaign in the Western Desert to conquer part of the planet for his GREs. He was to ultimately fail, foiled by the combined effort of the KADA and the Jan Mayen forces. In his escape, he kidnapped Tara, one of the GREL-Human hybrid children born in Jan Mayen. See **CC1**, p. 46.



Nicosa Renault ♟

A legendary spy of the Judas Syndrome and War of the Alliance, Nicosa spent much of the last fifteen cycles trying to balance intrigues in order to prevent a war. When Hutchison was assassinated in TN 1935, she struggled instead to ensure that the Badlands was not devastated and later helped organize the Khayr ad-Din Army. All the while she has been trying to understand the complex agendas leading Terra Nova into war after war. See **ITB**, p. 11.



Who's Who on Terra Nova

Characters of Note

Katryne Sanz



A famous Northern Gear trainer and one-time Duelist, Sanz was exiled from the North for her lack of faith. Traveling to the Badlands, she organized the motley Khayr ad-Din Army out of a collection of the best Gear pilots on Terra Nova. Together they made a stand for Badlands independence, fighting to keep the Gamma Maglev line from the polar forces. She remains in Khayr ad-Din, directing the KADA's postwar activities. See **ITB**, page 11.



Soldier Sebastopol



A GREL stranded by Earth, Sebastopol has spent the cycles since then struggling against the violent instincts programmed into him. The father of the Perfect Form movement that teaches GRELS a path to peace through meditation and martial arts, Sebastopol is the complete opposite of Colonel Proust. The two struggled over the GREL-hybrid twins in Jan Mayen, and Sebastopol managed to save Derek. He is currently in hiding with the child. See **TN2**, p.131.



Nigel Shirow



Nigel Shirow led a rebellion against the crazed Patriarch Oliver Masao; Okavango and Bangweuleu joined him, forming the so-called Free Emirates. When the mad Patriarch had the entire noble caste put to death, Shirow seized the opportunity to take over the league. A growing rivalry between Shirow and Emir Bhervo of Okavango — another noble survivor — has created a need for him to acquire added legitimacy. Shirow has married Lysia Masao to produce an heir who would have a stronger claim to the Patriarch's throne. See **CC1**, p. 38.



Kenichi Tanaka



The Lord Chancellor of the ESE and a hero of the War of the Alliance, Tanaka shared his friend Lang Regina's doubts about the Interpolar War. He wants to save the South (and Terra Nova) from power-mongers like deRouen and Molay. Tanaka helped to create the Westphalia Cabinet and the Black Talon in the aftermath of the Peace River bombing. Now that Shirow is in power in the ESE, Tanaka devotes most of his time to raising support for the Cabinet's activities. See **TN2**, p. 73.



Vallis Garrick



A small-time Earth collaborator that had been hiding out in the Badlands since the end of the War of the Alliance. His recent reappearance and the inordinate amount of protection he has received from CEF troops has led many to believe he may be responsible for much more than a few executions, however. See **ItB**, page 54.



Soldier Roskiman



Once the right-hand man of the renegade GREL leader Colonel Proust, Roskiman escaped to become master of his own destiny. He went into the Great White Desert to escape Proust's assassins, and there fell in with the mysterious Sand Riders nomads. He recently fathered a child with a Sand Rider woman, despite the GRELS' normal infertility. They have managed to keep the child's existence a secret so far in order to protect him. See the previous Storyline books.



Who's Who on Terra Nova

Characters of Note

Helen Del Pulciano

Del Pulciano crossed the Interstellar Gate at great risk in order to form an alliance between Terra Nova and the Caprice colony world, which is currently held by the CEF. She went and fought with the first Black Talon expedition to Caprice in TN 1941. Del Pulciano is a member of the Caprician resistance group known as the Liberati. See **SB2**, page 78.



Gervase Aschenbach

Aschenbach, a native of the Western Frontier Protectorate, joined the army at an early age. He fought under General Lang Regina during the War of the Alliance and later became an instructor at the Western Military Academy. His superb service record, combined with his loyalty toward Lang Regina, made him a perfect choice to become one of the founding members of the Westphalia Cabinet and the leader of the Black Talon. See **SB2**, page 12.



Jophell Taverson

Taverson was originally from earth. She enrolled in the CEF in order to fulfill her dream of traveling among the stars. She quickly grew disillusioned with the CEF's methods and goals, especially after she was assigned as a quartermaster aboard Monolith Station in the Caprice system. She now works covertly with the Caprician rebels in the hope that one day, she may take to space once more. See **LoC**, page 14.



Amir Falcon

Sendra Fallons, better known as Falcon, is Amir (senior officer) for the Yazaks (resistance cells) growing in the prison-fortress of Bastille Alpha, where she is a prisoner herself. Sendra communicates with the outside world via a micro-burst transmitter she hid on herself when she first arrived. As leader of the Old Guard, she has been instrumental in bringing the GREs over to the Liberati's side. All the information stored on her Data-Rig is false. See **LoC**, page 25.



Samson

Samson is a Jan-class GRE that leads the Legion, the GRE underground resistance movement in Bastille Alpha. The GREs of the Caprician prison-fortress are the older model Legionnaires no longer loyal to Earth. The Legion, as they call themselves, now seek freedom. Samson's loyalty to the CEF is gone, replaced by a sense of kinship to all Legionnaires outside Bastille Alpha. He has begun a tense alliance with the Liberati group known as the Old Guard. See **LoC**, page 60.



Fleet Admiral Winthrop

Veda Winthrop is the highest ranking CEF officer outside the Sol system. All the blame for the failed Terra Nova and Atlantis operations are falling on his head. Factions within the NEC are constantly screaming to have him replaced; because of this, the Fleet Admiral is using harsher methods to achieve results. He will not accept any more mistakes from his subordinates, nor will he tolerate any rebellion in the conquered territories. See **LoC**, page 23.



Timeline of Events

19•AU•41 to 05•SP•42

19 Autumn 1941: Emir Raphael Bhavro loads part of the population of the city-state of Skavara in the secretly repaired *Eastern Sun* and unleashes the full power of the ancient ship's interplanetary fusion drive, launching the hulk back into space and reducing part of the city to magma in the process. (see **Return to Cat's Eye**, page 68)

Late Autumn 1941: Space ships from the various leagues are dispatched to follow the trail of the *Eastern Sun* as it leaves the gravity well of Terra Nova. The Gateship goes into silent running mode and soon evades its pursuers, who are forced to disperse among all possible vectors and investigate a number of hiding place in the Helios system. (see page 54)

27 Autumn 1941: Following the overall success of the 1st Black Talon mission to Caprice, new pilots are recruited for the Talon program to form additional strike teams. Due to the pressing nature of the missions, veteran pilots are sought from all origins to minimize training time. (see page 44)

01 Winter 1942: Emir Shirow sends Emirates troops to the city-state of Skavara to ensure that the ravaged city remains under his control. The troopers are supposed to help with the rescue efforts and maintain the peace, but they soon find themselves opposed by looters, bandits and other opportunists eager to pry on the carcass of the city. (see page 32)

05 Winter 1942: The ruthless bandit king known as Khan and his men abandon their usual hunting grounds in the jungle of the Mekong Dominion and start to move toward the Mekong/Emirates border. Before being destroyed, a patrol signals that they are moving in the direction of Skavara. (see page 25)

Late Winter 1942: The Saragossan People Front for Independence (SPFI — a terrorist movement trying to liberate the city-state of Saragossa and its vassals from the clutches of the Southern Republic) steps up its recruitment campaign.

As more SPFI cells are activated, Republican agents attempt to use the opportunity to infiltrate the movement. This is part of a larger continuing project designed to root out opponents to the Republican regime. (see page 26)

Early Spring 1942: Several mysterious raids take place on the edge of Northern territories, destroying local power plants and communication stations. These raids all begin around the same date and typically involve small yet important objectives, with various levels of defense. (see page 10)

01 Spring 1942: Damien, the leader of the SPFI, is activated by her CEF handler as part of the Golab operation (a rear-guard undercover force left behind by the CEF as they left the planet). She reflects on her dual identity as a Terranovan terrorist and an Earth agent provocateur and begins to doubt the CEF and their objectives. (see page 24)

Early Spring 1942: The SPFI greatly increase the number of cells within its ranks in preparation for a complex operation known as the Day of Terror. This operation will consist of a number of coordinated strikes against Republican targets; though this is unknown to the SPFI at large, the plan is actually aimed at significantly weakening the Republican defensive capabilities in the region to ease future CEF strikes. (see page 27)

02 Spring 1942: The Westphalia Cabinet convenes at the country house of Lang Regina to decide on their future course of action. An ambitious plan of exploration and commando operations is reluctantly agreed upon by all. (see page 8)

05 Spring 1942: The first solid indication that the former Humanist Alliance armed forces are rebuilding in an attempt to reconquer their homeland is uncovered from an intercepted transmission.

Timeline of Events

07•SP•42 to 01•SU•42

To the Republicans' surprise, the former Protectors seem to have managed to unite a number of previously opposed Humanist factions into a single organized resistance movement. Humanist raids designed to gather supplies start to hit throughout the former Alliance territory. (see page 28)

07 Spring 1942: The Hands of Thor, a Revisionist revival sect, announces its existence for the first time to the general public during a Revisionist meeting in Sorrento. The group describes itself as returning to the peaceful roots of the religion in reaction to the recent conflicts, yet keeping the moral strength of character exhibited by icons of the faith such as Reverend Thor Hutchison. (see page 11)

12 Spring 1942: After nearly two cycles of secret imprisonment, former Badlands Revolutionary Front leader Ernesto Jaxon is offered a pardon by the Westphalia Cabinet in exchange for his cooperation. He agrees, provided the Badlands Revolutionary Movement is cleared of all involvement in the Peace River bombing. (see page 12)

Milani DuBeau-Slovenski set asides a special lab unit for purposes unknown even to her subordinates. The new facilities stand well aside of the New Peace River settlement being assembled in the plains at the foot of the Pacifica Range. (see page 45)

14 Spring 1942: Tired of waiting for Louise deRouen to make a movement against her father, and wary of her rising level of recklessness, Jacques Molay finds other conspirators willing to back him up in his bid for total power over the South. (see page 29)

15 Spring 1942: A series of missions go awry for the SPFI, causing the death or capture of many teams and operatives. Evidence points to internal sabotage, though the 'whys' and 'whos' remain unknown for the moment. (see page 30)

16 Spring 1942: An SPFI cell manages to survive the ambush that was supposed to eliminate it. The cell members go rogue and begin to dig into the recent mishaps that have befallen the organization in the hope of finding who is trying to kill them.

They are forced to go underground when their main contact is gunned down before their eyes by unknown attackers. (see page 33)

17 Spring 1942: The rogue SPFI cell discovers the extent of the disaster as many more of the newly recruited teams are eliminated. Careful investigative work reveals that the killers are indeed part of the SPFI and they are in contact with Damien, the organization's leader. (see page 34)

24 Spring 1942: Former Humanist Alliance forces make a series of daring raids against Republican positions near Gardena and White Rock. They escape with supplies and ammunition. (see page 36)

27 Spring 1942: The rogue SPFI cell attempts to eliminate Damien, but fails. This exposes them to the group backing Damien — the CEF underground agent provocateur group codenamed Golab — which immediately put a counterplan into action to have them removed permanently. (see page 37)

31 Spring 1942: The Golab Operation group sends an assassin team against the rogue cell. They are saved at the last minute by the intervention of Damien, who has a crisis of conscience. Damien decides to throw her lot in with the Terranovans, turning her back on her CEF past. (see page 38)

01 Summer 1942: After some in-depth behind-the-scenes reworking, Damien puts the "Day of Terror" plan into action. SPFI cells loyal to her are tasked to hit crucial objectives throughout the city-state, using the opportunity to remove as many CEF infiltrators in the process as they can.

Timeline of Events

11•SU•42 to 11•AU•42

Damien eliminates the leader of the Golab organization in the region. The local Colonial Expeditionary Force operation is wiped out, though the Republic is not rid of the SPFI. (see page 40)

11 Summer 1942: A mysterious woman capable of great feats of agility and strength is reported to prowl the alleys and streets of Friednam-Serrby, deep within the world-city of Gommorrah. Though this is not known to most of her pursuers, she is actually a SLEDGE who escaped from the control of Elite Genome Labs (EGL) before her mental conditioning was complete. EGL agents and rival gangbangers are currently hunting for her; this is also attracting the notice of the CEF and the Liberati. (see page 65)

22 Summer 1942: The first major public press conference involving the Black Talon is held in Valeria, Norlight Confederacy. The latest Talon mission is told to the world in broad strokes so as not to compromise operational security. The Talon crews are painted as heroic figures to garner public support for the program. (see page 14)

24 Summer 1942: Halban Kiskess, an old friend of General Aschenbach, is assigned as Head of Personnel for the Black Talon program. The rigid Westerner has some difficulty at first adapting to the loose organization of the Talons, but eventually learns to fit in. (see page 16)

In a widely-distributed news report, the Westphalia Cabinet announces the death of Ernesto Jaxon. It has been faked to allow him to operate without constraint. (see page 17)

29 Summer 1942: In response to the 77th Talon raid, the CEF implements a complex battle plan designed to stop the Terranovan incursions in Caprician space by destroying the Terranovans' space transport capacity, from vessels to

shipyards. The plan is broken down in an ambitious series of raids and deep space strikes, to be implemented gradually over the following months. (see page 68)

32 Summer 1942: The Gate drive parts brought back by the 77th Talons' Winter 1942 expedition are examined and analyzed at Iandens Astro Development Labs' main orbital facility. The entire operation is supervised from IADL's home base in Marathon, which serves as the mission control center. (see page 18)

34 Summer 1942: Disillusioned by the recent war and the belligerent conduct of their leaders, people abandon the Revisionist faith in large numbers. The Prophet's Shield starts a public relation campaign designed to bring the faithful back to the fold, by any means necessary. (see page 19)

35 Summer 1942: In need of serious political support, Reverend-Mother Maya Fajil meets with Grand Marshall Victoria Edden-Smythe. Seeing the latter's emotional problems — her marriage to Lang Regina is falling apart — Fajil convinces her to accept her as her new confessor. (see page 20)

Autumn 1942: Lysia Masao becomes pregnant with Shirow's child and future heir. The pregnancy is a difficult one, fraught with mood swings and physical problems. Many among the palace's inhabitants and staff wonder whether hormones or something darker is at work. (see page 41)

11 Autumn 1942: Agents under the direction of Clan Peters attempt to stir up troubles in the clanless worker underclass of the West Frontier Protectorate. This weakens Lang Regina's own political faction, a traditional opponent of the Zucco, with whom the Peters are allied. Unknown to the Zucco, this also advances the agenda of the Peters, who are seeking to become one of the prominent clans by using the chaos caused by the aftermath of the Interpolar War. (see page 21)

Timeline of Events

03•WI•43 to 34•AU•43

Winter 1943: The Khayr ad-Din Army, looking for action, begins hunting local bandits and brigand groups. This creates an exodus of sorts as the rovers are pushed further away from the Western Desert, toward the polar regions. (see page 49)

03 Winter 1943: A recon patrol from the Oasis tower of Jasmine's Hope clashes with a Republican battle group trying to establish a secret supply dump in the region. In the subsequent battle, the tower is destroyed and all its inhabitants believed killed. The officer responsible is tried and executed, but the Republican army decides to bury the whole affair anyway. (see page 46)

07 Winter 1943: The Battle of Harrid's Ridge, one of the many Black Talon operations on Caprice, takes place. The Terranovans are victorious, eliminating an entire Commonwealth convoy, but not without taking some casualties. This is the second instance of two Talon teams finding themselves on the same battlefield. (see page 56)

Spring 1943: The first few Oasis towers of the New Peace River settlements open their doors to the Riverans. Paxton reopens a number of small factories and resumes production. (see page 51)

02 Spring 1943: Jophell Taverson, a Liberati sympathizer serving aboard the CEF's Monolith Station, helps engineer the breakout of a captured Talon pilot, Nathan Matthews. (see page 60)

16 Spring 1943: The existence of a "fifth column" within the ranks of the CEF, long suspected, is confirmed. Colonel Hendricks, warden of the Bastille Alpha prison-fortress, begins a personal crusade to purge the CEF of any and all traitors. (see page 62)

Late Spring 1943: Disciplinary reports begin to pour in to Fleet Command regarding the increasingly shoddy behavior of the ground troops of the 3rd Fleet. (see page 63)

01 Summer 1943: The CEF's 7th Fleet, sent to conquer additional worlds further along the Gate Web, officially becomes "out of communication" after they miss yet another communication window. It is not yet assumed to be destroyed, but renewed efforts are made to contact them. (see page 64)

19 Summer 1943: The GREL prisoners working in the galleries under Bastille Alpha finally break through into the subterranean cave systems that pass beneath the installation. They cover up the passage to make sure it is not discovered by prison authorities. (see page 66)

20 Summer 1943: Discrete access to the outside world convinces the GREL (Legion) and human (Old Guard) factions of Bastille Alpha to form an alliance to better their chance of escape and revolt. (see page 66)

23 Summer 1943: A woman describing herself as a freelance Terranovan agent begins to make contact with Liberati cells across the city. She claims she is not affiliated with the Black Talon program, but is actually sponsored by another Terranovan faction. (see page 67)

34 Autumn 1943: An unidentified burn patient escapes from an hospital in the Badlands in a self-described mission of revenge. His injuries and background indicates he is one of the victims of the Peace River attack, but his biochemistry presents significant divergence from the population of the region. (see page 69)

Credits

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Philippe R Boule — hope you like how the ball's rolling!

Dedication

To Alex — wish you were here, buddy.

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