

INN NEWS UPDATE...

Jihad Hot Spots: Terra



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CREDITS

Writing

Joel "Welshman" Bancroft-Connors
 Herbert A. Beas II
 Craig Erne
 Chris Hartford
 Ken' Horner
 Nick "Gunslinger" Marsala
 Dana Maynard
 Mike Miller
 Jim Rapkins
 Ben H. Rome
 Adam Sherwood
 Paul Sjardijn
 Øystein Tvedten
 Patrick "Roosterboy" Wynne
 Andreas Zuber
Misplaced Childhood
 Chris Hartford
Chaos Eternal
 Nick "Gunslinger" Marsala
 Ben H. Rome
Rules Annex
 Joel "Welshman" Bancroft-Connors
Additional Writing
 David L. McCulloch

Product Development

Herbert A. Beas II
Rules Development
 Randall N. Bills

Product Editing

Ben H. Rome
Editing Assistance
 Herbert A. Beas II

BattleTech Line Developer

Herbert A. Beas II

Production Staff

Art Direction
 Brent Evans
Cover Art
 Klaus Scherwinski
Cover Design
 Matt Heerdt
BattleTech Logo Design
 Shane Hartley, Steve Walker and Matt Heerdt
Evolved Faction Logos
 Jason Vargas
Layout
 Matt Heerdt
Illustrations
 Douglas Chaffee
 Brent Evans
 Alex Iglesias
 Aaron Miller
 Mark Winters
Map (Devils Tower)
 Ray Arrastia
Record Sheets
 David L. McCulloch

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Playtesters and Fact-Checkers

Ray Arrastia, Ron Barter, Roland M. Boshnack, Paul Bowman, Rich Cencarik, Jason M. Donahue, Nicholai Duda, Bruce Ford, Joshua Franklin, William "MadCapellan" Gauthier, Tanic Half-Munchken, Keith Hann,

Térence Harris, Johannes Heidler, Glenn Hopkins, Daniel Isberner, Chris Marti, David M. McCulloch, Mike Miller, Darrell "FlailingDeath" Myers, Aaron Pollyea, Craig Reed, Rick Remer, Luke Robertson, Jason Robinette, Andreas Rudolph, Eric Salzman, Christopher K. Searls, Jason Schmetzer, Björn Schmidt, Chris Smith, Peter M. Smith, Joel Steverson, Geoff Swift, Chris "Chinless" Wheeler, Patrick Wynne.

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Find us online:

Precentor_martial@classicbattletech.com
 (e-mail address for any *BattleTech* questions)
<http://www.classicbattletech.com>
 (official *BattleTech* web pages)
<http://www.CatalystGameLabs.com>
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<http://www.battlecorps.com/catalog>
 (online ordering)

MISPLACED CHILDHOOD



AARON MILLER



MISPLACED CHILDHOOD

DEER LODGE, MONTANA
NORTH AMERICA, TERRA
BLAKE PROTECTORATE
15 DECEMBER 3078

"No, the left loader," Precentor Darius Ogden growled at his subordinate's incompetence. "Get it on the track and engaged!" He tugged the neck of his jacket up, tucking his chin back into the minimal protection of the collar, the frigid air burning his nostrils. The weak sunlight did little more than glint off his rank insignia; it was still twenty below out of the shade. He longed to be somewhere warm, but there was little chance of that.

Hurry up and slow down. That was the mixed message from command since the Unbelievers had invaded Holy Terra. Efforts to throw back the horde commanded by the arch-heretic Steiner-Davion and his cronies had proved ineffective, a far cry from the bloodletting that accompanied the disastrous "Case White" assaults not long after the start of the glorious Jihad to spread the Word of Blake across the stars. Geneva was lost, as were Singapore and Tokyo, though the heretics had been bloodied there and elsewhere. Matters looked grim, and St. Jamais had called all the faithful who could make it to converge on the Bear Lodge Supply Port, a suitable redoubt for the last stand against the fall of night that would follow should the heretics prevail.

And now this, forced out of the Court by advancing heretic forces and a desperate force-march to the bastion, only to suffer a blown drive train on the low-loader in the middle of this Blake-forsaken wilderness. He scowled at the stricken vehicle, sundry access panels open and machinery everywhere as technicians attempted to bring it back to life, incantations mixed with cursing and technical jargon. By rights they should press on but with supplies so scarce, abandonment of the vehicle and its precious cargo wasn't an option.

To say they were exposed was an understatement—Ogden glanced over his shoulder at the snowy expanse of the valley bottom, then back at the crews manhandling crates. At least it wasn't a wooded killing ground like the narrow terrain they'd sped through overnight. That really *was* bandit country, the territory of the Kalispell Witch, and he was surprised they'd made it through without major incident. He'd hoped to make Bozeman or even Billings before nightfall. But at *this* rate they'd be lucky to make Butte, and sitting out in the open was just asking for trouble, either from the bandits or the heretic orbital forces. Rumor had it that the barbarian Clans had thrown their lot in with the heretics, and it didn't take much to imagine them using orbital bombardment to mop-up St. Jamais' loyalists.

He checked his chronometer. Almost three hours stuck here now, and the chaos looked no nearer resolution. Too long. It was time to move.

"You and you," He gestured at the nearest workers. "Get those tied down and then get ready to—"

A low whistle rose into a tearing shriek, crossing from right to left just in front of him. Instinctively his eyes tracked the sound and noted the fist-sized crater in the side of the low-loader's cab. For an instant his frost and fatigue-addled brain struggled to comprehend what was happening, then his head snapped right, toward the origin of the sound. There was a brief flash on the edge of the distant tree line. "*Sni—!*"

Something punched him hard in the chest and he careened off the nearest crate like a rag-doll carelessly discarded by a child. He didn't feel the impact, but instead found himself wondering why the world was tilting alarmingly. His face came to rest on the powdery snow and he was distantly aware of the ice crystals burning his skin. Snow. The cold analytical part of his brain screamed for attention. Snow should be white, not red. It should be—
 Blackness.



Sabrina Nial stomped her feet in a vain attempt to restore circulation. The icy wind knifed through her smock and coat as if they weren't there. She'd never felt so cold, even when skiing back on New Avalon. Then again, an afternoon out doing winter sports followed by the après-ski in a toasty lodge was a far cry from a troglodyte existence halfway up a frigid mountain. She'd been here ten days and already wanted to escape. The people she'd been sent to meet had been doing this for years. Decades even.

"A crisp morning," the rugged-looking woman said, grinning as she brushed aside the camouflaged tarp and emerged from the tunnel complex. Grey dominated the petite woman's hair, pulled back in a severe braid, but there were hints of red and gold that complemented her deep green eyes. Her face was weather-beaten, with a scar running the length of the left side of her face from temple to jaw. It was impossible to put a precise age to her—Sabi guessed at early sixties, but it could easily be ten years either way. "But at least it's not snowing." She carried a steaming tin mug in each hand and offered one to the AFFS officer.

Sabrina felt her fingers tingle as the mug's warmth seeped through her gloves, the start of pins and needles. She sniffed the contents gingerly; supplies were scarce here and this

MISPLACED CHILDHOOD



was as like to be hot pine beer as coffee. The older woman laughed. "Coffee and a dash of Jimmy's hooch. It be nothing but the best for our guests. Cooked up nicely in the field oven you did be bringing."

Assuming the hooch wasn't fermented axel grease, Sabi thought. Jimmy Meeks was the band's mechanic, a man whose hands and face seemed permanently stained by years on the job.

Sabrina couldn't place the woman's accent. She'd thought Irish originally, but had been laughed at for the suggestion and guessing had become a game between the two of them.

Ops had given Sabi little in the way of background material on the band she was being sent to aid, just one of dozens of resistance cells who'd held out on Terra and had been contacted by Stone's Lament. But what the local resistance lacked in equipment and training, they more than made up for in zeal and efficiency. The taskforce had equipment in spades but needed people who knew the local terrain. And so here she was, in the godforsaken North American wilderness, providing technical support to the locals. Not that they seemed to need it; they were pretty much self-sufficient.

She sipped the hot beverage. Not as vile as she expected, but back home it might've gone straight down the sink.

Sabi cradled the mug, looking out across the wooded hillside, snow and dark trees in sharp contrast. It was deceptively beautiful, like much of Terra. Serene, with only the sound of branches clicking together in the breeze. For a moment she found it incomprehensible that they were in the middle of the largest military operation in centuries, but then she shifted to ease the pressure on her chilled feet - the pressure of the pistol on her right hip and the edges of the armor-polymer plates in her jacket brought Sabrina crashing back to reality.

The older woman tossed back the last of the coffee and with a sharp flick of her wrist sent the dregs into a nearby bush. "Company," she said, nodding toward a pair of white-clad figures climbing the slope. "News of our friends." The Blakists, the commander meant, running the gauntlet of the Rockies to escape the Coalition landings near the Court of the Star League on Puget Sound. There were almost too many targets for the band to choose from, so they had to pick their battles carefully.

The new arrivals approached wearily, as if they'd walked a long way in the snow. Both were swaddled in white, scarves wrapped round their necks and goggles covered their eyes. One was smaller and slimmer—a girl Sabi guessed—and carried an optical scope and a light assault rifle. The other

carried an older 50-caliber rifle, officially a light anti-armor gun but also favored for sniping. It was one of the "toys" Sabi had brought to the group and she frowned at the damage that'd been inflicted on the trigger guard.

"Jenn," the commander called, "there's coffee in the pot. Real stuff." The smaller figure gave an excited squeal and ducked into the tunnel. The gunman stood with the rifle resting on his shoulder.

"Not a bad piece of kit," he said, "though it pulls to the right a little. And—" He twisted the weapon to expose the trigger guard even more, or rather the metal stumps of where it had been. "—whoever designed it never considered someone trying to use it while gloved."

His black-goggled gaze seemed to challenge Sabi. "Or did they expect people to sit there with their pinkies exposed in twenty below?"

"Play nice, kiddo," the commander said. "Would you rather be using that old Makarov?"

The gunman pulled back the scarf and lifted the goggles so they sat atop his mop of red-gold hair.

Sabi gaped. He was sixteen, seventeen tops. The same age as her little brother. She recalled seeing him about the camp, but had assumed he was a message runner or some such.

"You're a child!" she blurted out. "What're you doing—?"

The boy scowled. "I've not been a child for a long time, Major Nial, not since the Blakists killed my father in front of me. Would've added me to their statistics had I not shot first." He jabbed a finger at her. "I was seven when Case White failed. Nine when I killed my first man. To you, this war has been going a decade. For some of us—" He gestured at the commander, the family resemblance obvious. "—it's been raging for twenty years." He held out the rifle. "This was the kind of 'toy' I grew up with. Don't call me a child." He stormed into the tunnel, not giving Sabi chance to respond.

The commander paused for only a moment, then shrugged. "You'll have to forgive my son. Nate can be a little touchy at times."

"My apologies. I didn't mean to cause offense. I was just caught off guard by his youth."

The commander made a dismissive gesture. "He'll get over it. Probably already has. Quicksilver temperament, that one. Like his father. And me I suppose." She grinned, then looked serious. "We fight with the tools we have, and that means my precious seventeen year-old is in the line, fighting for freedom and revenge. Sounds hokey, I know."

Sabi nodded. "It's what the Coalition is all about. What we're trying to do taking down the Blakists."

"Another war to end all wars?" She snorted, but the trace of a smile tugged at the corner of her mouth. "I was on



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Tukayyid." She gestured to the scar on her face. "And those of us who went through *that* hellhole thought we be winning a respite for humanity." She gestured to the landscape around them. "So much for that." Her eyes flicked to the tunnel entrance as a parka-wrapped figure emerged and handed her a note. "Though I do be hoping that were in the end game now." Her eyes scanned the page before passing it over. "Your boss do be thinking so."



**SUNDANCE, WYOMING
NORTH AMERICA, TERRA
BLAKE PROTECTORATE
16 DECEMBER 3078**

Powdery snow spiraled away from the chopper as its wheels touched down, the loadmaster gesturing for the trio of white-clad figures to leap clear under the watchful eyes of the waist-gunners. No sooner were they away than the pilot gunned the throttle and lifted clear, joining the mass of circling aircraft keeping a wary eye on the perimeter.

"Not been here for a while," the boy muttered. "'75 I think, after that excursion to Cheyenne."

"We were here back in '69 too," the commander said. "After Case White. When we stayed at the Mitchell place. Not that it looked like this then."

As far as the eye could see was a military camp, troops preparing to fight and vehicles being prepped. Numerous 'Mechs hung in mobile gantries while others marched along the perimeters. AA batteries jutted up toward the sky and the aerials of communications gear and electronic-warfare gear punctuated the skyline. There was a steady stream of trucks carrying equipment, and just as many on foot, dressed in a wide array of uniforms. All wore the Coalition insignia and the vehicles and 'Mechs were similarly marked; someone, at least, was thinking to minimize friendly fire.

Sabrina lowered the radio handset she'd been using. "The boss isn't at his CP but wants you to come up to Gantry Six." She gestured to the north, then tossed a small black rectangle to each of her companions, pinning one on her own chest. "Dosimeters. Our friends have been tossing nukes at Denver and elsewhere so we're likely to see more than just snow."

"They're at Mato Tipila?" The commander asked as they walked along a roadway that was equal parts mud and snow. She grinned at Sabi's blank expression. "Bear Lodge. The Devils Tower."

"How'd you know?"

"Who do you think let on the Robes had built a supply port there? That sort of work be rather hard to hide."

"This is us, I think." Sabrina gestured to the looming skull-headed behemoth nestled in the mobile gantry. "Time for me to make myself scarce."

"Been good working with you, Major Nial." The commander held out her hand and Sabi took it. The commander's handshake was surprisingly firm for such a petite figure.

"The pleasure's all mine." Her eyes glanced up at a figure descending from the *Atlas*. "You too, Nathan." She nodded at the boy who scowled back.

"Krimari, in the Magistracy." The commander stated, grinning. "You wanted to know about my accent." Sabi laughed and tossed her a salute before turning on her heels, attempting not to make her departure seem too hasty.

The descending figure was dressed in green overalls with a pistol in a shoulder rig. In his mid-thirties, he bore no rank insignia and hadn't shaved recently, his hair an unruly black mop. He could've easily been mistaken for a tech. But his eyes—intense and haunted—put the lie to that. There was little doubting that here was a person of importance. One of the techs handed him a towel, which he used to wipe grease from his hand before shrugging into a thermal jacket. He regarded the commander intently and offered his hand. "You'd be the Kalispell Witch, Edelle Kearny. Or do you prefer Edi Alexander? And Nathan, of course." He shook hands with the youth.

"You appear to be having me at a disadvantage, sir," Kearny stated flatly.

"Of course, my apologies. I forget my image hasn't been circulated on Terra. I'm Devlin Stone."



"Local knowledge." Stone gestured at Kearny with his left hand, a data pad held in his right. "Will be essential to victory."

They were in his command post, a holotable dominating the bunker and displays hanging from each wall. Techs in a plethora of uniforms operated the systems—ComStar, AFFS, FWLM—all feeding data to Stone's personal terminal. His appetite for data was insatiable; reports from the dozens of battles going on around the planet flooded in. It reminded Kearny of what she'd heard about Old Man Focht on Tukayyid, a giant swimming in data while coordinating that titanic clash.

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Kearny eyed the short figure across the table from Stone, the pins of the Precentor Martial on the collar of his olive-drab uniform, arms folded across his chest. She knew of Victor Steiner-Davion, Focht's handpicked successor, but this was the first time she'd met the man who was her notional commanding officer. Despite his height he was an imposing presence—like Trent Arian, she recalled—but even he clearly deferred to the younger Stone.

"In all probability, St. Jamais has some nasty surprises in store for the Coalition, but he's not got much in the way of troops. Intel reports less than a level IV—probably only a couple of Level III's—but then Intel didn't know about Bear Lodge until Cameron bolted there. We only had your reports to go on."

Steiner-Davion typed a swift sequence on his data pad and a 3-D image of the butte appeared on the holotable. The massive and the instantly recognizable tower of rock dominated the image, the prefabricated buildings of the Bear Lodge Supply Port straddling the Belle Fourche River on the eastern side. A pair of *Union* DropShips sat on the pads, surrounded by cargo loaders.

"This is based on orbital imagery obtained on the twelfth," Stone said, "but as you can see it's a bit short of detail. St. Jamais has managed to keep the defenses concealed and we need a look-see on the ground." He regarded Kearny intently. "I hesitate to ask after all you've done and the price you've paid, but someone who knows the terrain would be invaluable in scouting the Tower. Can I count on you?"

Kearny's eyes flicked toward Nathan, then back to Stone. "That you can, Stone." She sighed. "A last huzzah, then we can all go home."

"Me too, General." Nate injected. "You'll not find a better scout."

Stone's eyebrows lifted, but it was Kearny who spoke. "No son, this is for me to do. I'll not send you into that hornet's nest." She regarded Stone intently. "He'll do good for you here if you can find a spot for him. You wanted local knowledge and he can give it to you."

Nathan scowled "But—"

"No buts, soldier. I'm your CO, as well as your mother." A smile tugged at the edge of her lips.

"Done," said the grizzled Stone, who nodded to Steiner-Davion. The Precentor Martial unfolded his arms and tossed a small box to Kearny. She opened it carefully, her eyes narrowing upon seeing the rank pins it contained.

"Welcome to the Coalition, Precentor Kearny." There was a hint of German in Steiner-Davion's accent, just like Old Man Focht. "There's a ride waiting for you at Carpenter's Creek. An *Avatar*."

Memories of Salinas and Gunnison flashed before her eyes. Images of good people lost in the Blakist sneak attack so many years ago. Time to finish what had started there. "Yeah, I know the model."



**SUNDANCE, WYOMING
NORTH AMERICA, TERRA
BLAKE PROTECTORATE
17 DECEMBER 3078**

"Vampire! Vampire!" The alarm screamed and people in the command post pulled on NBC suits and respirators. It was chaos, but structured, some technicians pulling on their suits while others remained at their monitor posts. Nathan watched impassively—he had no monitor to watch—and he saw that Stone stood at the heart of the storm, unfazed by the doom rushing toward them. Fatalistic.

"What do we have?" he asked calmly, pulling data from several monitors.

"Fast movers," one tech called out. "Coming in NOE."

Fighters, Nathan thought, *using the undulating terrain to evade anti-air fire*. He recognized the distant buzz of chain-gun batteries firing. His eyes widened as he felt as much as heard the batteries in and around the camp opening up. There was a distant boom.

"Splash one. There's a second heading—"

The lights and displays flickered momentarily then resumed their full intensity. He heard a low rumble, followed by a tremor through his feet. The constant background hum off the bunker changed in pitch and he felt his ears pop. He glanced at Stone who'd held his nose, equalizing the pressure.

"Positive pressure. Keeps out the radiologicals," Sabrina said from her station to his right. "At least one of the bogies dropped their payload, though not on top of us." She had a hand pressed to one ear, holding a headpiece in place as she spoke. "Biologicals or chem too, from what the sensors are telling us."

"Where?" Stone's voice was a monotone.

"Three confirmed, two possibles. Pearce Reservoir—that's chem.—and The Mill." Her eyes widened and she turned to Nathan. "And Carpenter's Creek."



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The mask concealed his tears, he was thankful for that as he pushed his way out of the bunker's pressure seal. He sniffed as he adjusted the impromptu weapon belt and its cargo of magazines. He reached for the rifle he'd carried from Deer Lodge but another hand grasped it first.

"Going somewhere, son?" Stone. He hefted the 50-cal and sighted along its length, stock flush against his respirator. He nodded appreciatively.

"North," Nathan said. "Hunting." He didn't have to say that his prey wore sword insignia, not fur.

There was a click as Stone dry-fired the rifle, inspecting the mechanism before handing it back to Nathan. "A good weapon. Dependable."

"It's okay." He loosened the strap and hung the weapon over his shoulder.

"You don't have to go. She might not have died."

Nate frowned. "Do you believe that?" He'd seen the mushroom cloud. Had known where his mother was meant to be.

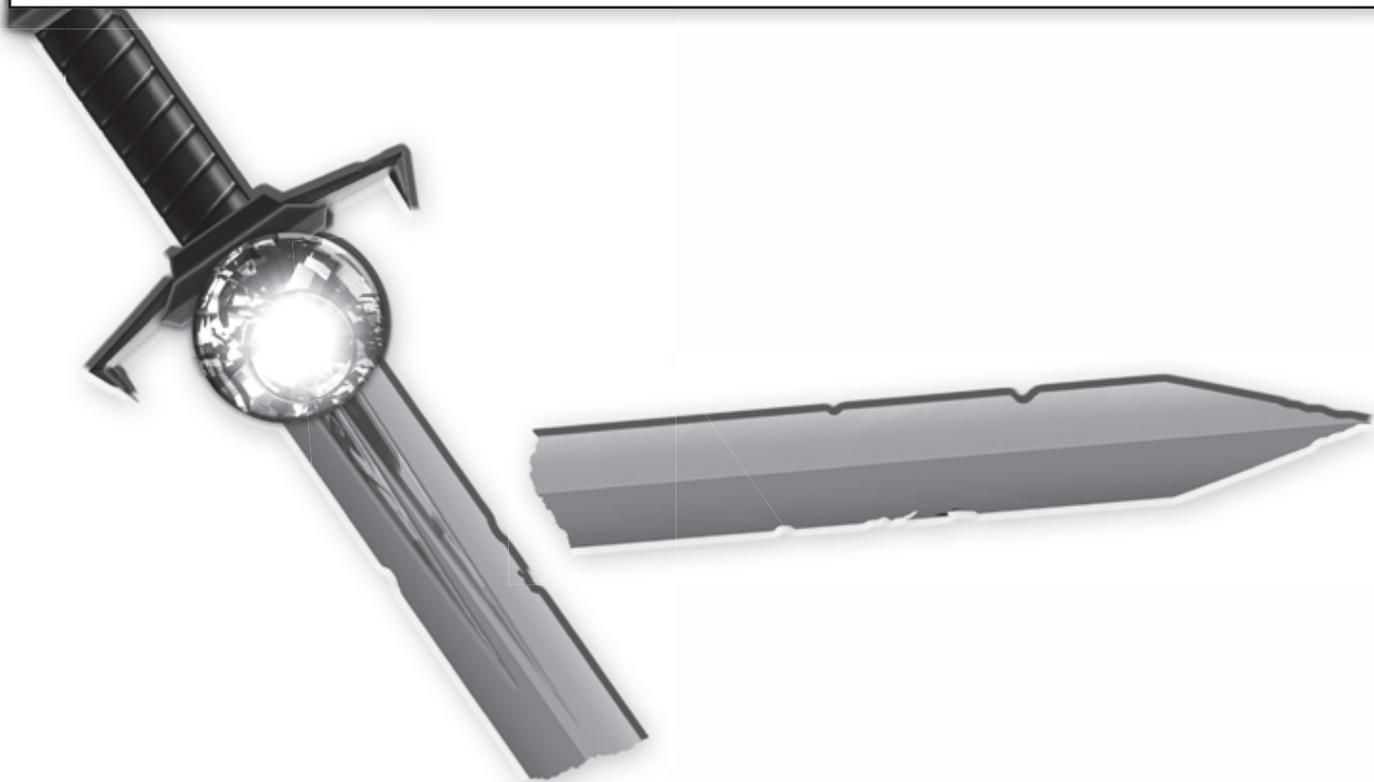
"We'll know soon enough." The Coalition leader took the youth's shoulder in a firm grasp. "Good hunting son. You know where to find us when you're done."

Nathan stood to attention and saluted.



Stone returned the gesture, then stood watching the boy's receding back. He sighed. How had it come to this, when children knew nothing but war? It had to end.

It had to.



INTRODUCTION



Welcome to our INN special report, "State of the Sphere: 3078". I'm your host, Bertram Habeas, and I welcome you to this truly historic retrospective.

It has been just over ten years since the start of the war we now know of as the Word of Blake Jihad, a war that has raged across the entire Inner Sphere, leaving no realm untouched. With death and devastation not seen since the days of the early Succession Wars, billions have died, worlds have fallen to ruin, and entire realms have teetered on the brink of collapse. For many, it has become nearly impossible to see a ray of hope, as the skies darken from the smoke and ash of war, yet heroes have risen—and united at last—to turn the tide against the jihadists. Covering these events across the Inner Sphere, INN continues in its commitment to offer its readers and viewers bi-annual reports to record and examine the war as it happens, so that we may all see the bigger picture unfolding before us.

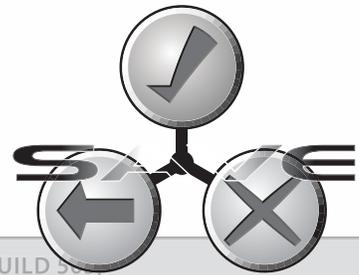
Presented here is a summary of events since our last special report. As ever, we have striven to accumulate data from a variety of sources—most through partnerships and unprecedented access within several organizations—to provide the widest possible view in the most personal and understandable ways. All of this is presented with a minimum of heavy analysis, so that you, the viewer, can make your own judgments. Yet as ever, through these snippets, we hope to show the complex and common fabric that runs through this terrible conflict that has impacted all of humanity like never before.

As a special consideration, this compilation also includes a new and updated review of Terra itself, humanity's home and the inevitable heart of the Jihad. Newly liberated by the allied coalition, it seems only prudent that our viewers receive this opportunity to understand the complex nature of the worlds mankind once called home, long before we stepped out among the stars and brought our wars to the interstellar stage.

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

As ever, INN thanks you, our loyal viewers, for your patronage and support.

—**Bertram Habeas**, INN Special Correspondent, Terra, 19 January 3079



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System Scan Initializing

SECURITY LEVEL AMBER



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Jihad: Terra (JHS: Terra) is a sourcebook for *BattleTech* that continues where *Blake Ascending*, *Jihad Hot Spots: 3072*, *The Blake Documents*, and *Jihad Hot Spots: 3076* left off, providing players and gamemasters with an ongoing first-hand look at the events of the Word of Blake Jihad that began the closing months of 3068 through the end of 3078. To best reflect the ongoing uncertainty of this period, the material presented in this sourcebook—as with the previous and subsequent *Jihad Hot Spots* books—uses the format of compiled news articles, interviews and first-person accounts. In addition, as the truth of events comes to light, this book and its successors will include a timeline describing those events known to be true from previous books while also providing additional campaign scenarios and new game rules and units based on developments in the appropriate time period.

Beginning with *The Protectorate Crumbles*, *Jihad: Terra* reviews the events that led up to and through *Jihad Hot Spots: 3076*. A review of known events—removed enough from the immediate chaos to be considered fact by nearly everyone in the *BattleTech* universe—is also provided here.

The following sections take readers forward from 3076 through the end of 3078, using the same format as *JHS: 3076*, but with a chronological order and a focus on the allied efforts to shatter the Word of Blake Protectorate and its last holdouts on Terra. Each of these sections includes scenario tracks (called *Chaos Eternal*) compatible with the *Chaos Unbound* and *Chaos Unleashed* campaign systems outlined in *Blake Ascending* and the *Chaos Rampant* and *Chaos Overwhelming* tracks featured in *JHS: 3072* and *JHS: 3076* (respectively). These tracks are also compatible with those found in the *Jihad Turning Points* PDF-exclusive books available through battlecorps.com. Gamemasters and players can use these campaign scenarios, which follow the *Chaos Unbound* system, for any number of one-off games. We chose not to reprint the campaign system in this book (which originally appeared in *Dawn of the Jihad/Blake Ascending*, pp. 133-138) so as to provide more room for articles and “hard” rules later on. The *Aftermath* chapter represents the final sourcebook section covering the Jihad in this book, and wraps up events

through 3078, including a few key happenings between early 3077 and the end of 3078. Following *Aftermath* is a special mini-sourcebook, *Touring Terra*, which describes the history, people, and speculations on Terra itself, the birthplace of humanity, once-capital of the Star League, and home to both ComStar and the Word of Blake.

The final section, *Jihad: Terra Rules Annex*, highlights new special rules and spotlights a few new units for advanced *BattleTech* game play whose introductions and/or use played a major role in the events preceding and featured within this book.

ABOUT THE CHAOS ETERNAL CAMPAIGN

The campaign tracks presented here follow the same rules as originally presented in *Dawn of the Jihad (DotJ)/Blake Ascending*. A free electronic version of this—*Chaos Campaign*—is also available on www.battlecorps.com. Players and gamemasters will also find these rulebooks handy, depending on the type of campaign run: *Total Warfare (TW)*, *TechManual (TM)*, *Tactical Operations (TO)*, *Strategic Operations (SO)*, *A Time of War (AToW)*, and *Merc Supplemental: Updates (MSU)*. References made to aerospace units in the Tracks will refer to those aerospace unit types featured in *Total Warfare* (such as fighters and DropShips) or those covered in *Strategic Operations* (such as JumpShips, space stations, and WarShips). Additional cited sources may include *Jihad Hot Spots: 3072 (JHS72)*, *Jihad Hot Spots: 3076 (JHS76)*, *Technical Readout: 3075 (TR3075)*, and *Technical Readout: Vehicle Annex (TRVA)*.

If a track does not specify certain parameters, the gamemaster decides what is fair for his or her particular player group. The overall intent of this campaign is to present gamemasters with a framework that allows them to bring their players through the massive conflagration known as the Word of Blake Jihad. Gamemasters begin this arc of the Chaos campaign with *Watershed*. Player groups begin this campaign arc with 1,000 Warchest points or whatever they had remaining at the end of the *Chaos Overwhelming* campaign from *Hot Spots: 3076 (JHS76)*.



THE PROTECTORATE CRUMBLES

