

BattleCarp

Tide of Darkness

FORWARD

Phew!! Well, it took a while but here it is, the first installment to the BattleCarp series; Tide Of Darkness. This has been a collaborative effort between quite a few people from the HeavyMetal Pro forum who have identified themselves with the Dropship Irregulars, sprung forward by Mac Attack's stories of the Warriors of the Dropship, still part of the now Dropship Irregulars.

Many of those that contributed to this story have had no prior fanfic experience, but what came together in the end is a masterpiece. A few special acknowledgments are in order; firstly, Pyro who started this entire odyssey, Nightstalker for opening another thread so that BattleCarp could be written without interruption, Discord for bringing it together in PDF, Medron who (at the time of this writing) will of course host the story for all BattleTech fans to read and enjoy.

Theses are all the members who posted on this story, in order of appearance:

Pyro
Magic Pack
Motown Scrapper
Teemo
Medron Pryde
js
Frederick'Hunter'LeBeau
Swords of Fire
Nightstalker
Clarke Marek
Grey's Shadow
Calis
Miguel
Goose
Sten
Bowtie Bob
EndoSTEEL
endersdouble
BlastyMcNasty
Chainsaw Assassin
Sir Henry

At the time of this writing, plans are being made to start work on the second installment, I have no doubt that the story will be any less of a whirlwind adventure that Tide of Darkness has been

Eric McLaughlin
"Frederick 'Hunter' LeBeau"

Prologue:

It has been many years since the crippling of the vessel known as The Dropship, the demise of alKhan (a rare Clan designation derived from the phrase "almost Khan") Raoul, and the sudden disappearance of MacAttack, the last Jedi during the investigation of a potential Hidden Clan. The Warriors have scattered to the very ends of space, and many have disappeared and others still given up the faith... but some remain. Deep in the heart of the NAIS, Team Bonsai labored long and hard to build the ultimate in spacecraft under Project Heavy Metal, with the aid of ComStar.

Project Heavy Metal only produced one craft, the ultimate in spacecraft... the SLS Irregular, a mighty vessel capable of carrying a reinforced mech regiment and a dizzying array of supporting assets, in addition to some of the heaviest armor and anti-capitalship weapons ever produced. Those few Warriors who remained saw worth in this new vessel, nearly a sister ship to their beloved Dropship, and began recruiting like-minded individuals. Thus were born the Dropship Irregulars, from such units of note as the 204th Bearded Cavalry and the 1st Kilted Battlemech Regiment, the Brightly Painted Decoys, and the Barrel of Monkeys as well as the original core of Warriors of the Dropship. From this ins... diverse mix came raw talent. But not all is right with the universe... the Jedi have vanished, as did the WoBs Deliverance and Katherine Steiner-Davion, and the House of Liao remains at large...

Chapter 1:
January 4
Armpit II
Rimward Middle Periphery

Leftenant Sven Alstrom, AFFS Exploratory Service Security Corp (AFFSESSC for short), watched the descending drop pods and looked to the rest of his lance. "Looks like we got some 'Mechs dropping. Look alive people." As he watched, the pods split open and several decrepit-looking mechs - ancient metallics all - rode to the Earth on jumpjets. A Daishi, two Centurions, and a Wraith, recovered with remarkable speed and charged at his lance.

Sven wasn't impressed. His Devastators and Emperors might not have the Clan-tech of their opponents, but outweighed them considerably. "Computer, scan enemy Battlemechs. Describe any IFF or markings patterns." "All forces, weapons hot. Prepare for battle."

Almost as soon as he said that, the Daishi entered its maximum weapons range and spat death at Sven's Devastator. Bracing for impact, he noted a remarkable grouping of shots hitting his center torso, breaching the outer layers of his engine shielding. "Okay, so you want to play rough, do you?"

Sven's riposte was nothing short of remarkable, lighting up the space in between his Devastator and the Daishi with two particle cannon beams and two gauss slugs. One of the slugs slammed against the head of the Daishi, and the mech staggered drunkenly - but didn't fall. "What in the..."

On his left, an almost impossibly nimble Wraith cut apart Jackie's Emperor, slashing into ammo bins and setting the mech ablaze while one of the Centurions fired a gauss slug through the head of Robert's Devastator. "All right. You're going down."

He never got to finish that thought, cut off by another salvo from the Daishi, which left his 'Mech on its back in the mud. Checking his displays, Sven was left with a grim picture. Gyros offline. Engine breached. Damage still mounting against the 'Mech. "Damn... Earl, send to FSS Plot Hook. We are under attack by unknown forces. Transmit battle logs."

Sven wrapped his hands around the reactor controls, setting to overload as the reply of "Aye, Sir" came across the comms. And then, his world became fire.

January 4, 3087
Sandhurst, Terra
Castle Brian

"And how can you improve on this, Scientist Pielt?" The man cringed. "Amaris the Seventh's plan was sound, but his methods were inferior, and his army an anemic joke filled with defective defectors from the armies of the House Lords. We have abandoned work on the goldfish altogether, finding them unsuited for our purposes, and instead have experimented with force-feeding neurological imprints to carp."

The robed woman's eyes glowed. "You mean to say you have wasted years of my time playing with Carp?" Lightning bolts flew from her fingers and intercepted the poor scientist, catapulting him off of his feet and into a nearby wall. "Neg, my lady..."

not wasted...", said the man weakly as a wisp of smoke rose lazily from him.

Pyro woke up with a start as the details of his strange dream faded away. For the past few nights, he had woken up at the oddest hours of the night, plagued with strange dreams of evil fish, interspersed with what appeared to be Jedi nonsense. He made a mental note to quit playing old Terran computer games like KOTOR long into the night, and to get rid of the fish tank in his bedroom - plans he always forgot the next day as the business of being Precentor-Martial came to the fore.

This morning was wholly odd, however, as his clock read 23:32 Blinking his eyes, Pyro glared at the clock and the number stubbornly refused to change. Then he remembered that this clock was on that infernal military time, and sat in his bed briefly. At this time, he finally noticed the glowing bluish-figure in the room. "Pyro..."

Quite determined that he was dreaming, Pyro nevertheless hid under the blankets. The bluish-figure pulled back the hood on his head and growled. "Dangit laddie, I dinna fly myself halfway across the galaxy jus' to fall for the hide under the blanket trick. Medron already pulled that one on me and I willna be fooled twice the same way!" The voice finally sunk in to Pyro's sleep-deprived mind. "Mac!"

"Shh.., not so loud. Half the Castle Brian might hear you. My business keeps me away still, and darkness closes on the Inner Sphere. We need another Jedi." The words sunk in. "So why come to me? I'm old, you can't expect me to go running off and saving the universe when I'm a lazy old coot!" Mac shook his head. "No laddie, that is not your destiny. Take only those you trust, and depart post-haste. You must resign your post and go to the far periphery, to the Yorba system, and there you will find the Bridge of Death."

"The Bridge of Death?" "Yes. You must cross it, and there you will find the next clue to your destiny." Mac's apparition began to fade, and Pyro leapt forward half-crazed. "Mac!" The apparition vanished, as the words echoed dramatically. "You will go to the Yorba System, and there find the Bridge of Death. Cross it, and seek your destiny."

January 4th
Celestial Palace
Sian

"This is INN!", said the tri-D projector, as the typical news update fanfare blew shrilly. Eventually, the whole noise died down and was replaced by a bleached blonde. "This just in. Long-time Precentor-Martial of ComStar Pyro has suddenly announced an extended leave of absence from the post, naming Precentor Tharkad as Precentor-Martial pro-tempore. He is reported to have vanished with a Bug Eye-class vessel crewed by his secretary and his aide. Sadly, the pickled head of Gavin Dow was unavailable for comment on the appointment of a new Pro-Tem Precentor Martial."

"In other news, the SLDF is preparing for a special commissioning ceremony for the SLS Irregular, first of a new class of dropships rumored to be able to revolutionize warfare."

Kali Liao watched the screen with a kind of distanced interest as her loyal Death Commandoes tortured a captured Federated Suns divorce lawyer for her

amusement. The lawyer screamed and whined pitifully as the worst anime of the latter half of the 20th century was screened in front of him, unblinking as his eyelids had been cut off hours ago.

"Enough of this!", she said as she rose. "Someone has to teach those Star League types respect! Those INN briefings should all be about the glory of the Capellan Confederation! Find that rogue Precentor-Martial and bring him before me. And destroy that dropship too!"

The Death Commandos nodded. "Your will shall be done, Celestial Wisdom." They tore the lawyer's entrails out for an encore and left him to bleed to death as they set about plotting their next assignments.

January 4th
The Junk Pile
Magic Pack HQ

In a dank room somewhere the clanking of keys resounded... there was a momentary flicker in the only light in the room, a battered old CRT followed by the time honored ritual for fixing balky equipment

"THUMP" THERE YOU GO YOU PIECE OF JUNK

geek hit the side of the terminal...
just then *BEEP*

Geek had gotten a message
"We're back in business.... still have your gear? Pyro"

No bovine scatology... its about time!!!"

"Damn Thing has got to be here somewhere"
Ravi "Geek" Iyer rummaged through the messy pile of assorted metallic and electronic junk pile.... then he found what he was looking for, watched with bemused disinterest by a small pack of plushy wolves.... then he came across what he was looking for.

The Box was rather a common but largish cardboard one....

"Ah there it is"

He reached in and pulled out, still in its box a brand new rotary doorknob launcher and a sack of doorknobs, Oh and the box was good for sneaking into enemy buildings too Oh and a claymore, for the missing master Mac... there had to be a claymore somewhere

The Dropship Irregulars were back

January 9th
Motown OLA
Brightmoor

It was with some trepidation that Rick Raisly's [*sic*] dropship approached the spaceport at Brightmoor on the planet Motown 10 long years he had spent at his strange place until the day that the Scrapper declared that Bow Tie and the rest of his crew had worked off their dept and were free to leave.

He had watched as the Scrapper had help build the Barrel of Monkeys into a formidable force. The turning point came when a DESS Team had arrived in system and offered the people of Motown the chance to become part of the Outland Alliance. The Kicker had been the presentation of two lances of Harley-Davison battle mechs to the planetary militia, that and the Cheetah that was given to the Scrapper sealed the deal.

After that, BowTie and the rest of the pirate band were given their freedom. They could not get away from this strange place fast enough. That was 25 years ago. Now he was coming back...why? First there was that strange message on the HPG most of it was garbled but there was one line that stood out "The Fortress was held by Five foot fish...fish with brains, fish waging war!" The use of that ancient system of measurement that had not been used in a millennium was puzzling but this whole thing was weird. He was wondering out loud where were they going to find the mechs to replace the ones lost in the Goldfish War when the mysterious child seer known as Tunnel Rat told him he should go to the Wizard of Brightmoor. He had no idea what she meant until he remembered that the Scrapper used to mess around with herbs and oils and make all sorts of weird potions and incenses and such and some of the locals referred to him as the Wizard of Brightmoor.

So now he was headed back to that weird place that he swore that he never wanted to see again...desperate times called for desperate measures. So now he was going to see this nut case. Why he had know idea, like this crazy nut could really be of much help.

As the dropship descended he looked out the window towards the place known as Recycle Valley and the sight that greeted him was unbelievable where there was once a sea of cans was now an incredible sight massive piles of battered mechs and mech parts the remains of hundreds of vehicles and all manner of aerospace and aircraft stretched for dozens of Kilometers dotted with massive sheds a sight that was absolutely breath taking. Rick just stared in shock. How in the name of all that is holy was all this accumulated. He sat back in his seat in utter shock *this* was too weird.

Chapter 2
January 8th
Yorba System, Deep Periphery
CSS Deus Ex Machina, Bug Eye II-class

Slowly, Pyro had the sensation of being poured out of his own navel as if in a liquid fashion and returned to a solid form as the CSS Deus Ex Machina emerged from hyperspace. KF drive travel was bad enough, but KF(c) drive travel over long distances had pronounced side effects that drove some crews insane. The crew of the Deus Ex Machina, though quite competent, was barking mad. That, however, is an issue to be discussed at another time.

"Admiral Church, give me a system scan." Pyro barked to the officer commanding the bridge. She nodded and yelled similar orders at some underlings, producing results in the holotank in minutes.

"Looks like we have one habitable world in the system. Move to high orbit and prepare my shuttle." The Admiral nodded and returned to her duties as the ship fired its engines and made its way toward the planet...

January 9th
Yorba System
Deep Periphery
Valley of Eternal Misery

The sleek aerodyne shuttle shot over endless kilometers of desert terrain, scanning as its crew of four watched the readouts closely. Slowly but surely, a large fissure in the terrain came into view, and one of the few signs any civilization had ever occupied Yorba became apparent. It was a superhighway bridge connected to no apparent road, across the chasm. Curiously, Pyro set the shuttle down a hundred meters from what appeared to be a tollbooth and walked up.

Inside, a scruffy-looking older man watched the approaching ComGuards with curiosity. "Ah... seek ye to cross the Bridge of Death? Then you must answer these questions three."

Pyro sighed. The situation nagged him, reminding him of an old movie he'd seen once. His secretary stepped forward and spoke in his usual manner. "I seek to cross your bridge, freebirth surat."

"What is your name?"
Ryan Furey!

"What is your quest?"
To cross the Bridge of Death!

"What is your favorite color."
"Blood red!"

"You may pass."

The three remaining ComGuards stood amazed as the bloodthirsty secretary strode

across the bridge confidently. Precentor Jacobs, commander of the ComStar's 666th Division (The Hellspawn) stepped forward. "Well that's easy!"

The bridge keeper repeated his first two questions, gaining the same answer. The third, however, differed. "What is Peter Steiner-Davion's birthday?" Jacobs sweated. "I don't know that!" With a rush of air, he was ejected into the chasm and fell into the murky blackness below.

Pyro and Adept Erika Carson stared at each other nervously, and insane gentleman that he was, Pyro went first.

The first two questions repeated, followed by a real whopper. "What is the airspeed of a falcon carrying a coconut?" Pyro scratched his chin briefly. "Is that a Peregrine falcon or a Jade Falcon?"

The bridge keeper went wide-eyed. "I don't know that!" And with a rush of air, the tollbooth went flying into the chasm, bridge keeper included.

And thus, Pyro and his aide crossed the Bridge of Death without further interruption other than a short annoyance caused by a native weasel-like species that was easily door knobbed to death as it tried to gnaw a leg off.

Whose leg? And what did Pyro find? Stay tuned...

****INTERMISSION****

January 9th
Yorba System, Far Periphery
Valley of Eternal Misery

Pyro stared at the rock he had found. After all that and the loss of Precentor Jacobs, all he had to show for it was a limping secretary, a dead weasel-like creature, and a rock. In frustration, Pyro howled and winged the rock into the distant sands of the desert...

And was wholly surprised when the rock disappeared from sight near a sand dune and a metallic clang issued seconds later. Curiously, Pyro walked forward, followed by his aides.

The false image of the desert gave way, and Pyro walked straight ahead into a post.

But it was not just any post that he had happened to walk into, but a post that supported what appeared to be a Tri-Vid array on a large scale - a hologram!

Surprised to say the least to find himself in a sandstone cave, Pyro was even more shocked to find what the rock had struck - a circular hatch in the ground. Pyro turned a wheel on top of the hatch until it unlocked, and looked down below. A dreadful musty odor wafted up from the hole, and Pyro looked to his followers. "I'll go first."

Drawing his Sunbeam, Pyro dropped into the tunnel... And found himself in what appeared to be an empty dwelling. Poking around, Pyro found a tri-vid projector and hit the on-button. To his surprise, Mac appeared. "Laddie, I knew you would find this place eventually. My old master may have gone insane and started building a Bridge of Death, but he should be able to teach you what you need to know. The Jedi must live on, and for the time being, you are it."

Frustration knotted Pyro's brow. The insane Master was now at the bottom of the Valley of Eternal Misery. It is said that Pyro's bellow could be heard from low orbit, though such is only conjecture, as his followers above were the only non-weasel life forms within range.

To his surprise, the voice continued. "If this is not the case, check the filing cabinet on your left for my copy of Jedi Training for Dummies. May the Force be with you."

Pyro lifted the ancient, sacred tome from the filing cabinet... and read.

January 9th
Motown OLA
Brightmoor

The dropship settled down on the landing pad and Rick got up from his seat and made his way to the exit. As he left he noticed a familiar ship to his right at one time it had been a Mule but it had been extensively modified all sorts of ports and hatches dotted the hull some of them were open and various cranes and lifts protruded at odd angles others clearly were weapon ports in locations that originally had none. On the side was a picture of an ancient reciprocating saw...The symbol of the Scrapper.

After checking his luggage Rick hailed a Taxi.

"I need to go to the Scrap Yard"

The cabby looked him over

"Looking for some war machine parts, eh?"

Rick looked puzzled

"What makes you say that?"

The cabby looked him over again

"There are only two reasons people go up there and you don't look like you are selling"

Rick climbed in to the back seat

"Ya O.K. just take me there"

The ride took about 20 minutes. As the cab approached the scrap yard, Rick just stared in awe. He had seen used parts depots before but nothing he had seen compared to the sight that greeted him. Mounds of battered mechs and mech parts old tanks and tank parts, aircraft and aerospace and parts of more, parts stretched as far as the eye could see. The cab pulled up to the gate the cabby rolling down the window and called into the speaker there

"Hey open up you got another customer"

There was a loud beeping as the gate slowly slid to the side

"He likes to have customers brought to his place"

Rick just stared as they drove past the massive piles. After a ride of about 3 kilometers they arrived at the place. Rick recognized it immediately. Piles of junk, just like it had been 25 years ago still surrounded it. The cabby interrupted Rick's reminiscing.

"That will be \$18 "

looking at Rick

"Or 15 C-Bills"

Rick handed him 20 C-Bills

"Keep the change"

After watching the cab drive away Rick turned and walked to the door. He pressed the doorbell. From a speaker above the door a familiar voice called out "enter". Rick opened the door and a familiar odor greeted him He looked to the right and just like 25 years ago there was the litter box needing to be cleaned. Rick made his way past the piles of junk topped by the occasional cat, and there in the back sat the Scrapper in front of his computer surrounded by shelves of jars and bottles.

"So Rick I never thought I would ever see you again here"

Rick looked at the old scrap collector other than the longer pony tail he did not seem to have changed much.

"Well to be honest I would not be here if it was not for a matter of dire importance"

The Scrapper cleared a chair of tools, electronic parts, and bondage magazines and turned toward Rick

"I think you better sit down and tell me about it must be pretty bad for you to come back here"

Rick sat down in the cleared chair

"I don't know why I came here to be honest I am not sure if you can even help but I am desperate...Look at this."

With that he hands over the message to the Scrapper

"O.K. this is weird any thing else?"

"Well you ever here of MacAttack?"

"Sure I like to harass him online but he has not been on lately"

"He has disappeared and Pyro has quit as ComStar Precentor Martial some thing big is coming down and it is time for the Dropship irregulars to ride again but we have few mechs left after the losses of the gold fish war...Hell I don't know why I came here except for what that seer said"

"Hmm what seer said what?"

"Little kid they call her the Tunnel Rat she said to go to the Wizard of Brightmoor"

"Hmm let me see that message again. Looks like you need a few things...You get that Team Bonzai bunch over here I got enough here to build a couple of RCTs from the ground up"

Looking at the puzzled look on Ricks face

"After that stoner took over I started to collect all of the old weapons and stuff left over from the Jihad. Those fools got stopped dead by the VRDF and the ODF and left a lot of junk behind. I got more scrounging around the old Battlefields. Got that stuff dirt-cheap, knew it would come in handy some day. You get your people over here on that junk pile and I will see about getting the BoM together chainsaw is in charge of them now I am XO and Light lance commander. Hey would you believe that BowTie came back here to take command of # 3 lance"

Rick looked at the Scrapper

"Can you really get any thing of combat value out of that mess"

"Silly boy come with me"

With that the Scrapper led Rick to a skimmer

"let me show you some things"

With that he took Rick to the nearest of the sheds and hitting a button on the dash watched the door open a drove inside there in contrast to the chaos that typified the rest of the place were row after row of racks full of neatly stacked Clan ER large lasers. Hitting another button a door opened at the other end of the shed. Driving to the next shed he hits the button on the dash again driving into the opening door

they soon were greeted by row upon row of Clan ER PPCs.

"You name it I got it weapons, engines, gyros, electronics, ammo EVERYTHING"

Rick just stared

"You get your team over here from what you tell me we got a lot of work to do and we have no rime to waste"

Later as he let Rick off at the space port the Scrapper started to go over the list of people to alert. Soon he was at the Starlink com center sending out a message to the members of the BoM

{eek,eek,eek,ook,ook,ook,eek,eek,eek}

The secret code for major trouble.

Returning to his place the Scrapper went to his lab and started to grind herbs and mix oils. He thought about the strange message "Fish five feet length, fish with brains, Fish waging war"

{This is going to call for some powerful Magicks}

January 9

Yorba System

CSS Deus Ex Machina

In a perfect picture of the odd type of serenity only a seasoned warrior can display, Pyro held the large claymore behind him almost at an upright angle to his right with his left hand outstretched to the practice robot. It was yet another of the odd things that seemed to follow in Mac's wake, a rare Star League era ammunition-unloading robot, illegally modified for battle.

Pyro made the classic "Bring it on" gesture and the robot charged, wielding a wooden pole. Pyro ducked the first swing easily and swung the mighty claymore at the robot's leg, only to find he was staring at the ceiling yet again with another blinding white pain in his head. The robot hummed and whined as it shut down again, and Pyro staggered to his feet.

Adept Erika Carson, Pyro's long-time aide and romantic notion rejecter simply chuckled at the absurdity of it. "Shouldn't you take a break?"

Woozily, Pyro stumbled forward. "Not until I beat mashterr level". Pyro regained his feet, somehow resumed the serene pose and eliminated his eccentric wobble for a few seconds, and the robot charged again. Pyro swung for the chest and the robot speared him in the midsection with its broom handle, sending Pyro to the mat again.

Erika sighed. "Y'know, Dr. Strangenstein is going to keep you bedridden for months if you keep it up."

Pyro's only reply was a noncommittal "Arrrgh..." as the room spun lazily overhead. Oddly, the face of MacAttack briefly replaced the rotating light fixture. "Purple monkey humvee electrician." Pyro blinked. "Wha... clear speak." Mac scowled. "Listen next time ye overeducated white robed toaster acolyte. Yer lady's standing over there laughing at ye. Are ye gonna be a man about it and go smack that robot around some or just lay there."

Pyro thought about it for a minute. "I can't, Mac. It's too strong."

Mac shook his head. "Nay laddie, you're in Mechjock mode still. Use the Force and turn off that over clocked brain of yours for a few seconds."

Pyro smiled, grabbed his flask and took a swig of whiskey. "Gotcha"

Mac may have continued on with his wise rant, but at this point, head injury and alcohol had already pushed Pyro into complicity with Mac's advice. His words seemed to be something equivalent to "Mountain Chihuahua hangover pitchfork."

The robot charged again and Pyro ducked the first swing with ease, then leapt over its head before it could spear him in the midsection, bringing the claymore up behind him and through the droid's neck, coincidentally batting its head into a wall-clock.

This moment would forever change the universe in many ways, including the invention of Robot Baseball, a sport that would sweep the Inner Sphere by storm. The rules are simple. A gladiator and a robot face each other in an arena, and the battle is not over until one side has his head lopped off in such a way that it hits a series of concentric target rings about the level where most people would keep a wall-clock. Points are awarded by proximity of the hit to the clock. Naturally, it still lags behind All-Female Zero-G Wrestling - one of Canopus IV's main cultural exports - in popularity.

January 10th
1st Kilted Division HQ
Somewhere on Alpheratz

Teemo bolted up in bed, covered in sweat, desperately trying to shake the remaining after-images of his just-completed nightmare. "Oh, my...guahhh". he muttered, shuddering like a man who'd just been tricked into seeing a picture of a cross-dressing cosplayer. Finally having composed himself, he flopped back down into bed and had just closed his eyes when the alarm clock sounded. Muttering words his mother would prefer he not use, he switched it off and shuffled toward the shower.

Having successfully completed the first tasks of the day, he headed off to the mess hall. The usual sights and sounds (and smells) greeting him, he collected his breakfast and moved to his usual seat. "Morning, boss" his XO, Natsuko Takagi, said by way of greeting, following with "You don't look so hot. Trouble sleeping?" "It wasn't the sleeping, so much as the waking up that was the problem. I just had the damndest nightmare." "Really? What happened?" "I died, and was reincarnated as a message board spell-check program." At those words, the rest of the crew (those who were in earshot), responded with groans and headshakes that seemed more theatrical than sympathetic.

Breakfast completed, Teemo retired to his office, to begin his favorite pastime: Moving that day's quota of paperwork from one side of the desk to the other. Midway through; that odd feeling struck him again. The sensation that he and his troops were urgently needed elsewhere, that they had little time to do... at this point, as usual, the feeling went away, leaving him slightly less disconcerted than he had been upon awakening. "The heck with it", he muttered, and pressed the large red button on his desk (this time remembering to lean back, so his eyebrows wouldn't be singed off as the remaining contents of his "In" box burst into flames). "I am SO glad I had that installed", he said to himself as he picked up his phone and pushed the button that would patch the handset into the base PA system. "Attention all personnel,

prepare to move out."

As he rose from his chair, he only just remembered to push the blue button that activated the "In" box's fire suppression system. Passing into the outer office, Natsuko caught up with him. "What gives?" "Long story. I just received a request to report to the OLA and hook up with Team Bonsai.... and the Barrel of Monkeys." "Oh terrific, I finally got that smell out of my Mech's air filters." Teemo smiled in spite of himself. "Don't worry, I've already explained to Scrappy, in *very* gruesome terms, what'll happen to his unit if they sling anything but insults."

January 11th
Unknown System
Unknown Starship

A black-robed figure stood looking out the forward window at the stars, as if they themselves had more answers than the bridge holotank behind. A blonde woman stood behind the robed figure, impatiently drumming her fingers on the hilt of a long sword she carried with her.

"You have summoned me?" The other figure made no motion to recognize her, but simply rasped in the usual alarmingly gravelly, inhuman voice. "I have."

"What is this then? Surely it is not time?"

"No, it is not, Darth Nuclear. I have sensed a great disturbance in the Force, as if some strange Jedi summoned its power to invent a new spectator sport."

"A Jedi? Surely this is impossible, neither MacAttack or his aides could have possibly overcome the mystery of the Hidden Clan by now.", said the blonde now identified as Darth Nuclear.

The other continued in that raspy voice. "You must find this Jedi. Use your talents and seek them wherever they may go. Destroy the Jedi and bring the weapon or the head to me."

The blonde kneeled. "As you command, Master." The other spoke sharply. "I have told you not to call me that. Now go, and bring me this Jedi."

Darth Nuclear turned and strode off the bridge, and the other continued gazing into space, briefly seeing a reflection in the glass. Underneath the hood of the cloak was a simple black cloth mask, betraying only two cold, hungry blue eyes that stared into the void. The other smiled secretly, enjoying anonymity, and left the bridge humming the intro of an ancient Terran song titled "Behind Blue Eyes."

January 11th
Yorba System
CSS Deus Ex Machina

Pyro sat on the deck innocuously in his brown robe, trying to fine-tune the diverse mix of skills he had learned in nearly record time. One of these skills was the ability to remote view nearly any place he could think of if he focused, and he was currently quite literally out of his mind.

Very little could bother him now, but sure enough, one of those things was standing in front of him, interrupting a perfectly nice meditative vision that happened to look a lot like the inside of the ladies' locker room aboard the CSS Righteous Fire. That one thing, of course, was his aide.

Erika sat down across from Pyro and looked at him. "So, what exactly did we accomplish there? Aside from launching an old crazy into a canyon and teaching you swordsmanship?"

Pyro opened one eye, inwardly cringed, and slowly opened the other as it became apparent that she wasn't leaving. "Jedi training is more than swordsmanship. Just as a rare few Draconis Combine masters learn to channel what they call Ki - a spiritual power that equates to what ROM terms as ESP - we learn to tap into the latent energy generated by all living things called the Force. Through the Force, one can boost their own potential to accomplish greater ends. But with such power comes great responsibility."

Erika rolled her eyes. "So you're a telepath? Prove it. What am I thinking then?"

Pyro remained unmoving, still seated. "You don't need to be a telepath to know that. You're thinking I'm not a telepath, I'm barking mad, I wasted my time, and if we hadn't gone that Precentor Jacobs would still be alive."

She stood with her hands on her hips, quite unfazed. "Alright Mr. Jedi. Give me some proof."

Pyro remained seated. "Are you sure?"

"Yes"

"Positive?"

"Absolutely."

"Final Warning?"

"Do your worst."

And then, Pyro did.

Every buckle, zipper, and clip included in a standard ComStar female officer's uniform unhinged themselves and gravity took over from there. To add insult upon insult, the pile of clothes at her feet folded itself up neatly as if it had just been washed. With a furious blush, Erika scooped up her uniform and put it back on as Pyro looked ahead, seemingly ignoring the woman in front of him. "Are you convinced yet?"

"You..."

"I warned you."

"Grr..."

"Three times."

She calmed down somewhat. "You're going to regret doing that."

"Probably."

Calming down further, she continued as she buttoned up her jacket and straightened the collar. "So what are you going to do with this new power? Crush the Clans? Destroy Blakeburger? Annihilate the Republic?"

Pyro shook his head. "Well, this will sound corny... but I guess I'll just have to wait and see."

Chapter 3

Marik Musings

January 12th
Free Worlds League
Atreus

The walls shook as another dropship rumbled overhead and Medron scowled at his terminal. He hated riddles. Hated them with a passion. And MacAttack was a positive purveyor of riddles. "Seek out the ice planet Roth." Who in their right mind would call a planet Roth? And what was with the idea of a planet with only one climate? Such simplistic ideas were only found in cheap science fiction. Medron shrugged and glanced again at the terminal. He was trying to track down the remains of the Warriors. There weren't many.

He shrugged again and leaned back in his chair with a long yawn. He rarely came out to Atreus anymore, spending most of his time in the Hegemony with his wife now, but he'd been caught in the middle of a diplomatic mission to their "bosom ally" in the League. The door chime rang and he opened the door with a tap of his finger before Captain-General Isis Marik-Steiner-Davion walked in. Speaking of bosoms. He tore his gaze away from her ample features and smiled as she smiled back at him.

Even if they hadn't seen each other in the last few years, they'd spent enough time together during the chaos after her "father" had been discovered as a ComStar plant that they still could talk without words. Her stance, a nice stance at that, said she was amused, now more amused. She was looking awful good for her age. Medron cleared his throat and turned back to his console quickly. He didn't need to make more of a fool of himself after all. She was the Captain-General after all. And she was married. To Victor "I can't die if you hit me in the head with a gauss rifle" Steiner-fricking-Davion. No...he really didn't want to pee off that guy, even if he was getting up there in age.

Medron snorted at that. He'd never have expected being part of the old guard. He'd been a mayfly after all, a flash in the pan. He was going to go out in a blaze of glory against a renewed Clan invasion or something. Not end up a zombie. But the Clans had never come again. And now here he was with grey hair and wrinkles. Well, not many wrinkles, and the grey hair was still a bit rare. Still, he'd have to get those new treatments ComStar was offering. He hated looking old.

"So how goes the search?" Isis asked and Medron shrugged. He'd told her everything of course. She probably thought he was crazy now, not like she hadn't known that already of course. But they'd fought side-by-side a long time ago. He wasn't going to start keeping secrets that big from her now. Small ones were ok. It wasn't like they talked enough to tell each other everything after all. But big ones like this? He wasn't keeping them from her. Especially if he could con some help from her in the process."

"Not many left," he muttered. "Some have permanently retired. Might be able to get them back. Some have disappeared. Even ComStar can't find them. That's a good disappearance," he added in an annoyed tone and Isis nodded in surprised agreement. After the fall of the toaster-worshiping Wobblies and their rise to dominance of the hotdog stand market, ComStar had risen once again to being the premier purveyor and collector of knowledge. And communications. If they couldn't

find someone, nobody on the right side of the law ever could. Not to say they were always on the right side of the law of course. "There are some still sitting around in League space, and others in the Hegemony. Most of those who were on my or your good side," he added with a wink. Some had hated Victor and left for other realms, others had decided to leave the entire Sphere behind for other pursuits. The Warriors that remained were a scattered few. Isis shrugged back innocently.

"Are you suggesting that we are sometimes hard to get along with?" she asked in a voice that matched her stance and Medron chuckled slowly.

"Only when we are sure we're right and someone else is sure we're wrong," he winked back.

"Oh...yeah, I guess you got me there," Isis whispered. "So you're going out again?"

"What choice do I have?" Medron asked sadly and the Captain-General nodded slowly. She kindly didn't say that he was getting too old for such damn idealistic crusades. She was thinking it of course, and Medron scowled at her. "And I'm not that old," he added firmly.

"If you say so," she responded simply. "The Third Knights are still online you know," she added and he glanced away towards the computer.

"I just noticed," he whispered and she giggled softly.

"Trying to con me into giving them up again?" she asked and he shrugged his shoulders innocently.

"You me. Would I try to con you?" he asked and she nodded firmly.

"You'd con me out of everything I own if you thought you could get away with it," she responded with a smile and he glanced back to her again, his gaze taking in her long flowing dress and matching shirt. His gaze went up to face caught her knowing smirk.

"Got me there," Medron said with a shrug of defeat. "The Third Knights were awful nice to have back in '82 against the alKhan. They could help here too."

"Take them," Isis responded and turned to walk out the door. She stopped as it opened and looked back towards him. "They were always more yours than mine anyways." She nodded simply and left Medron alone with his thoughts. Then he shrugged slowly and turned back to the computer screen. The past was over and there was nothing more he could do about it. All he could do now was fix the future. Assuming he could.

January 12th
A Firebase, This Continent,
Back of Nowhere, Periphery

"Hey cap'n! A message from Offworld just came in for you!"

A message, Captain JS mused, who could have sent us a message out here? No one

was supposed to know where they were. Not even ComStar, especially not ComStar. They had gotten into the debt collection business a few years back and were quite successful, too successful for a struggling merc company. For that matter, there wasn't an HPG on the planet. How on earth could a message come from offworld?

"How did a message come from offworld," he barked at his subordinate. Could the man read the spelling in his mind? He peered at him more closely wondering if this might be one of the "Jedi mind tricks" Mac had used to play on people for laughs.

"No, not offworld, Offworld with a capital O."

"It's a town over on That Continent," he continued. "All the offworlders... er, people from other planets, I mean, make that mistake. They say they're being attacked by pirates and want us to scramble over there."

Oh no, not that! Work! It was bad enough working for so little pay on this out of the way dirtball, but actually having to do real work to get paid was worse. He couldn't decide which was worse, hoping the pirates would be gone by the time he got there or the prospect of some salable salvage from some pirate 'Mechs.

"OK, load 'em up. Time to rock 'n' roll! Start warming up the engines on the *New New York, New York*. We got us some work to do." Inwardly he cringed at having to sound so gung ho, but his people seemed to like it when he sounded like some second-rate Tri-D hero. Just goes to show how the education system is still going down the tubes, he thought. It had been in steady decline for at least the last 1000 years. Everyone knew that. How much lower could it go? After all, look at the place names on this planet. These people didn't even have enough imagination to name places. Even naming a town after a person would have been an improvement - something like Todd or Howard. But no, A Firebase, This Continent, That Continent. Of course, Offworld didn't fit that pattern. Strange. It was the first place name he'd heard of on Back of Nowhere that didn't. Did that have some meaning he pondered. Nah, just coincidence he decided as he jogged into the 'Mech hangar.

He made the obligatory pause to admire the power and beauty of his Battlemech. Once upon a time he really had spent the time admiring the 'Mech. Now he just made the pause like he had been instructed to in all those second rate novels where he had gotten most of his training.

Instead he spent the time mentally reviewing his available forces. The Archer was still down with 'Mech martens, but they had quarantined it so they little buggers couldn't get into any of the other 'Mechs. The Locust still needed a new left leg. Attempts at jury-rigging one had all failed so far. It was clear the design of the legs was a physical impossibility just so that people would have to keep on buying new ones from the factory, a successful marketing ploy that had worked for hundreds of years. Nevertheless, the other 7 'Mechs in his command were all operational. Those plus the platoon of battle armor he had picked up when leaving his last assignment would have to do. He just hoped the pirates weren't too numerous or organized. There wasn't much left in the way of spare armor or ammunition. And there wasn't any he could steal, er, borrow when leaving this assignment like he could when he left the last one, either.

January 12th
Mordel's Bar and Grill

A dark robed figure enters the bar, almost unnoticed. A large hand falls on his shoulder. Mac, somewhat stunned that he was noticed turns to see a large Elemental motioning for him to relinquish his weapon. Mac waves his hand, "You dannu want tha sword". The Elemental crosses his eyes, shakes his head, and motions for the weapon again....

"Fine, ye overgrown haggis"

Frederick and Jimmy are in the usual corner going over the TO&E of the 204th. Fred looks into the bottom of his empty glass..."hmmmm, not good...Jimmy, how's your drink?" "I'm good, sir"

Fred walks over to the bar, "Chi, another MacAllan's 25"

"That be a mighty fine scotch ta drink, laddie"

Fred looks over and wonders for a few moments, "Mac, I presume?"

"Aye"

"You are here to tell me my destiny?"

"Nay, just ta mobilize"

"Lemme guess, seafood?"

"Aye, head off ta Recycle Valley, meet up wit tha rest of tha Irregulars"

"C'est bon"

Mac walks out the door, taking his Sword from Lurch, and disappears in the dusk.

"Jimmy, Major Tom and Sheepy should be in the same vicinity, and Worktroll you will have to hunt for, get them here ASAP, Chihawk, if you could unlock the 'Mech bays and set me up with a ride out of here"

Jimmy looks up from his paperwork, "Seafood sir?"

"C'est Ca, Mon Ami!"

January 12th
Yorba System, Deep Periphery
CSS Deus Ex Machina

The lift doors opened and Pyro stepped into the bridge deck. As per the usual routine, Spork the unfortunately named ex-Smoke Jaguar called out "Precentor-Martial on Deck!".

Most of the crew straightened their posture a little bit and Adept Shaft picked himself up off the communications station, which he was dutifully sleeping on and sat bolt upright.

Pyro cringed inwardly but decided to ignore the slip this time to see if the lesson was learned, and strode into the holotank. Literally, because he misjudged the outer limit of the holographic equipment and knocked his shin against the casing.

Muttering a string of curses not fit for print, Pyro jumped back and regained his composure quickly. "Admiral Church, I do believe it is time to get out of this system. Plot a course for New Avalon and prepare for jump."

Church blinked. "New Avalon, are you sure?" Pyro nodded. "Yes, just get us out of here. Quickly if you please, it won't be long before that warship is on top of us."

"What warship?"

Adept Shaft checked his instruments again. "I got nothing... wait. Emerging EMP signature..."

"That warship."

Adept Shaft was suddenly professional again "New arrival reads as FSS Murmansk, Fox-class." Church's eyes widened just a little. "Murmansk? That was one of the missing Loyalist ships, what's it doing here?"

Pyro shook his head. "Not a clue, but we can't stay around to find out. Mrs. Solu, plot jump coordinates and initiate at will."

The universe did that annoying thing it tends to do during KF(c) transit again, compressing itself into a two-dimensional plane and running like liquid. The entirety of creation ran into a crack in the deck as if down a drain, before the deck itself was pulled into the crack and the crack itself became a yawning void....

And then, everything vomited itself back out just as quickly and returned to a solid composition. Most of the crew was struck dizzy for a few seconds from the sheer length of the jump.

Mrs. Solu was the first to speak. "We're off course!"

Admiral Chruch was second. "Where are we?"

"Marik."

Every crewmember on the bridge then said the word Marik with some degree of awe or reverence. Mrs. Petrov asked, "Do you think we'll get to see the Knights of the Inner Sphere?"

January 12th
Marik, Free Worlds League
Marik Winter Palace

A company of Mechwarriors suddenly jumped onto a table and began singing again as support crews ran for cover to avoid what came next.

We're Knights of the Inner Sphere
We dance and sing real clear
Because we have guns everyone runs
And wets themselves in high fear
We dine real well on Marik
We eat dog and cat on stick

We're Knights of the Inner Sphere
Our shows are best with beer

But many times we're given rhymes
That quite assault the ear
We're opera mad on Marik
We sing like a drunken cleric

In war we're not in the rear
Quite fearful to be near
Between our trips we reload clips
And throw up from the beer
It's a busy life on Marik
I have to reprogram the TIC

January 12th
Marik, Free Worlds League
CSS Deus Ex Machina

Pyro scratched his chin. "On second thought, let's not go to Marik. It's a rather silly place."

January 14th
Brightmoor
Motown OLA

The Scrapper Watched as the dropships started to come in Team Bonsais SLS Irregular, the New New York New York, and others that were lesser known. Team Bonsai started to spread out among the piles to try to figure out what the hell to do with this mess Mechs bearing the markings of the 1st Kilted Division and 204th Bearded Cavalry debarked. The Scrapper was shocked by their condition. Gawd they needed a LOT of work, the parts were there, but was there time? Some of the responses to the distress message that he sent out were worrisome as well. Shaking his head he wondered just what in the name of all that is Holy had he gotten himself into, he was old, which is why he had retired from the New Star Sentinels. The old joints creaked and groaned when he moved. Both knees, both elbows, his right shoulder, lower back and a number of his fingers gave him pain at random intervals. The old eyes did not work as well as they used to.
"Gawd I hate being old"

Rick looked over the mess in front of him less than half of the Mechwarriors had mechs and most of them were in poor shape. There were a lot of parts available that was no problem, but turning these piles of parts into combat worthy machines in the short time available was a daunting task. But Tam Bonsai was not known as miracle workers for nothing and he had the Scrapppers people available to help as well.

Wizard of Brightmoor was a title that was not well known out side of the small village of Brightmoor. But among the people there he was known for his ability to heal minor aches and pains just by putting his hands on their shoulders and going into a trance his little bundles of herbs seemed to have interesting little powers as well nothing really strong just these little effects. Now he sat at his worktable in his lab mixing herbs and holding bowls of them in his hands going into little trances. Ancient powers that were all but forgotten in this ultra high tech universe but all the more useful because they were not commonly known. But these little pouches seemed to alter the effects of force wielders in a strange way. So he labored on mixing and charging a set of colored bundles of herbs for each mech, vehicle, and aerospace or

aircraft. Just a hunch but if wielders of the force were involved these could make a difference...maybe.

Chapter 4 **Homecoming**

January 14th
Brightmoor
Motown OLA

As he walked his 'Mech down the (dis) embarkation ramp, Teemo was grateful for the polarizing filter on his *Warhammer's* canopy, because with all the ground personnel running hither and yon, this would be a particularly bad time to be blinded by the glare as the morning sun reflected off the piles of scrap metal that seemed to literally stretch from horizon to horizon. Just as he was about to flip on his external speakers and ask the assembled multitude if any of them knew where he should park, Natsuko came on the comm circuit and said, "Hey, boss, I think that guy is signaling to us". Upon closer inspection, 'that guy' seemed to be the.... Yard Marshall? Beach Master? Well, whatever, between the orange safety vest and the yellow batons, he easily gave the impression that he was the traffic cop *du jour*. "Command Lance with me, everybody else just leave 'em parked on the ship for now.", he rattled off as he followed Officer Friendly out to the nearest available parking spot.

As his feet touched ground for the first time since he'd mounted up back on Alpheratz, he began stretching out the kinks from several weeks of forced confinement. Looking up, he saw two figures detach themselves from the crowd and come his way. As they drew closer, their identities resolved themselves. On the right was Scrapper, on the left the esteemed Herr Doktor Raisely. As they came to a stop, Teemo momentarily panicked as he realized he couldn't remember the protocol for greeting ranking officers who weren't part of his chain of command. *Ahhh, the heck with it, he thought, we're from independent commands, we can worry about protocol if and when we get unified.* As he watched, Rick began to cast a practiced eye over the 1st's Command Lance to identify whether any of the machines before him **hadn't** been modified at least somewhat. Scrapper, on the other hand, glanced around with a forlorn look and began muttering to himself about how long it would take to get the 1st's machines into full working order. "No time at all, Scrappy" Teemo announced, smiling to himself as those in earshot lapsed into shocked silence.

Before he could continue, Rick suddenly straightened up, and chuckled softly to himself. As he turned around, he caught Teemo's eye and nodded in understanding. *Damn, he's figured it out before I could explain it. Guess that's why he's the MechMeister.*

Teemo moved back to the foot of his *'Hammer*. "OK, Scrappy, you're wondering how this ancient POS managed to get aboard the dropship under its own power. Simple." Teemo winked at Rick as he reached up and pulled an apparently damaged armor panel off the ankle housing, revealing undamaged armor beneath. Tossing it to Scrapper, he continued. "It's amazing what you can do with the stuff you find in your Tech's scrap bin." Scrapper turned the 'armor' panel over in his hands marveling at the artistry that had turned plastic into 'metal'. "But, I can see stains from where you are leaking coolant and lubricant..." Teemo's grin widened as he pulled a handkerchief from a pocket on his cooling vest. "Looks that way, don't it." With those words, he reached up and wiped at the 'stain'. "Take some black paint, put it in a cup, and pour it over the joints. Take some yellow-green paint, thin it out, and pour

it next to the black paint. Cover it with a gloss finish so it looks wet,...." at this point he turned to the assembly in front of his 'Mech and showed them the still-white hanky "and that machine is bleeding out before your very eyes." he concluded with a grin that seemed a perfect match for the shark's teeth painted on his 'Mech's center torso.

"Now, then, what's a guy gotta to get some chow around here?"

January 14th
Marik, Free Worlds League
CSS Deus Ex Machina

Pyro stared hatefully at the clock again, reading 00:01, wishing his newfound insomnia would go away. The sudden awakening of a whole lot of new abilities and a profound lack of control had made Pyro perhaps one of the least skillful and least stable Jedi Masters in the history of the tradition. It didn't help that sleep was so close to a vision trance state that he kept seeing the future, the past, and other places in his dreams - reliving the nightmares of his own existence over and over again.

Pyro started to drift off again, only to be interrupted by a voice. "Pyro..." Looking up, he saw the familiar robed form of MacAttack before him. "Mac!" He nodded. "Ye done well with yerself laddie, though yer control is lacking. There's nay anything that can be done about that now. Ye must make haste to New Avalon, as your instincts had told you before. There you will find your destiny."

Pyro blinked. "What is my destiny?" Mac sighed. "Laddie I canna be sure of it. Nothing is written yet, but I can tell ye what ye must do. Find BBjr. Now go."

Mac faded out again, much to Pyro's dismay, only repeating "You must go to New Avalon... there you will find your destiny."

Pyro sighed and pulled himself out of the bed, pulling on a clean brown robe, and walked onto the bridge, this time remembering not to plow into the holotank. "Navigation, plot a jump to New Avalon and commence as soon as possible. Don't bother charging the LF battery, divert all power to the KF(c) drive."

The night watch officer, Demi-Precentor Nielson, blinked. "Are you certain, sir?" Pyro nodded. "Absolutely."

January 14th
Yorba System, Far Periphery
FSS Murmansk

Darth Nuclear smiled a smile the crewmembers manning their stations all around her found to be absolutely terrifying. It sent chills down their spines when she smiled like that. It was a cruel self-assured smile, to be sure. What they didn't know is that it was a smile that had smiled in the face of the blasphemous glare of Oppenheimer's light as dozens of green rookies flash-roasted in their cockpits decades ago...

She had, of course, just figured out the Jedi's logical motive. He would seek the best Mechwarrior in the Inner Sphere to bring to the Warriors... and he would lead her right to him. In one swoop, she would finally nail down two loose ends that had

plagued her masters. She allowed herself a little laugh as thoughts of her future triumph and rising status played through her heads. Now even her dark master would be impressed.

"Mr. Renard, where was that Bug Eye going?" The sensor officer spoke up shakily, seeing her wolfish smile. "New Avalon, ma'am. We hit them with our distortion field, however. They should be diverted safely away."

She nodded. "Plot a course for New Avalon and jump at will."

January 16th
New Avalon, Federated Suns
New Avalon Institute of Science

BBjr held his head in his left hand as he scrawled some notes with his right, trying not to fall asleep as Professor Haynes, his Strategy professor droned on. He wanted to pass OCS, and that desire alone was keeping him awake as many classmates slumbered on their desks.

To his surprise, the lower door of the lecture hall suddenly exploded inward. Most of the class was surprised too, and terrified when the explosion of wood chips produced a robed figure with a very large sword strapped to its back.

To BBjr's surprise, he heard a familiar voice bellow. "BB!" It felt as if an icy hand clutched his heart, the sudden terror he felt, until the voice said in an equally resonant pitch. "DUCK!" Reflexes fine-tuned at a very young age snapped into action and he spilled out of his seat to the right and rolled away as a long sword slammed into his desk.

To his amazement, the brown-robed figure leapt from the floor of the lecture hall and landed on the desk in front of his, swinging a claymore at the long sword-wielder.

It was then he saw who it was.

"Pyro?"

"No time! Get out of here, now!"

Warrior instinct or not, he wanted to figure out what was going on... and looked to see his would-be assassin trying to reorient from a sudden flurry of claymore attacks.

Deciding to try his luck with the rest of his class bolting into the hallways, BBjr. ran over the remnants of the door... only to have a hand grab his collar and pull him back.

To his surprise, it was a surly-looking man in a ComStar adept's uniform. "You are BBjr, quiaff?"

The surly man waited as recognition dawned on BBjr. This man was one of the survivors of Raoul's forces from Blue Dot, and had become the Precentor-Martial's bondsman. "Aff." "Follow me, we have a shuttle waiting."

They ran...

Elsewhere...

Pyro lunged at the figure only to be parried again. "Well, looks like your mission's a bust."

The black-robed figure laughed, but it was not a healthy laugh, but a hysterical, almost manic laughter. "Perhaps only part of it... Jedi. Your death, however, would be of great interest to my superiors."

She lunged at Pyro, catching him across the forehead with the tip of her blade, leaving a cut that leaked blood into his left eye.

Pyro jumped back onto a desk to avoid another attack... and saw his opponent through the hood. "Annette Leyland, I should have known when I saw the Murmansk. Is this a masterless villain convention?"

Pyro may have continued on with his goading, but narrowly managed to crash his claymore down to stop a swing and jumped back again, landing in front of a plate-glass window.

Leyland rushed forward as Pyro called upon the Force and launched a flying kick that, if observed by cameras, would have been imitated by dozens of cheap martial-arts movies for the devastating impact that was grossly out of proportion with the attack itself. With the added power, Leyland was catapulted to the middle level of the lecture hall and through a desk.

"Terribly sorry to spoil your fun, but I've got an appointment I intend to keep."

Pyro produced a flash bang grenade from the folds of his robe and lobbed it in her general direction, then leapt through the plate-glass window...

January 16th
CSS Deus Ex Machina

Pyro grumbled as he walked into the training room and sat down, itching under the dozens of feet of gauze covering much of his body. BBjr merely shook his head. "Next time, use the door."

Pyro shrugged. "We are charging the KF(c) drive as we speak. It should be nearly a week until we can jump again, and for the time being, we are stuck here.

BBjr nodded, and the questions he'd been waiting to ask finally started bursting out. "What was that all about? What's with the sword and robe? What's going on here?"

Pyro sighed. "Well, until recently Mac was the last of the Jedi. Now you're looking at the second to last. Your attacker was apparently in the employ of someone who stands to gain by both of our deaths, and I can only assume them to be the cause of the recent disturbances."

BBjr digested this. "So you're a Jedi? Are you going off to save the Inner Sphere?"

Pyro shook his head. "I'm not MacAttack... the Inner Sphere is too big a job for me, I'm afraid. That is why I have been sent to find you; I believe... it all makes sense now. Somehow, you are the key to saving the Inner Sphere, either by keeping you from the enemy or bringing you to the Irregulars."

"That's a little hard to swallow."

Pyro nodded. "I know, but it gets richer. I'm not MacAttack, and our enemy has at least one Dark Jedi, one that nearly had me back there. Remember that I said we had a week to work with? Congratulations, apprentice."

BBjr simply groaned.

January 14th
Brightmoor
Motown OLA

Teemo barely got his hand up in time to catch the liter of Code Red Mountain Dew that came whizzing right at his face followed closely by a white sack.

"Sack of ten; what you crave"

The Scrapper remarked as he shoved a small bacon cheese burger in his mouth followed by a slug out of a liter bottle of Code Red Mountain Dew and a large belch.

Rick looks at Teemo

"Be careful what you wish for...you just might get it!"

The Scrapper went over and examined the other mechs

"cute trick"

Surveying the gathering forces

"Now if we could just get some ideas as to the magnitude of the threat the message Rick got contains more questions than answers My contacts in the DESS say that nothing unusual has been detected in this sector so hopefully whoever is behind what ever this is does not know about what is going on here. I sent out messages to the other members of the BoM and select members of the Dropship Irregulars, so of the responses have concerned me. It would appear that it has been so long that some of them have forgotten the code.

An unknown figure peered around a pile of various metal parts at Teemo, the Scrapper and Rick as they devoured their meal, a feeling of urgency came over him. I must stop them, or something bad, very bad, was going to happen, but what? The tiny hamburgers, something was wrong, but what?

As Rick was beginning to take the last one to eat, time seemed to slow to a crawl. I know mission at last. Standing up and starting to run in one motion, he hoped he would make it in time.

Yelling at the top of his lungs, "Danger Rick Raisly, Danger." He reached out and snatched the small morsel from Rick just before he was to put it in his mouth. Throwing it as far as he could, it promptly splattered against one of the Scrapyard tech's forehead.

Turning back to the trio, a smile on his face, he noticed two large bore handguns pointed in his direction, and Dr. Raisly getting up from the ground. This can't be good.

"What the hell was that for?" demanded Rick, as he dusted himself off. "That was the last one!"

"You had better explain yourself," the Scrapper said, gesturing with his gun, "and quickly! 3.....2...."

"I just saved his life. I think?"

"From what, high cholesterol?" inquired Teemo.

"What do you want to do with him, Boss?" the tech asked as he wiped ketchup from his forehead. "If you don't mind, I'd like to have a few words with him." The look on his face didn't give the impression that it would be complimentary.

"Give him a chance to explain first. Then you can have him help you test the targeting systems." The Scrapper said with a wink. "Who are you?"

"I am the Nightstalker. And I have been compelled to protect you." Obvious pride was just dripping from him.

At this point, the tech collapses and starts to convulse, while turning a peculiar shade of purple. And then, within seconds, is completely still.

The Scrapper calls over some of his men and a medic. "Doc, see what you can do for Fitz. You men, take *The Nightstalker*" with as much sarcasm as he could muster, "and place him under arrest."

After a few minutes, Teemo asks, "Doc, how is he?"

"Sir, he's not dead, but I think that he's temporarily paralyzed. Some kind of nerve agent, I think. Don't worry, we'll take care of him."

When they are finally alone again, Rick asks the other two, "Well, what do we do with this nutcase?"

Fred and Jimmy walk up looking in rather pathetic condition.

"I am never doing a jump after 6 rounds of MacAllan's ever again"

Motown looks over at Fred, "Straight out of the Bar and Grill?"

"Ouai. The Bar and Grill has their eyes out for any seafood coming their way, they will be fine without support if anything happens."

After the run in with simians at the Bar and Grill, Motown and Fred both new they could hold their own.

"How's the 'Mechs held up" "Actually, Doc Raisley, they are in nearly battle ready condition, Fox at the Bar and Grill was able to creatively acquire the parts needed to sustain them." Motown chuckles a little at the fact.

"You guys all here?" Inquires Motown.

"We're just waiting for Sheepy, Major Tom and Worktroll, they should be here tomorrow, but I had their 'Mechs stored at the B&G so they are here, Doc Raisley if you want your boys to look at them?"

"Already on it" Rick flashes a little wink as the MechMeister already has the 204th 'Mech headed to the repair bays.

Jimmy pipes up, "I need some doorknobs for my RAC, my Lancelot is out"
Mo looks out to the vast expanse of stuff in what can be said to be his *front yard*,
"I'm sure I can swing that Jimmy"

Jimmy then produces 2 cases of Code Red and puts them on the table, "Care of Mordell, he figured if we were out to save the Inner Sphere, we could use it"

Rick comes to Fred after being on the comm with his techs, "Fred, you blew out the Internal Heating Unit again, but we can fix it, hopefully to better than new, 'cause we wouldn't want it going in the middle of a battle and having your 'Mech shut down at a critical moment like when facing down a Daishi and having one of us save you in an impossible and totally heroic way that could only happen in a bad sci-fi novel..."

Motown, Fred, Jimmy and Rick all look at each other for a few moments, and break out laughing

"Naw...that could *never* happen!!!"

January 14th
Celestial Palace
Capella
Cappellan Confederation

Kali Liao was annoyed by the interruption turning away from the whimpering pizza delivery boy chained to a chair

"This had better be important"

The Death Commando held out the message

"This strange message was recently sent to a number of people scattered around human space while it makes no sense the fact that it showed up at multiple HPG stations at the same time is of some concern"

Taking the piece of paper from hi hand she read the strange message

"eek,eek,eek,ook,ook,ook,eek,eek,eek"

"What does this mean?" She demanded

"That is unknown some of the recipients were known members of units affiliated with the Dropship Irregulars"

"Where was this sent from" She demanded

"There was no return address but it was received by a ComStar HPG from a Starlink HPG"

Starlink she thought the HPG service provider based in the Outland Alliance that provided service to a number of Periphery realms in the Spinward area of the periphery. Just what was this all about and did it have anything to do with her little project?

"Find out who sent this and why she demanded!"

"By your command "the Death Commando replied quickly exiting.

January 14th
Ashton's Bed

Finally, at approximately 13:30 in the afternoon, the ringing phone got the attention of MW Ashton Grey. He muttered something that was thankfully incomprehensible, as it would probably have ignited the wallpaper had it been more clearly stated. It hurt just to become conscious, let alone open his eyes.

Party. Oh yes, that was why. There had been a party last night. It must have been a good one, judging by the fact that his brain felt like it was trying to jump out of his head and run screaming through the streets.

Well, Ash thought, if my brain is going to do that, it isn't gonna do it without the rest of my body, at least not this time.

He reached out of the bed and fumbled for the phone. As he pushed the button to answer, he noticed that someone had been trying to call him repeatedly all morning. Well, they had finally succeeded in waking him; he wondered if the person on the other end knew what they were getting into. Surly was a mild term for what Ash was like when he was awakened too early, especially when he was hung over after a party, and his voice reflected that as he growled into the phone.

"What?"

Ow. His head had just burst into flames when he said that, pretty orange and red flames. He watched them in his mind for a while, their dance soothing him, until finally the angry, insistent voice on the other end pounded through the hangover haze.

"OOK OOK OOK EEK EEK EEK OOK OOK OOK, goddammit!"

Oh no.

"Yer kidding, right?"

His answer was the sound of the phone being slammed.

Ash sighed. No, it wasn't a joke. The lid was off, and it was time for the Barrel of Monkeys to play.

Slowly, Ash laid the phone down and mustered the will to roll over. Beside him was a woman; he had absolutely no clue who she was, or how she had wound up in bed with him. Oh well, he gave her a kiss anyway. "I gotta go ta work, honey. Lock up when you leave." Not that it mattered; she could steal everything in his flat, because it was all already stolen anyway. Everything he owned of actual value was stashed in Johnny's cockpit. Most people don't try to steal from Mechs. Especially not Mechs with flamers and psychotic pilots.

After about an hour to shower and dress and gather a few things, Ash left it all behind, heading out to join his unit. If he came back, he would probably just get a new place, and forget this one had ever existed. Not that he could remember it anyway.

Man, he thought as he fired up Johnny's engine...that must have been some party...

January 15th
Celestial Palace,
Sian

The two Death Commandos grunted under the weight of the human shaped block of ice. They were taking it to the ultrasecret unfreezzin chamber to revive the warrior inside. It was rumored that he had sinned against the Chancellor but nobody was sure why she punished him so severely. But if someone risked his ears to the intense cold, a faint voice could be heard coming from the ice.

"No Kali, red shoes won't match your green dress no matter what you say"

The black suited men put the block inside the chamber, closed the door and set the dial on defrost.

"How many minutes do you thing he'll need?" one of the Death Commandos asked

His companion shrugged "I'm not sure, lets start with ten, the Celestial Light won't be very happy if we roast him"

Pressing the start button brought the machine to live, while the two men waited surrounded by a droning sound.

January 15th
Brightmoor
OLA

"How's my 'Mech Doc?"

Rick scratches his head after getting of the comm with the techs already on Brightmoor "Well Fred, we've cleaned it up and changed a whole bunch of the innards so it shouldn't crap out on you for no reason. If you get a critical hit, though, the heat will still spike"

"C'est Bon, Doc"

Jimmy walks in and interrupts them, "Sir, the rest have arrived" "Excellent! Tell them to head to the 'Mechs and wind them up and do all the checks they need" "Yessir"

Just as Jimmy walks out "Doctor Raisley, The rest of Bonsai should be here by end of day, the 204th should be ready to mobilize to meet up with the rest of the Irregulars on Alphard"

"Sounds good Jimmy, now Fred, the 204th's 'Mechs are ready for battle, the techs are just now placing the IHU in yours, they requested you run it in about a half hour to test it"

"C'est bon.....Hey, where's the one that piloted the Hatchetman? That guy was the inspiration for me to join the Irregulars in the first place"

"Oh, that is BrainBurner Jr., BBjr for short, he's with the Warriors"

"Cool, I have a 'Mech with his name on it back at the Bar and Grill, dumb luck that I got my hands on one, a nice minty Berserker"

Rick raises one of his brows, "Well he has a 'Mech of his own, but I do think he would like it"

Fred starts up his modified Ti Ts'sang and switches on the IHU, "All green up here" "All good from here sir" came the response of one of the techs. *Bon, Tres bon* Fred thought to himself.

The hatched mech leaps out of the bay, having the TSM at the sweet spot off the go, and moves out to an open area of Recycle Valley.

From here he watches over Jimmy testing out the RAC 5 with the new doorknob ammo, Major Tom's getting used to the new ER lasers in his old Archer, Sheepy testing out the bathtub ammo for his SRM 6 and testing all the other guns on his Loki, and the hard hitter of the group, Worktroll and his Marauder blasting away at scrap targets, having a 'Blast'

Tres, tres bon, Fred thought again, *We keep it tight on the field, and we'll hit them hard*

"Hunter 4-2 to 204th, the Fish wont know what'll hit em" All the members sound off in agreement "Alright boys form up on me, let's figure out how to use all our mechs and skills to create the best damage potential, this is the first time we've been together since sign up, so lets start off good"..

Scrappy wanders about the junk pile. Something in his mind did not add up with the incident last night with that Nightstalker character. He seemed to know that something was wrong with that burger but how? He appeared to have Ricks best interests in mind but just who was he and what was he doing here? Fitz was stabilized but was still in a light coma he had sent the remains of that burger to be analyzed and was still waiting for a response. Who had poisoned it and how did they know which burger to contaminate there were like 20 sacks, 200 burgers and sandwiches of various types and that was just one of several orders that day. This was getting weird...er. They said that once they brought Nightstalker to the lock-up he just sat down and most of the time he was in a catatonic state except for the times he got into discussions/arguments with somebody that was not there.

As he walked through the yard the Scrapper observed the activity most of the Dropship Irregular mechs that had been brought in had been either reworked or were in the bays right now. The 204th's mechs were now on the practice range testing repairs and upgrades now. Work was commencing on building mechs out of the piles of parts that were scattered everywhere. He watched as the Husband and wife team of Discord and MercChick worked with some of the other team Bonsai techs on an old Atlas somehow shoehorning in an engine salvaged from a Gargoyle and squeezing in TSM and Clan tech weapons, this is going to give somebody a rude shock. He stopped and watched as their little daughter sat on the left foot of the mech arranging and rearranging coloured stones... Tunnel Rat odd nickname for a little girl he thought She stopped looked him dead in the eyes and said "You should have Nightstalker released they tell him things that can help you" "huh?" "And your Anti-sorcery sachets block the force"

What is this kid talking about?

She looked him straight in the eyes

"You were known to be special ever since you were a small child on Hector"

He stopped dead in his tracks {How in the name of all that is Holy did she know THAT?!?!? He had not told ANYBODY about that!!!} He just stared at her in shock, and she looked back and said

"I know these things...and Fitz is fine he is waking up right now"

and she turned back to her colored stones.

The Scrapper just shook his head and walked off .The phone on his right hip rang he answered it, It was Brightmoor General Hospital reporting that Fitz had come out of the coma and the tests were coming back good and he might be released later today. Looks like he might be back to work tomorrow. He took the phone and called the security lock-up

"I want to talk to that Nightstalker guy I will be there shortly.

As the Scrapper walked into the observation room for the interview room that currently held Nightstalker, he noticed on the monitor that it appeared Nightstalker was holding a quite conversation with himself. "Why is the sound off?"

The guard reached over and turned up the volume. "...don't think that they believe me." A pause, like he was listening to someone, then, "You're right! That just might work."

Scrapper shook his head, this on defiantly needed professional help. "How long has he been doing this?"

"Sir, the guard on his cell said that he started just before you called and said you wanted to see him. Funny thing though, when he was told we were moving him, he just said, "I know, let me see the lost Hellion." Then once he got here, he started up again. You need backup in there?"

They looked back at the monitor to see Nightstalker looking back at them. "If you're done talking about me, I have something to show you. Also, bring a pencil and some paper."

Quickly recovering, Scrapper said, "I don't think so. But have someone ready just outside the door." Grabbing the requested items on his way out the door, the Scrapper mumbled something unintelligible, but it sounded something like, "Loonies for sale. Get yer loonies here."

Entering the room, Scrapper saw that Nightstalker appeared to be waiting for him. "Can I have the stuff you brought me?"

"Yeah, here you go." handing over the paper and pencil, which Nightstalker placed in front of himself. "Why are you here? And how did you know that burger was poisoned?"

"I am here because I was told to protect one of the three that was there. As for the burger, I didn't know that it was poisoned, just that there was something wrong." During this, the Scrap Yard's owner noticed his guests' hand drawing on the paper, without it's owner ever looking at it. A frown appeared on Nightstalker's face, "I was actually looking forward to an explosion, not a splat."

"OK. How did you get onto Motown? There are no records of you arriving."

"I don't know. I woke up behind a pile of junk when I heard a lot of dropships landing." All the while, his hand kept drawing all on it's own. " I don't know where I came from, I really don't remember anything before I woke up."

"Well, you at least know your name. After all, you told us it."

"I was told my name by the voices." The Scrapper couldn't see what the hand was drawing, but it suddenly stopped. Nightstalker's face went blank for a moment, then he said, "Excuse me, but they are very insistent right now." At which, he started whispering to himself.

After a few minutes, Scrapper got impatient and cleared his throat. As Nightstalker looked up at him, "You said you had something to show me?"

"I hope you're right about this?" to one of his voices, apparently. Then looking back at Scrapper, "Yes, I don't know what this means, but I was told you would understand." He hands over the drawing.

Looking at it, recognition dawns on the Scrapper. It was a picture of a bearded angel in flight, carrying a doorknob thrower in one hand, and a Jedi Claymore in the other. Over the top of this were the numbers "204".

"I was told that they didn't have a symbol. But, I wasn't told who they were, perhaps you could enlighten me?" The hand started up again.

"This is nice, but it doesn't prove to me that I should keep you around."

Nightstalker nodded, "We didn't think so." He hands over another piece of paper. It shows a highly detailed map of the Scrap Yard, complete with "You are here" arrow and an "X" to mark the spot. "Follow this and you will find something you will need shortly."

The Scrapper shakes his head, "As for your question, the 'they' are the 204th Bearded Cavalry. And they just started getting around to designing a unit symbol. I'll check this out," holding up the map, "and let you know. OK?"

"Sure, but tell Rick to stop at only five Code Reds with dinner tonight. He won't like the results if he doesn't."

With that, the Scrapper left to see what the map led to.

Motown runs into Fred in the Scrap Yard, and hands him the drawing of the unit, "What do you make of this, it was drawn by some loonie sent here to protect us or something"

Fred looks at the picture and trails off to himself, "un ange.....Y vol, un epee du Jedi?, le lace-mannet d'porte, pour nous....C'est Parfait!!!"

"so, you will use it?"

"Pas exactement, pas pour le group terrain, mais. ya un group de..."Fred notices Motown's eyes glaze over slightly "Oh! Sorry, I mean, I won't use it for the 204th

Bearded Cavalry, But their is a group on Solaris VII that could form the 204th Bearded AirCav.... "Fred turns back for a second "JIMMY!!!" "Yessir?" "Get a hold of Lewis back on Solaris VII give him this message" Fred hands Jimmy a slip of paper with note quickly jotted all over it, and runs off to the comm station.

"If you will excuse me, Fred, I apparently need to find some thing I will need to use, apparently"

Fred just nods and heads off to his bunk for some shut eye, totally focused on the Jedi Claymore written in the picture. He recalled Motown calling the artist a loonie that was to protect us? *Peut etre un voyeur* Fred thought to him self as he dozed off, not knowing it would become a little clearer in the morning

"Laddie.....laddie....LADDIE!!"

Fred Wakes with a start to find himself in a darkened room, with a single light in the middle

"it's about time, just ta let ye know, yer havin a vision laddie"

"Hey, Mac...."

"Yer wondering why the seer drew in a Jedi Claymore in tha picture"

"So he his a Seer" "Ya already knew that one laddie, Ye are nay a Jedi, but the force is strong with ya, have ye always wondered why ye nor ye father gat yer 'mech caught in tha mud in tha bayou? Ever?"

Fred ponders this for a few moments "Whaddaya know...I guess we just always knew where to step, or, when to duck, jump, fire, weird..."

"Aye, it can be if you dannie know, now ya do, trust yer instinct laddie, and look inta yer family history, ye might want ta say the same to Michael when he gets here, Now wake up!"

Fred's eye shoot open to the sound of his comm going off...*giaw* he thought, he always hated waking up....."Fred here"

"Sir, Jimmy, I got a hold of Lewis last night and the former Kogoth Yastreba has agreed, They are now the 204th Bearded AirCav commanded by a Russian, um, Michael Romanov..."

Michael?!?, "um Jimmy, can you get a hold of my Maman back in the bayou" "the *Traiteuse?*" "Ouai, I need to talk to her"
"I'm on it"

Fred lays back down in bed.....and lights up his pipe and enjoys the taste of maple Cavendish.....

January 15th

Aboard a merchant dropship
Somewhere over Brightmoor

"Can ya hover here for a minute?" Ash was looking out the window of the merchant dropship that he had hitched a ride on. Below was the port of Brightmoor, spread out beneath them as the dropship slowly descended.

"Ummm, sure." The captain looked at his passenger. Something about the man hadn't seemed right from the start. He smelled like smoke, and the strange eyes and "I know something you don't" grin were getting to be scary. "What for?"

"I'm getting off here." Ash snapped shut a device in his hand; the captain noticed that it had a map screen with a single bright blip.

"You're WHAT?"

Ash sighed, looking irritated. "Look, I paid you already. Just when I give the word, open the bay door and count ten, then close it." He headed out of the bridge. "And then you can forget you ever saw me." He paused, and gave a glance back, with that psychotic grin that sent a chill down the captain's spine. "In fact, you'd be wise to." Then he was gone.

The captain looked at his crew in disbelief. They were equally dumbfounded, but did as asked. The dropship hovered for a minute, then two. From the bay below came the sounds of a Mech starting up, then several clanking steps. Finally, the stranger's voice came over the radio, thunderous and dramatic.

"OPEN SESAME!"

With a grind and groan, the bay door rolled up, letting in the twin roars of engine and wind. And then the stranger was gone, the rushing air and screaming exhaust all but drowning out the "LOOK OUT BELOW!" as his Mech jumped out of the dropship door. And before he switched off the dropship's frequency, they could hear the man laughing like a demon...

Below, on Brightmoor, Motown was looking over the plan. Not that plans meant much to the Barrel of Monkeys, who were known for deliberately mangling anything resembling a plan as soon as they got into action. But it at least made him look like he was doing something productive while he was waiting for his team to assemble. Things were going entirely too slow for his tastes...

Suddenly Motown was interrupted by a whistling noise outside, like a bomb falling, accompanied by a growing roar. He could hear people running and panicking, and he grabbed his gun as he ran for the door. Something told him it was better not to go outside, and so he knelt inside and looked out.

Motown was just in time to see a Firestarter make a controlled crash landing in front of the building, its jump jets wide open, its knees flexing deeply as it hit the ferrocrete with a 35-ton BOOM! A cloud of smoke and dust arose, and Motown ducked back as gravel flew in all directions.

Slowly, Motown peeked back out, to see a small crater through the haze. All was silent for several seconds, as the crowd slowly gathered round. Then suddenly, there was a loudspeaker voice: "And heeeeere's JOHNNY!" The grey and black Mech popped up, firing its flamers in the air, and the crowd scattered. A chuckle came over the loudspeakers as the Firestarter made an elaborate show of dusting itself off. It climbed out of the crater, stepped up to the building, and its pilot emerged: a dark haired man in a Mechwarrior's suit, with a black longcoat and cigar. And a grin that left Motown no doubts of where he belonged.

"Hiya boss. Mechwarrior Ashton Grey, Barrel of Monkeys, reporting for duty."

Slowly getting up and slinging the ancient rifle over his shoulder the Scrapper opens the door and walked out.

"Ashton Grey you sure know how to make an entrance"

The younger man just grinned

"Yup that I do"

The Scrapper looked to younger man over

"Despite that crazy entrance of yours I am glad to see you. So far the other units have been showing up in force but you are the first member of the BoM to make it here so far. Bowtie sent a message he is on the way. Anyway some real weird crap has been happening here lately. The lead people from team Bonsai is here and one couple got this little kid with them I do not think she is even four years old yet but she comes up with stuff that just cannot be explained. Then there is this Nightstalker guy makes you look sane."

Ashton looks a Scrapy

"Watch it there I work hard at being nuts"

"Yup that you do But he hears voices that tell him things...he talks back to them.He stopped Rick from eating a Drugged Hamburger Said the voices told him to do it...He knew stuff that I cannot figure out how he could have known it.A Firestarter Omni has been found nearby we believe it is his.I would like you to go talk to him see what you think"

Ashton looks down and then at Scrapy

"Crazy to crazy right"

"Ya you got it"

"Sure why not"

"O.K. I will call the Lock-up and let them know you are on the way"

With that he pulls out his phone and dials up the lock-up

"Hey guys I am going to sent Ashton over there to talk to our friend

Nightstalker...Yup like I am certain just about everybody in the place knows he is here...Who else makes combat drops when called to the assembly point... Ya that is why I want him to talk to him crazy as he is he just might understand him"

He looks at the younger man

"They are waiting for you"

Ashton grins that silly grin of his

"Right boss"

An Ambulance pulls up and the passenger door opens and Fitz comes out Scrapy walks over

"How you feeling kid "

Fitz looks up

"Fine...and if I ever see that goofball again I am going to take a wrench and shove it so far up his ASS that it will knock his TEETH out!!!"

Scrapy chuckles

"Glad to see you are feeling better you ready to work again"

"Ya I think so still feel a little tight though"

"O.K. tell you what there is some thing I want to check out how about if you tag along I am not sure what it is but our friend drew this map ...I think he might have something stashed here.

Fitz looks at Scrappy

"O.K. might be a good idea for two people to be there just in case let me grab my tools'

15 minutes later they pile into a skimmer and go to the location marked on the map.

And Goose opened the door to the Briefing Room to see what the commotion was *this* time . . .

It was just about sunset as Fitz and Scrappy finally got to the place indicated on Nightstalker's map. "Man, sometimes I forget just how big the Scrap Yard is. I don't think that I've been in this part for years."

"Wonder what could be so important out here?" Fitz looked around at the various piles. "And where in the hell do we start?"

"Only one way to find out Fitz." With that, they get out of the skimmer and begin to search.

As the last light is fading, the Scrapper throws up his hands in disgust. "You know Fitz, right now I'm thinking real hard about giving you a wrench and then taking you to see that nutcase. An hour of searching, and nada."

"Well, tell you what. Lets go back, and I'll get a wrench for you too. Sound good?"

"Yes it does. Lets go."

As Scrappy is searching his pockets for the keys, Fitz taps him on the shoulder. "Boss, you see that over there?" Pointing to one of the piles they hadn't gotten to yet.

"What? I don't see any..." The Scrapper rubs his eyes. "Looks like there's light coming from inside that pile." He grabs his phone, "Yeah, its me. Get some heavy equipment out to Section 8 as fast as possible."

Thirty minutes later, Scrappy and Fitz are looking at what appears to be a very detailed statue of a man coming out of pool with a plastic cover trying to pull him back in. There's what appears to be a control panel on the side, next to some writing. "Fitz, can you read this. The light's not good enough for me."

"S...T...E...E. Then its worn, or scratched out until. N..G. And below that, on the panel, 'Stasis Active'. That's it. Can't read the rest of it."

"Can you figure out the control panel?"

"Sure can, Boss. Got just the tool for it too." Fitz bends over his tool bag, grabbing, and then discarding various tools. "Nope, that's not what I want. No...no...no. Ahh, here we go." He holds up a five-pound dead blow hammer. "This should do it." And before the Scrapper can yell stop, Fitz slams the hammer into the panel. "Pound to fit, paint to match."

With that, something falls out of a small panel on the side, and the various lights on the panel begin to go crazy.

What's that sensation? It sure is getting warm all of sudden. Hey!! I can't see, that light is blinding me. Aaargh! Hey, why can't I hear myself screaming? Are my ears plugged up.

The *ice* begins to crack and crumble, as the body begins to tumble. Steelfang falls to ground with a thud and a crash as he gasps for air.

"Where...*gasp*....the....*gasp*...frell...*gasp*.....am...*gasp*...I?"

Motown speaks first, "You are on Brightmoor, in the Scrapyard. Nightstalker, go get some medical help."

"Just friggin' great! I spent five years getting off this rock! And now I am back right where I started. The Gods hate me. Next question, when the frell am I?"

"It's January 15, 3087."

"What the ...? That means twenty years have passed me by. Frick, frack and frell! When I see Shabba the Hutu and Bobo Fret again, it's gonna be clobberin' time! First they grab me up, thinking I'm some guy named Hand Solong and then they dump me on this floating junkyard, they are going to pay!"

Hey, it's not junk, it's a valuable commodity."

"Believe what you want, Old Man, and I do mean old. It's still junk to me. Now howsabout some beer and fillin' me in what in the Sam Hill is going around here. Like who belongs to all them DropShips I see parked over yonder?" Before Steelfang could go on much longer, he fell to the ground again. Evidently 20 years without food, water or exercise has a wonderful, though not kind, effect on the musculature of humans.

Normally, the goings-on of the past few hours would not have disturbed Teemo too much, but the psychological shock of his near-poisoning, coupled with the legendarily infamous aftereffects of the "sliders" he had consumed, had meant a night with far much less sleep than he was accustomed to. Though his basic training was far behind him, Teemo had listened to enough tales to know that there was one sure cure for the tension that was gripping him. Unfortunately, his position as C.O. meant that he had to set a good example, and therefore he didn't even attempt to hit on his X.O. **That** avenue closed to him, he settled for the next best thing. Donning his cockpit attire, he mounted his 'Mech, and before buttoning up, he sought out his host. "Hey, Scrappy, y'all got a target range out here, or should I just pick a random pile?"

Ash wandered after Motown, wondering what was up. Making an entrance, hrmph. All he did was a high-altitude hover-drop. It wasn't like he'd landed in the First Lord's swimming pool or something. THAT would have been an entrance...

Ash watched as the man they called Steelfang was melted out of the ice.

"Y'know, my flamers coulda got him outta there pretty quick..."

"Yes, but we didn't want to boil him instantly." Motown sounded irritated.

"Are you saying that we want to boil him later?" Ash took a puff of his cigar. He wasn't serious, but he had an image to keep up. Always make them think that you're crazier than you really are, both friends and foes. That way when the switch flips, you still have the advantage.

"Maybe," Motown said with a grin. "That depends on how helpful he turns out to be."

"Hey, wait a minute, just because I've been on ice all this time doesn't mean I'm a free target for jokes..." Steelfang had his head cocked over, patting snow out of his ears.

"Oh, cool it," Ash said with a grin. "You know we're just warming up."

"Here, you might want this." Motown offered Steelfang a large...was that a cricket bat? It looked like it was made of some dense metal.

"Yes, thank you."

The next thing Ash knew, he was laying flat on his back with his ears ringing.

"Knocked for three," Steelfang said with a grin. "The Ferro-Carbide Bat of Doom doesn't like bad puns."

"So I see." Ash rubbed his jaw as he slowly got up. Not bad. Not bad at all. "I think I'll take that as a clue. Hey Nightstalker, I need to talk to you..."

As he watched Ash walk away, he thought to himself, *"I must get back to the gym, normally they don't get back up."*

Turning to Motown, "When I get better, I will knock him for six, just for kicks." Turning to the doublewide trailer that Mo used for his office/home, "You still got some of that mule pee you call beer around here, 'cuz I is thirsty."

Chapter 5 Preparations

January 23rd
Free Worlds League
Atreus

The *Thera* class super carrier *The Knights Own* drifted in space near the docking yard where Medron Pryde watched it from. It hadn't taken too long to assemble the Third Knights, as they usually made their home on Marik. In fact, they'd arrived over Atreus a week ago, after loading their LAMs into *The Knights Own* and had been waiting to recharge before taking on the next step of their journey. And he'd sworn he'd heard signing in the background of the super carrier's first message.

That was a bad sign. He'd already been seeing things. He didn't need to be hearing things too. He shook his head slowly and glanced over at the *Thera*'s escorts, the *Eagle* class escorts *Kai*, *Merlin*, and *Arthur*. They always had gone everywhere with the Third Knights, and had been invaluable in the fight against the alKhan five years ago. He nodded slowly at that thought before hearing the brush of a dress behind him. He turned to see Isis walking into the room before gazing out at one of the League's most powerful warships. As usual, her clothing was well tailored, emphasizing everything that should be emphasized while not overdoing it. After all, it wouldn't be good for the leader of the League to look like a crazy hooker. That's what the Liaos were for.

"She's a nice ship," Medron whispered and Isis nodded in response.

"She's always had an odd harmonic," she returned quickly. "Ever since the war with alKhan. The engineers never were able to find out where it came from and finally gave up. It didn't seem to adversely affect the running of the ship."

"So you're giving me a defective ship?" Medron asked in a teasing voice and she turned to look at him balefully.

"Just loaning it with the idiosyncrasies it had when it was returned to me," she finally whispered back and Medron winced painfully.

"Right," he muttered awkwardly. "This isn't why I came here you know," he added and she nodded back.

"Of course not," Isis returned. "You don't need a vision from Mac to visit your bosom allies," she returned and Medron pointedly kept his eyes locked with hers. He didn't need to go through with the whole looking thing again. "And its not like you could forecast when you were going to start seeing things," she added softly and Medron winced again. He really hoped she didn't think he was crazy right now. Oh wait, way too late for that.

"But thanks for giving me the Third Knights again. It really was more than you needed to do," he finished gratefully and she smiled back mischievously.

"Oh no," she responded in a tone that matched her smile. "The pleasure's all mine. I've been trying to find some quest for them to go on for a while now. I think they've been getting a little stir crazy you know. And now this pops up. I figured you'd be

perfect for riding herd on them," she finished with a smile that would have felt at home on a Cheshire cat.

"I do hope this isn't going to be as bad as I think it will be," Medron whimpered and Isis just smiled back before turning to look at the ship again.

"Don't worry, I'm sure it'll all be fine," she returned calmly, terrifying Medron even more. "But you really should get going now. You've got an odd...ice planet...thing...to find don't you?"

"Yeah," Medron muttered and turned to walk out. "Once again, thanks. I think," he finished awkwardly and left the room. He wasn't sure, but he thought he almost heard giggling from the room. He refused to turn around and see though. She was right. He really did need to go. The walk to the *Alphard's Pyre*, an *Incidio* class dropship designed by the Hegemony, was a short one. They were small but swift ships, and the trip from the yard to *The Knights Own* was mercifully short.

The smaller dropship locked onto the warship's docking port and shut down her primary engines as the larger ship accelerated out of orbit, with her three escorts holding position behind her. Ten minutes later, everything seemed to be sucked into a funnel and spat back out as the ships made a jump straight out to Alphard, the capital of the Marian Hegemony. Medron looked down blearily at the planet, and then at the Wobbly hotdog stand in orbit advertising to all new arrivals.

Idiots. Didn't they know an arriving ship could land right on top of them? Ah well. If they wanted to see Blake, that was one way to do it. Nice and painless. Hopefully. It's not like anyone had survived an interpenetration to say either way. Medron shrugged at that thought and glanced past the hotdog stand to the *Quadran* class way station in orbit. In another life, it had been an *Overlord* dropship, and its heritage could still be seen. Now though, it was one of the primary stations over Alphard where visitors first came. What visitors came to the periphery at least. Willingly. The unwilling arrivals came in via different routes.

Medron chuckled at that thought and smiled as the *Alphard's Pyre* detached from the warship and began moving towards the planet. For a moment, he frowned. Had he heard singing again? He shook his head quickly. No. It had to have been something else. It had to have been.

Swords of Fire dashed down the corridor and into another to catch up to Medron. His loud running (Damn loose grates on the floor) evidently alerted the elder mechwarrior who promptly blurted out "Dammit not again!" before he realized that Swords was less than three meters away.

"Morning Sir Pryde" He began as Medron shuddered.

"Morning Squire" Medron replied, Swords had been assigned to him for Squire duty ever since Medron had found him occupying a small force of the AlKhans troops in a No Dachi and a list of particularly tasteless jokes. "Is there a reason your trying to shake this dropship apart with your running?"

"No Sir" Swords looked at the elder warrior "Simply trying to keep up with my duties"

"Well then you can keep up with your duties by getting me a cup of coffee, kid" Medron looked rather forcefully at the young 'kid', he had never really liked the boy but certain persuasive people had convinced him to let the kid have a chance.

"Aye sir" Swords started to regret getting Medron that copy of the Matrix Revived for his birthday last year. He seemed to have picked up calling him the kid from that.

Swords ducked off down the corridor at a full pelt, wondering if what he was hearing was the ship, or Medrons baritone impressions.

Marian Hegemony
Alphard

The call had gone out. The Warriors of the Dropship were to assemble at Alphard. What was left of them at least. The Warriors knew Medron hung his hat out in that sector of space, so wouldn't be surprised at where he called the assemblage. Though what they found when they arrived just might surprise them. After all, this was the Periphery. Nothing good ever came out of the Periphery. At least that was what everybody thought. That was what the Spheroids thought. It's what Medron had thought at one time.

He was better now.

He walked through the halls of the capital building, nodding approvingly at the Roman styling and the deep red curtains in the alcoves. The Imperial Guards stood at attention in their equally deep red uniforms, blending into the curtains, invisible in their motionless stance. As was custom, he did not do anything to betray their presence and simply walked on by on his way to speak to the Caesar.

He hadn't been to a formal audience with the Caesar in some time now, but there were proper ways to do things, and improper ways to do them. When it came to requesting the allocation of government resources, he much preferred the official and proper way. After all, he wanted the *Subtrahos* and the Schola. Those were not little things to ask for. He sighed slowly as he walked into the Caesar's audience chamber, hoping he could get away with another con job.

Of course, it wasn't really a con if you told the truth was it?

Three days later, he lay on his back, smiling like a Cheshire cat as the sun came up over the horizon of Lothario, fanning the aurora out to cover the entire sky with its intense colors. It was a beautiful sight. Not the most beautiful he'd ever seen, but it definitely ranked up there on the list. There were one or two things that beat it though. One of them nuzzled deeper into his side as her world showed off the beauty of another day dawning.

January 25th
New Avalon System
CSS Deus Ex Machina

BBjr ducked another swing from the practice robot's wooden pole and suddenly leapt

forward with great speed, driving his claymore through the robot's shoulder assembly and up through the neck severing the head and sending it in a straight up and down arc. A sudden backswing caught the falling head and sent it smashing into the wall clock.

Pyro nodded. "Well done, you just beat Knight level. And scored a perfect hundred to boot. Quite a feat for what little time we've had to train."

A repair robot came out and picked up the pieces of the practice robot, and would reassemble it over the course of the next hour.

Pyro neglected to mention the fact that such a thing as a "Jedi Training for Dummies" book ever existed, for the benefit of BBjr's training. To save the universe required proper mastery, not book learning. Such a manual was a dangerous quick and easy path, only to be used in the direst of emergencies. Such as when Pyro couldn't remember exactly how to force levitate the coffee mug into his hand and didn't feel like getting up.

A repair robot began reassembling the training robot as Pyro's communicator squawked. "We got a message for ya." Pyro nodded. "Go ahead, Adept."

"From Medron Pryde. He's called the Warriors of the Dropship to Alphard." Pyro nodded. "Alphard, eh?" Pyro shook his head as Isis's use of the word "bosom allies" rang through his brain, half-recalled from some long-forgotten discussion last time he was on Marik, seeming like another lifetime ago. "Thanks, Pyro out."

Pyro punched a few more buttons on the communicator. "Mrs. Solu, plot a hyperspace jump for Alphard. Jump as soon as possible, and try to hit the right nation this time."

Again, Pyro closed the link and keyed in Engineering. "Mrs. MacArthur, give me full power to the KF(c) drive again."

Her voice squawked back across the radio, barely improved from 20th century 2-way radios. "I just canna keep pushing the hardware like this, Precentor. She'll fly apart!"

"Fly her apart then, I need full power as soon as safely possible."

"Aye."

BBjr looked at Pyro curiously. "What's going on?"

Pyro smiled. "The Warriors of the Dropship are assembling at Alphard. We're going to meet with them as soon as the drive finishes charging."

BBjr nodded. "Seriously? There's still a WoTD to assemble? Incredible! But what about our 'Mechs? We didn't exactly bring them with us."

"No worries", Pyro said, "I've sent word for the remaining members of Team Bonsai still at the NAIS to ship your Claymore by next day KF(c) soon as possible at ComStar's expense and even managed to procure myself a surplus Hauptmann to send along with it. I may have to face few excrement sandwiches thrown at me when

I get back for the expense of this little trip, but it's worth it. Best to get some rest, we got a busy day ahead of us."

January 25th
Somewhere on Strato Domingo

Precentor Clarke Marek, a guest of Clan Diamond Shark, lands on the planet. As agents of ROM go, he's seen a lot. Many times in the past he's misjudged people, something that cost him dearly. Other times, he's guessed on the spot. Today, though, his mission is as diplomat to the Clans. *Officially*. Unofficially, his mission is to do reports to the Precentor Martial. Things like, what are the Clans up to? What is their strength and status? What are they up to? How does one get HarJel? And, most importantly of all, Star League Coffee, or even Clan Coffee?

"Precentor Marek. Message from ComStar." The Star Captain approached him. The Star Captain had been assigned as an assailant to Marek, but he never could understand anything about the guy. According to his reports, the warrior is a mix of two former Diamond Shark Khans: the genefather was former Khan Jordan Clarke, and the genemother was Barabra Sennet. Normally, the Clans don't name their warriors after Bloodname houses, but for some strange reason, this one was named Clarke, after his genefather. Odd. And ironic, though both people sharing the same first name has helped to ease relations.

"Yes, Star Captain Clarke."

"Precentor, the message is odd. It's from former Precentor Martial Pyro. Says you are needed in the Inner Sphere immediately."

"Is that all?"

"Well, that and something about doorknobs."

Marek realized what this meant. He was assigned liaison to the WoTD early in his career. A lot of things happened since. And with his recent bout with inner demons, coupled with various other duties, he wondered if he would be up for the duty.

"Very well. Star Captain Clarke, is there any way I can get passage back to the Inner Sphere?"

"Yes. By chance, I work part time as a pizza delivery boy. It is very interesting work. Did you know that Jamie Wolf always had a thing for anchovies on his pizza? Not many people know that."

"Just get me the ship."

"Roger. You will like the crew, I bet. Bunch of fun guys, you probably know them."

Marek pauses. "How?"

"Well, funny thing happened about 40 years ago. See, this Jumpship landed in system and started an invasion. The ship and some of the crew members where returned to their former house, but we kept a few. Fun guys, but for some strange reason they keep praying to coffee makers. They are not Blakists, are they?"

The Outbound Light. Marek thought. *So that is what happened to all those crewmembers. No wonder we could not find them. They have been running pizza for the Clans all this time. I just hope they don't go turncoat on us when we return to the IS.*

The two board the Dropship. As it docks the Jumpship *Ceasar Minor*, Marek sends a message to the ship's commander. "Set course for Barcelona. Somebody's gonna be surprised."

January 28th
Alphard, Marian Hegemony
CSS Deus Ex Machina

With yet another jarring KF(c) transit behind, the CSS Deus Ex Machina materialized at a pirate jump point near Alphard. Pyro ceased his pacing on the deck, partially from disorientation and partly trying to recall what he was thinking about right before he jumped. That's right...

He turned to Admiral Church. "Well, it looks like we made it in one piece, Admiral. I have no further demands to place upon this ship and crew, so you are free to return to ComStar at will. I only ask that you tell them only what you have to."

She simply nodded, and Pyro headed for the shuttle. "I'll be taking the Mongol with me, but only because I need all the people it can carry on the way down. May the Force be with you."

Pyro left the bridge and headed for the shuttle bay, collecting BBjr, Erika Carson, Ryan Furey, and an additional security acolyte to man the gunnery station. Once done, the five boarded the 200 ton assault shuttle and left for Alphard, leaving behind the Deus Ex Machina.

The trip to Alphard was uneventful and boring. About the only thing that happened along the way was that the crew got to know each other better. The security acolyte, though a striking brunette in her early twenties, was saddled with an ugly and unwieldy name: Anonymous Extraneous Redshirt.

The sleek, deadly shuttle slid through the atmosphere and landed at the WoTD staging area, landed, and conned the port authority into giving up on wringing landing fees out of them.

Pyro disembarked from the shuttle first, followed by the others. A few WoTD support personnel came up and looks of recognition dawned on everyone's faces "Hey, Pyro." Pyro nodded. "Hey guys. Brought a shuttle to the party. Don't laugh; it's more a superheavy fighter than shuttle. Anyone hear about Mac's old Claymore and a Hauptmann showing up?"

One of the techs nodded. "Yeah, they showed up the yesterday. Everything's in order and they're loaded in your names."

Pyro nodded, and looked to the rest of his crew. "C'mon, let's go find Medron."

January 28th
Alphard, Marian Hegemony

The Warhammer landed on the landing pad, the massive air cushion underneath it. It had been the tradition of the place he had been before he had become a warrior of the dropship to name dropships and warships after mechs, he remembered during the jihad when his old friends took out a blakist unit with a single marauder.... a nightlord called marauder that is.

The door opened and geek walked out, tugging at his itchy woolen robe, his claymore slung to his back

he addressed a customs personnel
"you will take me to Pyro.. if he isn't here then Medron Pryde... if all else fails a place I can get a halfway decent chocolate milk"

Geek found himself at the space station canteen

"Oh well"

And thus he sat down nursing a chocolate milk waiting for the rest

Geek found himself five minutes later

The assembled Warriors were quickly escorted to the nearest coliseum, where Medron and a few thousand screaming fans sat, stood, and jumped as they watched a volleyball game. Beach volleyball, despite the fact that the coliseum in question was nowhere near a beach. It did have nice, warm sand though.

And as much beer and as many pretzels as an assemblage of the Warriors of the Dropship could wolf down. Which just happened to be a fairly large amount. Of course, they had fruit juice for BBjr., a fact that made him annoyed to no end. Medron waved him over to sit beside him, and Pyro followed quickly, wanting to get a seat as quickly as possible so he could watch the show.

One of the Warriors said something about Medron always knowing the best places to have meetings and then Medron leaned over to BBjr. with his teacher face on. "Have you ever studied Newton's Three Laws of Motion?" he asked and the young kid frowned, wondering what millennia old laws had to do with this situation. Medron smiled slyly at Pyro before dropping back into his teacher mode with relish. "The first law says 'Every object in a state of uniform motion tends to remain in that state of motion unless an external force is applied to it'." Then he pointed towards the nicely shaped volleyball players as they bounced back and forth, going after the ball. "Watch closely. Do you see the law in...um...motion?" he asked with the sound of someone trying to find a better word.

"Um...oh yeah," BBjr. whispered with his eyes wide open and Medron nodded approvingly before accepting another beer from the man walking up and down the isles.

"Excellent," Medron returned with a smile. "Now for the second law. 'The relationship

between an object's mass m , its acceleration a , and the applied force F is $F = ma$.' As you can see it's practical aspects can be...um..." Medron trailed off thoughtfully, glanced over at BBjr.'s glazed eyes and nodded in embarrassed agreement. "Ok ok. Forget about that one. I don't understand it either," he muttered with a shrug.

He slapped the younger warrior's hand as the boy tried to grab his beer before going on. "Now for the real kicker," Medron noted with supreme pleasure. "This is the third law of motion. 'For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.' Do you see what the law is talking about?" he finished as BBjr. carefully covered his lap with his arms.

"Oh yeah," BBjr. responded quickly and Medron smiled at Pyro.

"See? I always said studying physics could be fun! What do you think guys?" he asked and looked around at the other Warriors. In between eating pretzels and drinking beer, they voiced their abundant approval at the idea that physics could be fun. Their roar of approval just happened to coincide with the visiting team smashing one of the home team's players to the sand with a spike and the audience surrounding them started looking at them crossly as the girl started getting back up slowly. "Um...guys? We're on the home side seating," Medron noted calmly. "We uh...we might want to git while the gitting's good."

One VERY quick exit later, the assembled Warriors huffed and puffed against the outside wall of the coliseum and Medron shook his head slowly. "We're too old for these damn fool idealistic crusades," he whispered sadly.

"Speak for yourself, old man," BBjr. responded and Medron sniffed.

"Young whippersnapper."

"Relic."

"Now now," Pyro muttered as Medron wound up for another response and Medron sniffed before shrugging in defeat.

"Ok...I suppose we should find another spot for the meeting," he finally noted thoughtfully, then smiled as an idea came to him. "They've got stockcar races going on across the city," he announced in a happy tone of voice and the Warriors hemmed and hawed doubtfully. "They've got nice looking flag wavers!" Medron added and the Warriors shouted in approval before following him away from the coliseum.

They saw a young stubbled man outside waiting patiently

"ah yes... Pyro and Medron Pryde. Finally I've found you.... I am Ravi "Geek" Iyer.... not to be confused with that Greek sounding lass, Pyro sent for me"

He wore the Woolen cloak and claymore of the Jedi Order, The Warriors' ceremonial Rotary doorknob cannon attached to his side

"I am one of the Jedi, though I only found out after Master Mac disappeared and the dropship was lost.

My sword and my life are at your disposal... as is my largish stock of star league coffee...

and besides doesn't anyone know a place that sells REAL chocolate milk in this damn place? My last cup was laced with liquor..."

"Lord save me from Jedi," Medron whispered to himself. "Come along, come along," he added in a louder tone and waved for "Geek" to follow him. "We're finding a new place for our meeting. The old one was...too dangerous," he added with a wince

"Cheerin at the wrong time eh?" geek chuckled "happens far too often"
"Hmm... Precentor Pyro-since when were you a Jedi anyway? "

" Anyway I brought a few toys I've got a updated Archer, the old model of course but I did some minor changes. I also have this odd little bird that Greytech industries was testing.. some kinda crazy ass crop-duster on steroids it seems.. and my "Warhammer", its a dropship I got on loan-I woulda brought the Marauder"

"the marauder?"

"the Nightlord class warship Marauder..don't ask"

Pyro looked to Medron as they walked along. "Relic or not, it's been far too long. Just remember, the secret to staying young is to lie within a believable range of your actual age... or use the Fishtank. They have one aboard most ComStar warships and in most HPG compounds. I could get you in if you want. Removes unwanted years in minutes, and only hurts about as a salt bath after being skinned alive."

Pyro scratched his head as he appraised Geek, and shrugged. "Jedi for about three weeks. Really makes me wonder though, as I was supposed to be second to last..."

Pyro continued along drumming a finger on the hilt of his claymore nervously as he pondered recent developments. One irate glower later, he realized his pondering had wandered too much in the direction of Acolyte Redshirt's shapely backside and made a mental note to keep his eyes at level or closed while lost in thought.

January 28th

Team Bonsai

In transit between New Avalon and Brightmoor

Dr Raisley had given the techs of Team Bonsai their orders and left it up to them to get all the mechs of the Dropship Irregulars in working order. Discord looked down at the techs from Team Bonsai from his vantage point on an overhead gantry, he brought up a listing of all the available parts for the outfitting of the Dropship Irregulars. MercChick and Bubbasan walked along the gantry towards Discord, neither one looked very happy about having to shoulder the load of watching over the tech while waiting for rest of Team Bonsai to arrive.

Goose, Doc Vic and Sir Henry were all scheduled to arrive within a couple of days onboard Teams Bonsai's modified Union class dropship the Wanderer along with the Teams mechs and other combat equipment. Calis and the rest of the Special Forces commandos were securing the Team Bansai facilities on New Avalon and would meet up with the others when the rest of the support personnel and the mule with the new

Battlearmor suits.

Doc and Sir Henry listened to Goose as he went over their orders for what seemed like the millionth time since the called had gone out for the members of Team Bonsai to assemble at Scrappers place on Brightmoor. All three looked up at the vid link from Alphard came in and they say the volleyball matches in the coliseum.

Calis went over the checklist one last time, making sure nothing was forgotten before setting the new security codes that Dr Raisley had left with him. Walking up the long corridor leading to where the hover car waited and not hearing the sounds of all the engineers and technicians yelling over the whine and grind of machinery was kind of eerie. It would be good to get to Brightmoor and finally meet up with everyone else.

January 28th

Alphard, Marian Hegemony

Pyro quit walking and the Warriors continued their procession to the racetrack unnoticed, even as he grabbed Medron by the collar and yanked him backwards with a tug that only managed to draw a strangled "Ach!" from him.

When the rest of the warriors were past, he nodded. "Few things I been needing to tell you, Medron... it's about Isis."

Medron blinked. "Er... what?"

"Well... let's just say I have it from very good sources that Victor still isn't in the Inner Sphere right now. Remember, that's why we had to find Mishima in ages past, because Victor had entrusted him with the UCS when he made his departure from known space..."

Medron's brain ground to a screeching halt. "What are you saying?"

"Same thing I always do. ComStar knows all."

Medron glowered. "Quit evading, you know something. I can handle it, so start spilling."

Pyro sighed. "The FWL's got another double, and this one's in short form. If you weren't too busy kicking around with your "bosom allies" you might have remembered some of these little insignificant details."

Only a small storm cloud hovering around Medron's head could have darkened his look any further, and Pyro shook his head in the negative. "I'm sorry I had to tell you like this, but I had to say it in person. There are still a few major security breaches in the communications network even I'm not fully aware of and I couldn't risk sending you a message. Not on a subject this sensitive."

"I'm gonna strangle the little runt," Medron growled angrily. "And then I gonna break every bone in his little body until he starts telling me what I want to hear. And then..." he trailed off evilly as another idea came to him. "And then I'll turn him over to Isis," he finished, his eyes burning with anger.

Then he turned back to Pyro like a tiger stalking his prey. "Tell me everything you know," he growled at the former head of ComStar. "How do we prove this? And how do **you** know?"

"I've already said most of what I know about what I know.", Pyro said with great deliberation. "The how is simple. Nobody can be in two places at the same time. I can't tell you where the real one is, of course, that's some really sensitive information way outside of even your clearance..."

"But the proof is simple. ComStar has the real Victor's DNA on file, since he went in for his yearly physicals. Guess he didn't want to repeat the way Hanse went out."

Pyro smiled one of his "Evil Bastard" smiles that made him the poster-boy of all ComStar-hating loonies in the Inner Sphere for so long. "Just beat some blood out of the double and you're in business, we can disprove him in as much time as it takes for the test results to come back."

"Sounds like music to my ears," Medron whispered in a dark tone. "But that can wait for now. I hope. We need to go to a world called...Roth. I've got the co-ords. Don't know what's there, but Mac told me about it. We can't wait much longer. We should go...fast. **Then** we can deal with the little **runt**," he snarled at the end.

Pyro nods. "I agree. Let's get everything packed up and going... it's been a weird last few weeks and something normal like traveling with the WoTD should be pretty relaxing."

Medron raised an eyebrow. "Travel with us? Normal? Relaxing? It really has been to long."

Pyro shrugged. "At any rate, it's time for me to go. I've got some more business to attend to. Go on to the races." Turning, Pyro left quietly, most of the Warriors still not noticing he was gone.

Ten minutes later Pyro sat in the extra bunkroom of the Mongol-class shuttle, now loaded aboard one of the WoTD Dropships, examining the possessions he'd brought with him ever since he left the home of Mac's master. Mostly, this was forge tools and extra robes.

It was clear to him from his battle with Darth Nuclear that claymores were simply not his weapons at all. It was a large and powerful weapon for a large, powerful warrior. And though possessed of a large, durable frame, Pyro was far quicker than strong. Mac may have cast quite an image with the claymore, but the scar slashing through Pyro's eyebrow from a glancing blow with a long sword reminded him that survival was more important than image.

Pyro laid down a chunk of ferro-titanium and went to work...

Quite a time later; he chucked the unrecognizable lump into a growing pile of rejects and did so again.

Finally, well into January 30th, Pyro emerged from the shuttle and headed for the

practice room and headed for the training robot. Pyro's hand never made it to the on switch, as he promptly fell to the practice mat and commenced snoring.

January 31st
Alphard, Marian Hegemony

Pyro woke to the sound of laughter, His new weapon still clutched in his hand

"and what do we 'ave 'ere...once yer done with it laddie maybe I could give it to me wee cousin to play with..." Geek checked himself "I mean wake up..we've got work to do...I've gotten word that someone tried to kill Rick Raisely on Brightmoore ... and I got a phone call from a monkey.... "

January 31st
Alphard
Marian Hegemony

Pyro nodded at the Geek and woke up, realizing he was on a practice mat for some reason... then realization slowly crawled into his sleep-addled minute.

"Well, if they tried, they obviously didn't succeed, else we'd be talking about a successful attempt." Pyro thought for a second. "So that's good news. When Medron and the crew get back, we're going to make best speed for the Ice planet Roth, and possibly link up with the rest of the Irregulars then."

"And as for this..."

*Pyro draws a perfectly identical companion to the sword he was laying beside from the other sheath on his belt and moves the two in a furious flurry of motion, then shoves them back. *

"Two feet of ferro-titanium blade on a custom grip. Balanced evenly for chopping or thrusting motions. May not look like much, but the pair of them is perfect for my purposes. Observe."

Pyro hits the activation button on a master-level training robot and it comes out, swinging its broom handle as usual. In very short order, Pyro deflects a swing with the left-hand blade and chops the right through the neck of the robot, then just for effect, bats the robot's head into the wall clock with the left.

"See?"

January 31st
Celestial Palace
Sian

"This is INN!" Boomed the voice once again, as the news update fanfare played. The splash screen was replaced by the same bleached blonde that usually gave the news.

"Over the past weeks, a number of periphery worlds have reported unusual raiding activity by 'Mechs piloted by warriors of legendary skill. Though experts discount such reports as being the exaggerations of incompetent Periphery commanders, this INN exclusive video may well prove otherwise."

A voice, drained of most identifying factors by the staticy audio-visual transmission spoke as a number of mechs approached the transmitting 'Mech. "FSS Plot Hook, we are under attack by unknown forces. IFF n...", the transmission faded out for a few seconds, then returned. "...insignias are no match for known house units." The screen changed to show the image of a very large, very mean looking fish, then changed back to the HUD view. "Our lance is lost. I've never even seen 'Mechs handled like this before. I even... oh..." The video feed cancels completely as a sudden squeal runs through the audio channel.

"Whether or not this can be attributed to the lack of contact with a number of Periphery worlds in recent days remains to be seen. This has been an INN special report."

Kali Liao looked at the screen and grumbled. "Death Commandos... Please kill whoever has that fish logo. They are stealing my airtime. This is a crime punishable by the most gruesome death imaginable!"

A nearby Death Commando bowed, and left the throne room quickly as a random Servitor was beaten to death with his own left arm as a demonstration of the price of failing to have the restroom absolutely and completely spotless.

Weapons of War

Marian Hegemony
Alphard
January 31, 3087

"This my crazy friends is the Schola," Medron Pryde announced proudly as the assembled Warriors watched, and waved his hand towards a row of BattleMechs standing at attention. They all had a suitably Roman look to them, something that surprised few of them, and Medron nodded gratefully towards Pyro. "Without ComStar, these would be impossible. The ability to design 'Mechs like these has been lost since the Star League fell. Some of us remember how older 'Mechs could move like humans, sliding around with our thoughts, and making maneuvers that modern 'Mechs cannot hope to manage.

"The Houses have never relearned how to make anything better than a walking tank, but old Star League 'Mechs were extensions of the warrior who piloted them. They had grace and style, instead of simply being a platform that carried weapons and marched around firing them. Thanks to ComStar, the old days of 'Mech design has finally returned," Medron finished excitedly and turned back to nod towards the assembled 'Mechs.

Like a flash, the 'Mechs began moving and running through a series of tests. They all moved organically, like humans did, rolling back and forth. Smaller, faster 'Mechs braced and turned, leaning from side to side as they ran through obstacle courses, their arm mount lasers firing on targets as they came to bear with a simple twitch of the arm. Larger 'Mechs moved sedately, more like a cruiserweight fighter waiting for an opening. They actually had some torso mounted weapons for long range firing, but like the smaller 'Mechs mounted arm weapons as well. And then came the heavies and assaults, lumber from foot to foot like ancient warriors in the coliseum. Torso weapons fired massive amounts of firepower at longer ranges while the arm-

mounted weapons were distinctly less impressive.

But the final thing that all the Warriors noticed was the hand operated weapons every one of the `Mech used. The smaller `Mechs mounted simple lasers, but some of the heavier ones actually carried full particle cannons in each hand, much like the old Zero Class LAMs the Knights had used five years ago against the alKhan. After demonstrating their ability to fire swiftly and easily on targets of their choice, the `Mechs came to a stop, turned, and began to engage each other.

They dropped their hand-held weapons on the ground and moved into hand-to-hand fighting that most of the Warriors hadn't seen in decades. Only well-maintained old `Mechs could still move like these did, and those had been rare even before the militaries disarmed. Now they were all but unheard of. Only a few like them existed anymore, most of them hidden in caches by warriors who couldn't bear to part with their old friends. After a minute of showing how they could maneuver, the Schola stopped sparing and moved back into formation.

Medron nodded simply at them and turned back to the Warriors. "You can keep your old `Mechs if you wish. If any of you wish these `Mechs, you can have them. Either way, some of the Schola will come with us. Not many mind you, as we only have a handful of `Mech transports available, but a century of them will come with us. One maniple of scouts, and one maniple of heavy hitters to support us," Medron noted with a simple nod. "We will take up the rest of the space available to `Mech transports. All twenty of us," he muttered slowly. In the past, their numbers had been far more, but the past was long gone now, and many of their former comrades were gone.

"Six carriers will come with us, as well as eight standard *Incidio* Class assault ships. That will be all the *Subtrahos* can carry," he finished simply, and the Warriors blinked as they wondered what it was. They only knew of one class of ship that could take twenty dropships, but it had more hard points than that. "Yes, this is something new," Medron smiled slowly. "Also would not have been possible without ComStar," he added with a grateful nod towards Pyro. Pyro for his part frowned at Medron suspiciously. Medron's return smile proclaimed his innocence. Or would have without the urchin's grin he kept on being forced to suppress.

A few hours later, four dropships that looked suspiciously like remodeled *Leopards* shot up into orbit and approached a warship that looked suspiciously like a *Vincent*. Pyro glared at Medron as the on again off again Periphery/Marik loyalist just smiled.

"A *Vincent* can't carry dropships," Geek whispered and Medron turned to him slowly, his smile broadening.

"True," he responded. "But the *Subtrahos* can. Only not in the way you are accustomed to," he finished mysteriously, obviously enjoying his little secret. As they approached the ship, the plates of armor on the ship began to shift, showing four openings into the warship nearly 70 meters long apiece. Pyro glared a little harder at Medron as his smile grew to Cheshire proportions.

That was when what looked like a small yard structure moved out of each of the openings and the four dropships slowly moved into them, reaction thrusters spitting

just softly enough that they barely nudged up into the structures. Then the structures shifted, locking onto the dropships, and pulled them into the mammoth cargo holds that took up fully half of the inside space of an old *Vincent*. The plates of armor shifted back in place over the dropships and Medron shrugged innocently towards Pyro.

"What? Everybody knows that *Vincents* are worthless in combat. Why try to make them any better? Especially when you can carry twenty *Incidio* Class dropships in their cargo holds and still have plenty of room for food and spare parts," he finished with an evil smile. "By the way. We're good to go now," he added and Pyro grabbed his arm.

"The Leaguers have KF(c) drives," he noted simply and Medron nodded back innocently.

"Why yes they do."

"Roth is over four hundred light years away," Pyro added and Medron nodded again.

"Yes it is," Medron responded, his smile back to Cheshire proportions.

"DON'T tell me the Periphery has drives that can go that far too," Pyro added menacingly and Medron shrugged.

"Ok, I won't tell you that," he responded happily, and then turned to the comm. systems. "Captain," he transmitted to the *Subtrahos*. "Commence buildup for jump to Roth," he ordered and turned back to see Pyro staring daggers at him. "What? You told me not to tell you," Medron noted innocently. "I thought that meant you wanted me to show you," he finished with the smile of someone who had just had great fun pulling the wool over someone's eyes.

Then Pyro and Geek started fingering their swords and his smile disappeared VERY quickly. "Then again..." he whispered slowly and turned away from them as he began to whistle softly.

January 31st
Alphard, Marian Hegemony

Pyro glared as Medron receded, and pondered the recent turns of events. Once more, that crazy Pryde had managed to pull one over even on ComStar ROM, hiding some remarkable military hardware right under their noses. It was almost becoming a hobby for him...

Pyro's thoughts darkened at the failure of his intelligence gathering in this regard and wondered what other surprises might await elsewhere. While surprising it was that the Marians might have KF(c) technology by now, it was very likely inevitable that they would get it within the next decade thanks to their warming of relations with the League. That one didn't bother him as much as it could have...

The new BattleMechs were interesting, but still, Pyro figured on keeping his new Hauptmann. As well as the new 'Mechs moved, assault 'Mechs showed the least improvement of the bunch, and the latest ComStar revision of the UCS went a long

way toward maximizing the pilot's connection to the 'Mech. The combination of the revised UCS, C3i, and Omni technology was more than enough to keep Pyro from trading the 'Mech to the Marians, no matter how nice the new designs were.

Still, he thought... "I'm going to have to procure a few of those for my crew."

Pyro continued to pace back and forth, lost in his thoughts and drumming his fingers on the hilts of his swords nervously as he returned to the shuttle, which had become something of his private residence aboard one of the Incido-class dropships over the past few days.

To his surprise, the shuttle wasn't unoccupied. Acolyte Redshirt was aboard the shuttle and lounging in the gunnery turret. Upon hearing the boarding ramp open, she looked down. "You alright there? Looks like you've seen a ghost."

Pyro sighed. "Close enough. I think Medron's trying to make a Martial Olympiad event out of irritating the Precentor-Martial."

She chuckled. "What'd he do this time, pull a full-featured copy of Titan Yards out of his aft?"

With a shrug, Pyro simply said. "Wouldn't surprise me if he did, at this rate. And everyone wonders why my hair is white at such a young age..." "Mid fifties?", she said.

Pyro gawked. "What? How?" The security acolyte shrugged this time. "You're not the only one who's ever used the Fishtank." She smiled slightly, then explained quickly. "I didn't really want to turn 30. As for you, you were in my father's unit on Tukayyid. He mentioned everyone in his Level II in his letters home. That means you've been around for a while."

Suddenly, Pyro remembered. Hapless Redshirt was his name. He was a skillful Adept and a graduate of Sandhurst Military Academy, yet when the Jade Falcons came knocking, he died in the first salvo from a gauss slug at extreme range that took his 'Mech's head clean off... gaining Pyro his first battlefield promotion of many and launching a career that would rock ComStar. Those records, however, were sealed to keep people from finding too many answers that would provoke more questions.

Pyro thought on that briefly, and something seemed to tug at his brain without making itself obvious. There was something about Anonymous and the connection that was bothering him. "Alright, so you know something about me now. I received my first battlefield promotion because I took command of what was left of my Level II and lead the Jade Falcon star on a merry chase onto a volcano crater and let them charge to their deaths. So what's your story?"

She went on to tell a bit about herself, about her brothers Random and Expendable, who died during the Civil War and the battle for Blue Dot respectively, and how her extended family was very large in spite of the horrific casualties they took during every war.

Something about these Redshirts, Pyro thought... Click. It fell into place. They always remained as nearly unnoticed additions to any force, then died gruesome, highly-preventable deaths at strange moments. There must be some kind of force,

he figured, that doesn't like low-rankers that don't really distinguish themselves from the pack. Too bad, he thought, because Anonymous seemed nice enough.

Pyro scratched his chin. "You've got a long name. Mind if I just call you Amy?" She nodded "That works."

Almost there, he thought. "I've been having a pretty rotten day. Want to go for drinks before we launch off on this weird little quest?"

Amy nodded. "Sounds like a plan. I've been bored out of my mind all day."

They left the shuttle, talking among themselves. Somewhere, on a higher plane, the three fates sat wide-eyed. "Was that a Redshirt?" The second nodded. "I think so." The Third simply gawked. "And she did something other than dying a random gruesome death?" The first nodded. The second one moaned "But we didn't plan for this!" The third shook her head. "What's the universe coming to? It's like those WoTD are trying to make an Olympic event out of irritating

January 31st
Brightmoor
Motown OLA

The last two weeks seemed like a blur as The Dropship Irregulars were made combat ready. The BoM members finally started to arrive Andrew Hunter arrived shortly after Steelfangs Stasis chamber was opened and proceeded to blow away a valet packing shed outside the Spaceport after the wind caught an empty cardboard box and blew it across the parking lot and he thought it was attacking him. Nightstalker and Ash hit it off well after their initial meeting...between the two of them the woods that used to be south of the yard was now just a field of ash and charcoal. Rick says that if he has to repair one more mech that Andrew has shot in a panic he will barrow Steelfangs Bat ...Steelfang has been spending a lot of time in the gym getting back into shape he has finally stopped krabutzing about being back in Brightmoor and just wants to kick ass and take names. Tunnel Rat has not made any more weird observations but there does seem to be something on her mind the way she keeps just looking up to the sky to the North West. Nightstalker still gets into lengthy conversations with the voices.

Today the Stars and Bars landed looking as beat-up as ever. Bowtie Bob staggered out of the ship with a huge bottle of beer in his hand.
'Hey guysh where's the party"
Some things never change.

Chinsaw is still AWOL, a fact that is of some concern. There have been reports of settlements being attacked by mysterious raiders DESS units report that several outlying worlds have been hit. So far neither the OLA or any major allies have been attacked but a general mobilization has been made just in case. Reports have come in that the WoTD is already on the move towards the Ice planet Roth. Reports have also been received of movements by forces loyal to Kali Liao, what their motives are unknown yet. Something big is about to break and what it is not clear yet. Hopefully Medron can find out something.

Steelfang was back in fighting trim, six hours a day in the gym and a gallon of

protein shakes per day will do that for you. By his second day he recovered enough strength to rummage through the Scrapyard to find a 'Mech chassis to make his own. He found one the next day, a beat up old *Rifleman* that was missin' an engine and it's weapons. He grabbed a heavy recovery and couple of Mo's techs and pulled it out of the pile. He then spent the rest of the looking for a fusion reactor to put in the chassis. No more engines that run on Everclear™ and cooking oil.

It took two days to find one that would fit and luckily for him it came straight out of what was left of a Clan *Pouncer*. With a little help, he got the engine mounted and he was ready for weapons. At this point he decided it was time to raid Dr. Raisely's parts bin. He found a single Clan medium pulse laser and couple of their refits of the NAIS' RAC. To complete the loadout he mounted four ER medium lasers from the LyrCom.

Then he went to tinkering with the engine. He learned that the OLA had experiment with supercharging their fusion engines, so with Mo's help he slapped one of these bad boys on the Clan tech fusion plant. Since he liked engaging multiple targets he liberated one fo the new fangled MultiTrac II targeting systems from the Team Bonsai equipment lockers.

Now, after 10 days of backbreaking labor, the [Harbinger of Doom](#) was ready to rock and roll. All he needed was an enemy to shoot at.

February 1
Marian Hegemony
Alphard

Geek had the dream again.... his claymore in hand staring down a battlemech... its demonic visage staring back... geek launched himself through the ar and...

THUNK

He'd hit his against the ceiling again...
Damn dreams...

he got out of bed to the mechbay and started working on his archer... while it essentially maintained the same loadout, the arm lasers had been shifted to the torsos and TSM had been added just in case...

well the brightly counting clock was NOT somethign he remembered being there before....

"red wire..green wire... aww hell" geek ripped it out and threw it outta the mech bay... where it went off...

"BEEP BEEP BEEP"
Geek had just destroyed a tech's alarm clock

Chapter 6 **Frozen Bawls**

Deep Periphery
Ice Planet Roth
February 5, 3087

Light flashed through the system as the hyperspace barrier ripped apart in five places, flooding local space with more radiation than a runaway nuclear reactor. Then the barrier sealed back up, the jump fields collapsed, and five warships stood revealed to an entire world. The newest KF(c) drives could drop ships much closer in to a gravitational well than older drives could manage, making them much nicer for people to write stories about. After all, now writers could ignore all the time spent flying from jump point to planet and get right to meat of the story. Of course, they really weren't as common yet as the storywriters implied, but that was make believe. This was reality.

Drives powered up, sending plumes of burning fuel behind them at better than lightspeed, and the starships pushed forward towards Roth. Nobody had figured out yet why the fuel did that, but it had been that way ever since a little known company on ancient Terra named FASA had said that was the way it was. Ever since, it had simply happened that way, and many had tried to harness that fuel ejection method to make another way to go past lightspeed. None had yet returned. Probably fish food now.

It only took a few minutes to get into orbit around Roth, and Medron looked down on the world in his monitors with a sorrowful smile. Yup, it was an ice planet. A great big ball of ice. But somehow it had a breathable atmosphere. Barely. But where was the vegetation? How did it make the atmosphere? Medron shrugged. Stories didn't always make sense, so why did real life always have to after all?

"Captain," he spoke into the comm. system. "Are you picking up any signals? Mac said there should be a homing beacon here," he transmitted and waited for a response. It took a few seconds before the captain responded.

"Ah...yes, we're getting something," he noted slowly and Medron nodded, then waited for a few seconds.

"And?" he finally asked with a wince towards Pyro.

"It's Star League," the voice came back over the speakers and Medron blinked slowly. "Original Star League," the voice added and Medron blinked again before looking at Pyro slowly. Pyro shrugged back unknowingly and Medron shook his head.

"Ok, launch the troop ships," Medron ordered and the captain of the *Subtrahos* responded in the affirmative. Then a clang rang through the hull of the ship Medron, Geek, and Pyro stood in, before it began to move slowly. The bridge crew shifted over to internal displays and watched as the skeleton assembly moved them out of the flank of the warship before folding away so they could move out. Reaction thrusters fired, slowly pushing them out of the assembly, and the monitors showed four other dropships doing the same thing. A minute later, as they waited in position in front of the warship, a sixth dropship rose out of the top-most bay of the warship and thrust forward to get into formation with them.

Then the whole collection of six dropships burned downwards toward the planet in perfect formation. Shooting down through the atmosphere, they began slowing as they approached the source of the signal, and then began using thrusters to slow down even further. They finally came to a soft landing and the Warriors and the Schola walked out into the snow that surrounded them, nearly covering the noses of the dropships that had, effectively, belly flopped on the white stuff.

Medron shrugged in a "not bad" gesture and walked towards the single nearby building that the signal was coming from. That was when Geek tripped over something. He brushed snow off some kind of box and pulled a blue bottle out of it. "Hey! It's Bawls!" he shouted out and the other Warriors jumped. "It's frozen!" he added after a quick shake and Medron sighed sadly before walking over to grab a bottle. Whatever it was, it looked old. Maybe it would be worth something.

"Hey, my bawls are frozen too," another of the Warriors muttered after grabbing two bottles and the other Warriors just shook their heads sadly.

After they were done grabbing bottles, the Warriors started walking towards the building again. Halfway there, a man came flying at them with some kind of a Chinese scream as he waved his swords in the air. Medron looked at him calmly, turned to Pyro and said, "Do you know what happened to the man you who lived by the way of the sword?" he asked and Pyro glanced at him for a second as the man kept running towards them, periodically slipping and falling in the snow.

"This is hardly the time for a joke," Pyro muttered and Medron just looked at him. "Ok ok, what happened?" Pyro finally asked, hoping this wasn't going to be as bad as he was afraid of.

Medron smiled, pulled out his laser pistol and shot the screaming Chinese in the head. "He died by the hand of the man who lived by the way of the gun," Medron said with a smile and Pyro groaned.

"That was so bad," he muttered regretfully, wishing he hadn't asked. "And besides, you didn't even touch him with your hand."

"One little problem," Medron muttered back. "You're as bad as a Trekkie arguing Trek science," he added and Pyro glared at him.

"That was cold." Medron looked at his breath steaming in the freezing cold air and groaned.

"Yeah," he finally said with a wince. "It took bawls."

The 204th Bearded Cavalry and AirCav decided to head to Roth ahead of the BoM Bansai and the 1st Kilted. They hitched a ride from a merchant ship, and without a KF(c) drive, they couldn't get to close to the planet, but it's ok, they need a little character development and interaction time

"So, mon ami, it appears that our great, great grandparents have something in common"" Da, tevorishch, strange, a Cajun and a Rooskie?"

"You had the dream with Mac" "Da, I always vondered vhy I always knew vhen to

pitch my ride to the left or to the right, they say I fly around bullets!"

A voice came over the comm. "Kapitan to the bridge" Both Fred and Michael headed up to the Aerodyne Dropships bridge

"Medron's Ship, off port-bow"

"Get Medron on the line"

Medron comes on the comm, sounding a little cold" "What-t-t?"

"This is Master Warrant Officer Frederick LeBeau of the 204th"

"Oh, w-w-w-welcome to th-th-the party!, Wh-wh-where's the rest?"

"The rest of the Irregulars are finishing up some repairs and refit and should meet up end of tomorrow"

Warning lights on the bridge flare up "Kapitan! Jumpship just dropped, Starbord-Aft, Two dropships approaching!"

"Medron, you boys in ya 'Mechs?" "No" "Stay with whatever you are doing we'll cover you" "you got it, but if it looks bad we're jumpin in our cockpits!" "204th out"

Fred turns to Michael, piecing together a plan in his mind, "Sounds like good idea, tevorishch!" Both men look at each other for a moment, and shrug it off, it would have been weirder if Mac had not told them they are sensitive to the Force

The 'Mechs touch down in the packed snow over looking a wide open feild with the city that the Warriors are located, on foot and exposed, as their dropship pulls off to the west.

"Alright, Hunter 4-2 to Cavalry, stay in Sheepy's ECM bubble for now, the Warriors are on foot in the city behind us so the pressure is on, let's show why they let us into the Irregulars"

Ok, what do we got ahead, a Daish, some Grashoppers, o goodie, an Atlas, two Mad Cats, Merde!

The 204th held its ground, waiting....as the first long-range salvo from the enemies fell low and wide, only by an uncomfortable margin, 5 inconspicuous blips came flashing on the radar, and moved fast, *Go for it mon ami* thought Fred, now used to the idea that Michael could sense it.

Before the enemy could turn around, 5 Mantises, or Manti for those who like proper English, came screaming into view and in range, 20 ER small laser plow into the rear ranks and the 5 VTOLs pull up in a beautiful fanning motion, all the while dropping the bombs attached underneath them. The 5 bombs spin and tumble towards their prey and mid way seem to disintegrate.....

200 doorknobs.....

Most of the lighter 'Mech couldn't stand the barrage and went down for the count.
"Medron, I present to you Angel Flight, the 204th Bearded AirCav"
"Most impressive Fred, but you still got work to do"
"Hunter 4-2 to the 204th, move in for the kill"

Worktroll and Major Tom stood back spewing long-ranged mayhem from their Marauder and Archer and the AirCav was harassing a few grasshoppers and

Jimmy went after a Mad Cat, tearing into it with his RAC doorknob launcher, Fred went for the Daishi. With Fred's first training being as a sniper, after all in the bayou, yous gat to git tha gator, b'fo the gator dun git you. He was able to bring this skill to his mech, hitting the Daishi square in the head with his Large Laser, knocking it down for at least a minute.

Fred was harshly reminded of the Atlas after the LRMs struck his side.

Non, you didn't

The Ti T'sang's automatically heated TSM allowed Fred to scream across the Ice field and engage in a fist-to-cuffs with the lumbering giant. After sustaining some rather large dings, Fred finally plants the large axe into the Atlases head, only to be notified by a PPC hit that the Daishi had finally gotten up

Fred Jumped towards the Daishi, landing hard in the snow, then alarms went off, in Fred's head and a voice that was screaming "*RECULE!!!*" So he started back pedaling an fast

The Daish gave pursuit, and stepped *through* where Fred had landed, and sunk straight down "hey, Les Boys, we're on a lake"

"really" come Jimmy's voice over the comm, The Lancelot spews doorknobs at the Mad Cat's feet, softening the ice breaking it up and sending another enemy to a freezing death "That works boss"

Sheepys Loki swings back from taking out a small group of mediums, finding the bathtub launchers to have been quite effective, and Worktroll quickly dispatched a Mad Cat that wanted to get to close to Major Tom's Archer, who peppered the enemy with well placed LRMs

"They have been taken care of sir" "That they have Worktroll, nice work boys, that means you to Michael"

The dropship drops back just outside the city to pick up the battered but victorious 204th, "Kapitan, the enemy dropship are retreating, all clear"

"Medron have you found what we are looking for?"

The battle came and went quickly... but something felt strange still. Where did these 'Mechs come from, and why?

Even with augmented speed, it took Pyro quite some time to arrive at the site of the battle. Using one last boost, he leapt straight from the ground and onto the cockpit of one of the lighter 'Mechs, a Wolfhound that had fallen in the first barrage and pulled open the emergency egress control and turned the maglock...

And was surprised to say the least to be greeted with a rush of water. That was not

the most surprising thing, however... as the occupant of the cockpit appeared to be a fish approximately four and a half feet in length, covered from nostril to tailfin with the characteristic glowing green lines of EI implants. The fish thrashed as its water drained out of the cockpit and quickly froze to death in the chill air, leaving Pyro standing on the outside of the 'Mech quite stunned.

Shaking his head wordlessly, Pyro produced a digital camera from his tool belt and quickly snapped a couple of pictures before calling the salvagers to pick up the fallen 'Mechs, then went back to aid the others in the search.

Along his way, he found his team digging at what looked to be some crates. "What is this?" Looking closer, he saw what they had. Apparently in the Star League era, Bawls had come in two-liter bottles as well. Pyro grinned one of his stranger grins. "Well, they opened this can of worms."

The other ComStar personnel nodded, having a general idea what was coming next, as Pyro said. "On three."

And several meters away, many other Warriors worked on the icy fields, digging for clues, only to be interrupted by the raucous singing of those crazy ComStar folk. "And he's got big Bawls, and she's got big Bawls, but we've got the biggest Bawls of them all!"

February 5, 3087
Unknown System
Unknown Starship

The one previously identified as The Other stalked back and forth angrily, furious at recent developments. Darth Nuclear had failed on New Avalon and had the audacity to live through her failure, and the attack on Roth had actually been defeated.

"Scientist Nida", The Other called. The ex-Smoke Jaguar scientist trembled in such a terrified way that not even alKhan Raoul had ever evoked. "Y... yes Dark Lady?"

"If these BattleCarp of yours are so spectacular, why did the Warriors defeat them?"

The scientist stammered slightly. "Begging your pardon, Dark Lady, but the Warriors did not. They had reinforcements that took our landing by surprise before we could complete the strike against the elements on the ground."

She paced again. "Who were they?"

The scientist relaxed slightly, realizing that he may yet live to see the end of the day. "It appeared that they had support from the 204th Bearded Cavalry and their new Aerospace unit. This was entirely unanticipated, our intelligence had placed them on Motown..."

The Dark Lady turned and extended a gloved hand at the scientist, sending a bolt of lightning coursing through him and driving him to the floor. "Always expect the unexpected when dealing with these Warriors. I do not want to see failure on this scale again. Do whatever you must to succeed."

The scientist used every bit of his willpower to quit writhing on the floor and return

to a kneeling position. "Begging your pardon, Dark Lady, but there is something you could do to help..."

"Oh, and what is that?", she said with an annoyed curiosity.

The scientist braced himself. "Bring me the blood of that WoTD who always piloted that axe-wielding 'Mech... the unknown. With it, I could imprint a batch of BattleCarp that would be unstoppable."

The Dark Lady rubbed her chin through the cloth mask and considered possibilities. "You are dismissed, scientist."

Almost gratefully, the scientist shot to his feet and fled from the room.

Somewhere on a higher plane, the three fates sat slack jawed as they watched the antics of the Warriors and their new allies.

"How'd they get across the human sphere so quickly without a KF(c) drive?" the first asked.

"Hell if I know," the second answered.

"And why didn't that Redshirt die?" the first asked. "A random shot from those attackers should have taken her head off!"

"I don't know, but I have plans to deal with her," the third fate muttered in an annoyed tone.

"And what plan would that be?" the first asked.

"Simple," the third responded. "We make her a love interest. Everybody knows, that love interest Redshirts always die. It is the way of things."

"Good plan," the second fate whispered in awe as third pulled out a bow and arrow.

"Now what are we going to do about these...new allies of the Warriors?"

"I have no clue," the third muttered hopelessly and the second nodded in agreement. Finally the first sighed helplessly.

February 5th
Brightmoor
Motwon, OLA

As the lights came back up in the briefing room, Teemo was just as silent as the others gathered there. *We're all thinking it, but no one wants to be the first to say it*, he mused to himself as he glanced back at the JPEGs that had just come from Pyro. "Giant....*fish*," his XO, Natusko, breathed, finally breaking the unnerving silence. "But...**how**?" Scrapper added. "I think I know" Teemo said, knowing without looking up that he had the full attention of the assemblage. "Now this I have to hear" Scrapper snorted. "Some time ago, when my cl...er, my *families*' ancestors were looking for a place to settle down, they came across a planet in the periphery, out from the Outworlds Alliance. Climatologically speaking, it wasn't too far different

from Terra, with the added bonus that it's resources were sufficient to support habitation without being spectacular enough for the Spheroids to want to fight over it." "So why didn't they settle there?" Natsuko wanted to know. "Simple," Teemo smirked, "somebody beat them to it. Some group of scientists had a self-sufficient research station going, and they decided to stay put when they heard what was happening back home." With these words Teemo started clacking away on his keyboard, bringing up the data file on the world under discussion. "It's called Hagar", he said, then added "one of the few unusual things my ancestors found was that the place was home to some unnaturally large fish species." *You idiot!* he raged at himself. *Just because you can't be sure that Scrapy **isn't** one of them. "My clan" indeed! If anyone finds out I wasn't referring to the Jaguars* Teemo glanced around to ensure that the others' attention was focused on the files on their respective screens. *God help me if the others ever find out my heritage.* As he remembered the stories he'd heard as a youngster, Teemo's eyes grew hard. *My life, and the lives of my family, depend on my keeping that secret. We're under a death sentence for something that happened before any us were born.* As he reflected further, the corner of his mouth turned up *If the others find out, then God help **them**.....*

February 5th
Roth

Pyro trudged through the ice over to Medron, who was busily scanning the area and yelled something unintelligible.

Medron looked up, and looked over to Pyro as he got closer. "Care to repeat that?"

Pyro gave up on speaking over the wind, and just used the force to project his thoughts right to Medron. "Heads, up, somebody's coming."

Medron again asked him to repeat, and Pyro simply turned red and pointed toward the black-cloaked figure walking up to them.

As the figure closed, it drew a sword and broke into a run at Medron. Medron simply sighed. "Not again", and drew his laser pistol. He fired, and to his surprise, the beam intersected with the dark figure's sword and simply left a glowing red mark that quickly turned back to steel gray in the storm.

"Alright... nice trick", Medron said and pulled out a 10mm pistol, firing three shots... which the figure deftly deflected by striking each bullet with the flat of the blade tilted at just the perfect angle to deflect the shot away from the wielder.

Medron looked at Pyro. "Er..."

Pyro sighed. "What was this about living by the sword and dying by the gun again?"

Medron smiled nervously. "A little help, please?"

The figure closed in and tore her hood back, staring at Medron. "You shot my apprentice, surat, and now you will pay!" Leaping forward, she struck at Medron only to have her blade intersected by a quick draw of Pyro's right-hand sword.

Medron ran to a safe distance away as Pyro continued to parry the attacker's scimitar and looked for an opening. The opening finally presented itself when she

came with a well-telegraphed slashing attack toward Pyro's legs. Pyro leapt upwards and brought his sword straight down in a flight path intersecting with the mysterious Dark Jedi's head in such a way that should have split it open like a cantaloupe...

Had Pyro not decided to use the flat of his blade for the attack. The Dark Jedi stumbled backwards half a step before falling into the snow, quite unconscious.

Pyro picked up the scimitar and examined it, then handed it to Medron so he could inspect it. "Ferro-titanium, just like my own. You don't use really expensive aerospace armor for a sword unless you absolutely need something that won't be warped by bullets and hand lasers."

Medron nodded, then looked back to the fallen darksider. "So what about her?"

Pyro shrugged. "Clanners deserve a second chance. Most of them don't know any better."

Medron looked down at the unconscious Clanner/Jedi/Whatever and shrugged. Personally, he'd always thought the only good Clanner was a dead Clanner. Other than a few exceptions that had been in the WOTD over the years. But those were very rare.

Then he shrugged again and opened up his communicator. "Medron to *The Knight's Own*," he projected into the device and a crackling voice responded.

"This is Benson. What do you want?"

"Well, I was wondering how those 'Mechs that just hit Roth managed to get through your screen up there. Five warships with dropship support should have been enough to hold them off. Or at least *WARN* us of their arrival," Medron finished with an annoyed growl.

"Sorry boss, but we didn't see anything coming in. I think they must have been on the planet already."

"Ok...I can buy that," Medron muttered, wondering what the chances of that were. But at least it made things make sense. "So how about this? Where were the Knights?"

"Um...well..."

"I'm waiting," Medron whispered and Benson cleared his throat.

"They spent last night partying and singing, sir," he finally whispered in a sad voice and Medron shook his head back and forth slowly. It was so hard to get good help these days.

"Ok, ok. Just try to get them sobered up again. And I want at least a battalion of them on launch alert all the time from now on," he finished sternly, wondering what the Knights had been doing over the years that they'd forgotten such rudimentary ideas. And thinking that maybe Isis had sent them just to get them out of her hair. Naw. She wouldn't be that mean would she?

He shook his head quickly and started calling the Warriors around again. They'd unburied enough frozen bawls for now to keep the Knights happy for months...ok, ok...maybe just days. In any case, they had more important things to look for. He hoped. Surely MacAttack hadn't sent him here to save his bawls. Medron shuddered at that thought and pointed towards the single building rising above the snowfield. "We need to get in there," Medron muttered. "Any ideas?"

"We could knock," Geek noted.

"Too simple," Medron returned.

"Blast it open?" Pyro asked and Medron shrugged.

"Too destructive. Remember that Grey Death Core? The whole mountain went up when your boys blew the door open."

"Good point," Pyro muttered back.

That was when three 'Mechs came running into view at maximum speed, plodding through the snow like giant walking tanks. Medron looked down at his laser pistol, and then back to Pyro. "This isn't going to work," he noted simply and Pyro nodded in full agreement. "Maybe we should run," Medron added and Pyro started to nod. Then the Marian Schola 'Mechs poured out of their dropships and ran towards the approaching 'Mechs like sprinters moving through snow. "Then again, maybe not," Medron muttered.

"Whoa!" the communicator in his hand blasted and he looked down to it. "We're Irregulars too! Blasty, Clarke, and Bowtie at your service. We've been hunting a screaming Chinese swordsman for the last few months," Blasty added and Medron sighed slowly.

"He's dead," Medron whispered as the 'Mechs came to a stop. "So how'd you get here?"

"Um...coincidental story point to move the plot along?" Blasty answered and Medron stared doubtfully at Pyro for a moment.

"Works for me," Medron finally answered with a shrug. "Could you hold the fort up here? We need to go inside that building and check some stuff out."

"No problem," Blasty transmitted and the three 'Mechs turned to watch in all directions as the Marian Schola walked around carefully. They wouldn't be caught unawares outside their 'Mechs again. Good. Finding bawls was one thing, staying alive to enjoy them was something else entirely. Then he shook his head, wondering if he was overdoing the whole joke. Ah well.

"Let's go boys," he ordered and started walking forward towards the building again. All around it, nothing but snow and 'Mechs could be seen, and the windblown snow made it difficult to see anything but the snow. He just hoped the 'Mechs had their infrared sensors online. It would really suck to get stepped on just because one of them was blinded.

As if on queue to his thought, a 'Mech stumbled on by, its foot coming down towards

the Warriors as they scattered in every direction. All except Amy Redshirt who kept on walking towards the building as if she didn't have a care in the world. Medron sighed, stepped forward, grabbed her shirt, and pulled her out from under the falling foot as it came down. Then he looked down at his toes and breathed a sigh of relief as the 'Mech walked on. He could see toes just barely poking into its footprint. That had been way too close.

On another plane of existence, the three fates screamed in frustration as once again the Redshirt survived. It wasn't fair. How could those WOTD keep on changing the rules on them? Everybody knew that Redshirts died horribly indecent deaths when they landed on an unknown planet. The others weren't supposed to save them! But there was still hope.

"My hero," Amy Redshirt whispered and Medron turned around slowly, expecting to see her face. The view he got instead wasn't one bit bad at least, one of the few good things about the view. Pyro gave a "what do you expect me to do?" shrug as she hugged him, her back turned to Medron, and Medron scowled. He must have thrown her into Pyro. Ah well. Things could be worse.

Then he turned back to the building and began walking towards it again. It seemed to be taking forever to get to that building. Things just kept on popping up. What were the odds of so many things happening across such a short amount of ground? 'Mech fights, Jedi duels, finding frozen bawls, near-accidental deaths. He'd only seen that much stuff crammed into B-movies and other cheap stories. Oh well. They really had to get to that building.

And then they were there. Finally. Medron sighed in relief as he took one final step forward and brought his hand up to knock on the door. They'd made it without another improbable event slowing them down. And that was when the door opened. His hand froze in mid air and a smiling man in a white shirt greeted him.

"Hello. I'm glad you're finally here. You're a little late though. You should have been inside before those carp came," the man said matter of factly and waved the Warriors in.

"We would have been, but we found some bawls out there in the snow," Medron noted as he walked inside, scanning back and forth.

"Ah yes. We lost refrigeration a while back so just keep our bawls frozen up there for whenever we feel like drinking it," the man noted in the same tone. He looked oddly at Amy Redshirt as she walked by. "Well, that's unexpected," he added softly and stood to the side as the last of the Warriors filed in and then shut the door behind them.

"So where are we?" Medron asked as he looked around the large white room that filled up the building.

"Oh, nowhere in particular," the Whiteshirt responded mysteriously. "Just one of the entrances to our main facility on Roth."

"This doesn't seem very well defended," Medron muttered. "I would think you'd have problems with those carp here. Assuming they came from this world."

"They don't come from here," the man answered his unasked question. "But there are many on this world. They do not trouble us."

"Odd," Pyro whispered. "I'd think they would try to attack you."

"I never said they didn't try to attack us," the man whispered mysteriously. "I simply said they did not trouble us," he finished in a pleased tone as he walked up to a single small panel on a pedestal in the middle of room. It seemed odd, but Medron shrugged. He'd seen that in stories a lot so it made some sense, in a really weird way. His hands ran across the panel as the Warriors looked around at the otherwise empty room, and then the room began to move.

Or more accurately, the floor began to move. Down. The walls seemed to lift up high over them and Medron nodded slowly. An elevator. This one large enough to hold at least a lance of `Mechs comfortably. "Impressive," Medron whispered and Whiteshirt nodded.

"Thank you. We try," he responded as the temperature began to rise. "You might want to take your coats off. Like I said, we lost refrigeration and it gets rather hot as we go down into the engineering levels."

"Um, isn't it cold outside?" Medron asked as he took his bulky coat off. Then he caught a glance of Amy Redshirt taking her coat off and stopped cold. Actually more hot than cold in this case. For a moment he wondered if the loss of refrigeration was just some plot line thrown in so readers could see nice looking women in a small amount of clothing. Of course not. You can't see writing. And anyways, this wasn't a story. It was real life. Though he had definitely seen stories that did that. And usually didn't mind those plot points, or the results.

"Well, yes it is cold," Whiteshirt answered. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, did you ever think of opening the doors and letting the cold air *in*?" Medron asked as the temperature began to get uncomfortably hot. He unbuttoned the collar of his shirt, and then glanced over to see what Redshirt was doing, only to see Pyro glaring at him and any of the other Warriors doing the same. Medron quickly averted his gaze to look elsewhere.

"Hmm, an interestingly low-tech method of getting the wished for results," the Whiteshirt pondered slowly. "I shall have to take it before the council to see what the others think." And then, coincidentally just as the conversation seemed to be finished, the floor stopped dropping and a door opened before them. "For now, please follow me," he said as the blast-furnace level heat shot over every one of the Warriors.

"Whoa," Medron whispered and then followed Whiteshirt through the door and into a large room with a single spaceship strapped down. His body instantly began sweating heavily as it tried to keep cool, and he wondered how the other Warriors were handling. How Redshirt was handling it. He turned slowly, acting like he was innocently scanning the walls.

"You look, you die," Pyro's voice whispered and Medron turned back to look at the ship, whistling innocently as he went.

"So what's this?" Medron asked as he looked at the ship and Whiteshirt smiled proudly.

"Over three centuries ago, the greatest minds of the Star League were sent out here to Roth to build weapons to give the League an edge in future wars. We, their descendants, continue their mission," Whiteshirt said as he waved at the ship. Medron suppressed a snort. The genius obviously hadn't bred true if these people couldn't even think of opening a door to let the hot air out. "And this is our proudest achievement. *Ragnorak*," he finished with even more pride than before.

"Wha?" Medron whispered as the other Warriors ohhhed and ahhhed over the neat sounding name. "I don't like that name," he whispered and the other Warriors looked at him like he was mad. "It means the end of the world," he added shrilly and they blinked quickly before looking at Whiteshirt, seemingly unaffected by the heat that was making them all sweat profusely.

"Well, it *is* the end for whatever world it targets," Whiteshirt smiled. "In theory at least," he added with a wince.

"In theory?" Medron asked suggestively and Whiteshirt winced.

"Well...we've never actually made it do that yet. It keeps on...blowing up," he supplied and Medron blanched.

"Wait a minute," Medron muttered as he waved his hands back and forth. "Let's start this over at the beginning ok? MacAttack told me to come here. Do you know why?"

"Oh yes," Whiteshirt responded quickly. "He wanted us to give you this," he added as his hand waved over the dropship. "It isn't as powerful as the full scale version will be, but this should be sufficient for your needs."

"And it works?" Medron asked.

"Oh yes."

"How?"

"Well, do you know about how fuel exhaust from ships goes faster than light?" Whiteshirt asked and Medron nodded slowly.

"Yes. It never made much sense to me."

"Honestly, we can't figure it out either, but it just seems to be the way it is," Whiteshirt shrugged back. "Anyways, we thought we could fold the thrust around a technirator generator, through a garonsen rift, and then through a---"

"Stop!" Medron interrupted the Whiteshirt's techno babble with an upraised hand. He really didn't need to be stuck here for three hours as this guy tried to explain to him the secrets of the universe. He already knew enough to know what made him happy,

and he wanted to get back to it. "In plain English please," he whispered and Whiteshirt sighed sadly. He'd just been warming up.

"Ok, we thought we could concentrate it, fire it and...well..." he faded off as he put his hands together and then spread them out in an explosion motion.

"Oh," Medron said with a smile. "How big?" Whiteshirt started to warm up again and Medron brought his finger up in front of his face. "English," he stressed and Whiteshirt sighed dejectedly.

"Well. Do you know the moons around Mars in the Terran system?" he finally asked after a few seconds of thinking and Medron nodded slowly. "Well...um..." Whiteshirt trailed off again as he put his hands together and spread them back out in an explosion motion.

"Oh," Medron said with a larger smile. "Nice. And it works?"

"Oh yes," Whiteshirt said quickly, maybe too quickly. Medron shrugged at that as a man in a red shirt walked up to the group. "This is Obligatory Redshirt," Whiteshirt supplied and Medron's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "He'll be piloting the *Ragnarok*." Something about that made him nervous, but he couldn't quite nail it down. Then he shrugged. The weapon worked. Now he just had to figure out where to point it. "Oh, and MacAttack told me to give you this," Whiteshirt added and Medron scowled as he accepted a note from the man. This was getting entirely too coincidental. Almost like someone was purposefully writing it that way in some dumb story.

But this was real life. Right?

On another plane, the fates watched intently, waiting for something to happen.

5 February 3087
Brightmoor
Motown, OLA

As Teemo is giving his pondering his life during the brief, he notices Nightstalker come in and sit down. After looking around for a seat, and finding none, Nightstalker just leans up against the wall and begins to talk to "his voices."

Shaking his head, Teemo continues, "As you can see from the planetary data, this place is nearly identical to Terra. Atmosphere, climate, gravity and just about everything, matches exactly to what humans have wanted in a planet. I have the coordinates for Hagar, and I believe that it should be investigated."

Nightstalker raises his hand. Teemo simply acknowledges him with a nod.

"Your coordinates are wrong. They put you in the area, but not in the park."

Biting back his initial reply, "Let me guess, the 'voices' told you."

"You are correct. They also said that you, Scrapper and me need to talk after the briefing. And no, they won't tell me the coordinates. You have to do some things for yourself."

Getting back to the briefing, Teemo could hear Nightstalker in another conversation. After a few minutes of group discussion, Nightstalker bursts out "I can't say that, they'll think that I've lost my mind."

Scrapper turns around to face Nightstalker. "What is it now?"

"Um. Who is Pyro?"

"He works for ComStar, and is the one that sent these pictures. Why?"

Seeming to notice the picture for the first time, "Oh, that. It's a Class 5 Battlecarp. Anyway, and this might sound a little weird, but, he should watch something called Star Trek and avoid red shirts for some reason. And we need to find The Axman. Why, I don't know. Like I said, it doesn't make sense." Seeing everyone staring at him with their mouths hanging open, he asks, "What? I got a booger hanging from my nose?"

Nightstalker goes to wipe his nose, but is stopped by Scrapper. "You know what this is? And how do you know?"

"All I know is the name. I don't know how. They didn't tell me, if that's what you're asking. Can I go now, everyone's staring at me?"

Scrapper merely nods his head. On the way out the door, Nightstalker says, "Sir, Teemo, don't forget to get with me right after you're done."

Sometime later, Teemo and Scrapper find Nightstalker listening in awe to Ash tell one of his many stories. And, of course, it revolves around women, alcohol and fire, Ash's three favorite things. Not necessarily in that order.

Scrapper calls him over. "Ok. What did you want us here for?"

"Well, its simple. You two have more in common then you might think." And to Teemo, "You can tell him, then you'll have more protection for them. Bye." With that, Nightstalker goes back over to Ash.

"So, what was *that* about?" Scrapper asked as soon as Nightstalker passed out of earshot. "I can help protect you from who?" He knew he would have to wait a minute for his answer, for Teemo's face had taken on what the ancients called a "thousand-yard stare". *I don't know how the Hell he knows, but he knows. So, do I simply shrug and say that you never can tell what the loonies mean, or do I trust a guy who would **willingly** work with/for.....a bunch of loonies?* Scrapy looked concerned as Teemo started laughing. Not the laughter you'd expect from someone who's mind is midway around the bend, but the laughter of a man who simply can't keep the punch line to himself any longer.

Finally regaining his composure, Teemo looked straight into Scrapper's eyes and said: "My family can trace its bloodlines back to the remnants of Clan Wolverine. That fact that I'm a Freebirth won't count for squat, 'cause if any Trashborn find out I've got so much as a drop of Wolverine DNA in me, they'll let me live just long enough to make me tell them where to find my relatives. You'll not be offended when I say I'm not entirely sure I like the idea of my life being in somebody, anybody else's hands."

He breathed a deep sigh. "Now that my secret's out, and *safe*," Teemo continued, looking sideways at Scrappy as he patted his holster, "we should probably mount an expedition to Hagar and see if we can learn anything useful. You wanna call Pyro, or should I?"

February 5th
Brightmoor
Mowtown OLA

This is too much I have three Certifiable loonies that are young enough to be my grandkids filling out my lance the other lance consists of two drunks in assault mechs. What next? Tunnel Rat at that point announces, "That shuttle that is coming in to crash over there contains the pilot for the Atlas mommy and daddy built"

As she points to the left runway
"What?"

Moments later a KR-61 class long range shuttle comes in wheels up and skids to a stop in a cloud of sparks. After the Fire crew covers it with fire suppression foam a young man walks out the door and asks

"O.K. who is in charge here"

I look him over

"That would be me. And who are you"

The youngster announces.

" I am Blasty McNasty Where do I sign up"

"And what brings you here"

"I am looking for some action"

At that point Tunnel Rat pipes up

"He needs to go with Bowtie Bob and they need to go to Roth right away"

We both look at her and I tell him

"She knows things do not ask me how but she does. Tell you what kid take Blasty here over to that mech that your mommy and daddy built"

Blasty looks at me

" Never mind just do it I gave up trying to figure out what is going on a long time ago. Just go with her"

I watch as they walk off. The grabbing my phone I call Bowtie

"Yo booze head get the Stars and Bars Ready to go you have an appointment on Roth"

"**BUUUUURP** Right boss"

I call Steelfang

"Get over to the Stars and Bars you are rolling with Bowties lance"

I watch As Tunnel Rat Intro Introduces Blasty To mommy and daddy and they show him the mech and she turns back to me

"Make sure that one of your Travel protection sachets is on the Stars and Bars."

Two hours later the Stars and Bars Takes off With Bow Tie and company to

rendezvous with the Scout class jump ship that is taking them to Roth. A Travel protection satchets safely stashed in the engine room along with an anti sorcery satchel and a general protection satchel.

"Roth? Christ on pogo stick! That's nearly 1500 light years from here and it's bawls busting cold there, too." He mumbles as he grabs a cold weather survival pack, anti-hangover medicine and four pairs of thermal underwear. All of which he's going to need by the time he gets to Roth.

*on the phone with Motown

"Roth? Yee Haw! I here they got beer coming right out of the snow!!"

Bowtie downs the rest of his beer and climbs into his mech and heads towards the dropship.

After getting his mech "stowed" in it's bay, and arguing with the bay commander about just what the gantry looked like BEFORE he parked his mech, Bowtie met with Blasty and Steelfang....

"Howdy guys, names Bowtie Bob, guess Motown stuck you guys with me, so let me lay down some ground rules."

"First, you see any beer lying around, it's mine..."

Blasty interrupts, "What if somebody just set it down?"

"Don't matter.....they were just holding it for me. Second, don't even THINK of touching my mech.....it has delicate equipment inside, and I don't need you guys messin it up."

Steelfang leans over and whispers to Blasty, "Delicate, Ha, I've heard about this loon. Probably has the dang thing loaded down with beer or something."

Luckily, Bob doesn't notice his two lance members whispering and continues on with his conversation..... "So, that's basically all you need to know.....Long as you two follow these simple rules, we'll get along just fine."

Bowtie points to a set of space suits hanging near the opposite wall of the bay, "Now, git them Mech's docked in and let's get outta here.....We got some beer....err...friends to save! Now, if you need me, I'll be in my quarters." Bob wanders off in search of the ships bar...

Steelfang and Blasty both look at each other and just shake their heads.....Blasty says "How in the world did THAT guy ever get to be a Lance Commander?"

"Have you MET the rest of the BoM? In this group, that guys normal...."

February 5th
Roth

As the 204th's 'Mechs are being repaired in the bays, Fred, Jimmy, Michael and Natalya, the AirCav's XO, gathered in the Archangels Comm room. At the controls of the OTH Sensor and Comm network aboard the dropship supplied by Lewis on Solaris

VII, is a geeky looking guy in his mid 30's with chin length hair and glasses, Esme (cc:ez-may)

"We've lost contact with the boys" "I thought this OTH was supposed to have real long range Comm signals and sensor info"

"Well yah, it does, but not when a large portion of the main characters go down an elevator in a strange building made of metals that shields from signals on a planet that really shouldn't exist, their would be no suspense in the story line if we could just chat it up with them at any time"

"Tevorishch has a point" pipes up Natalya, a petite Russian with long straight jet-black hair, hazy grey eyes, slim yet shapely figure and huge.....tracts of land.....

"Ouh, ya, and another thing, the sensors need line of sight, so if the fishies come from that conveniently placed mountain range to the east, you guys would have to scramble real quick to get into position a fight them off, that first battle was all ooohs and ahhhhs, but later on there will be screaming and running and dieing...."

"Shat up Esme, we get the point, we are all aware that the second major battle goes to the badnicks, we will just take it, somehow all survive except for the secondary characters(the fates grin devilishly) and come back for the final win in our favor"

Michael half smirks "Da, predictable but effective"

"Ooh, ya, by the way, part of the Barrel of Monkeys are on their way via KF(c) so should be here soon"

"Sir, if we didn't have KF(c), how did we get here so fast?" "Well, I asked the captain of the merchant ship, and he just said 'Un petit detour', and no more"
"One helluve shortcut it must have been" "Da, Esme, Da"

They all nod, looking pensive about the situation.....

And return to doing other stuff

February 5th
Roth
MHS Aquila, Incido-class Dropship

Pyro paced back and forth, wondering about their newly acquired superweapon. Something about it tugged at his mind in that indefinable way things do when they just want to annoy you rather than reveal themselves. His communicator suddenly beeping wildly cut off Pyro's reverie. He picked it up. "Pyro, go ahead."

A familiar voice crept across the comms line. "Dis ist Dr. Strangenstein. Ze patient is

vaking." Pyro cleared the rubbish from his head. "Roger, I'll be down there shortly."

- Obvious Break in the Action, for Scene Shifting Purposes-

Fiona opened one eye cautiously, then the other when she realized that she was still alive and not surrounded by immediate threats. Then she realized that she was bound to a medical table, with quite a bit of frustration.

The man who had defended that stragav gunman stepped into the room as some strange-sounding scientist moved away from her. She thrashed furiously, only causing the restraints to dig into her arms a little bit tighter.

The man walked up to the table and looked down. "Well, you got a name, Warrior?"

"Fiona", she offered with no small amount of rage.

The man nodded. "Well, you may be wondering why you're still alive, and why I didn't decide to bust your head when I had the chance. That's because nobody's ever been perfect. Not me, and certainly not any Clanner. Between your upbringing and your Dark masters, your head's been filled with a lot of mush, but with some time and some patience I think you might come around..."

She spat. "Lies! Your dishonorable ways are the product of weakness..."

Pyro shrugged. "Maybe, maybe not. Either way, I'm going to put this in terms you'll readily recognize. You may consider yourself to have Bondsman status as of this moment. Whether or not you spend the rest of your life repairing 'Mechs is up to you. Your lessons will start tomorrow, be prepared."

Pyro turned and left, and the scientist injected another shot of a ROM-approved ESP inhibitor before letting her go.

-Another obvious scene shift-

Pyro sat down and drank, wondering if he was doing the right thing by taking another bondsman after all this time. Was it really right to keep someone against their will until they rejected the load of utter bunk that they'd been taught?

Across the rec room of the Aquila, Ryan Furey slammed down another shot of Tequila. Laughing, his opponent, a Marian gunnery officer matched the feat... wobbled... and fell flat against the table. Furey scooped the pile of C-bills into his pocket and stood up to go home... and promptly stumbled to the floor and remained there for a minute or two, watching the room spin lazily around him.

Pyro chuckled as his philosophical meanderings suddenly ground to a halt in the face of their justification, laying right there on the floor. Quite naturally, winning a drinking contest beat the hell out of being a dead smoked jaguar buried in 100 tons of mangled steel on some forgotten dirtball nobody cared about. It wasn't every day someone could get a second chance.

Finally done sorting out his thoughts, Pyro got up to leave and walked a wobbly walk back to his quarters. Thoughts of the superweapon surfaced again briefly, but were quickly pushed to the back burner when Amy caught up with him and steadied his

walk, helping him along to his quarters. Such thoughts were knocked off the cooking surface entirely when Amy locked the door behind her and dimmed the lights.

Message in a Bottle

Deep Periphery
Roth
February 6, 3087

Amy Redshirt and Obligatory Redshirt continued talking outside the *Ragnarok* as Medron and Whiteshirt watched in a befuddled manner. Who would have known that the two would have been related, and would spend hours comparing family histories to get each other abreast on what had happened. Speaking of which. Medron felt his eyes starting to go down, and then turned to look at the *Ragnarok*. He didn't want to die after all. At least with the vents opened, the temperature in the docking area was down to a comfortable level. Of course, there had been positive points to the previous temperature. To get him off that line of thought, he turned back at Whiteshirt.

"This looks a bit small to have a jump engine," Medron noted with another quick glance to the *Ragnarok*.

"Yes," Whiteshirt responded. "There was a time when we could build a ship this small with a KF drive, but then a hole in the Fasonian Laws was caught by the Fanpronian editors and we had to stop. So you'll need to attach this to a larger ship. Do you have anything free up there?"

"Oh yes," Medron muttered quickly. "I'm sure the Knights will be happy to party...erm...talk with him."

"Good. The *Ragnarok* will be free to leave inside the hour. We just need to finish loading her up with supplies you realize. Then we'll be leaving too," Whiteshirt added with a wince. "There have been entirely too many people coming here lately you know. And we reclusive scientists like to be...well...reclusive. I hope you understand," he finished with a sigh.

"Yes, it is sorta busy out here," Medron whispered. "Will there be any way for me to contact you if I need to?" he asked and Whiteshirt nodded carefully.

"Come here. We will watch this world. From a distance," Whiteshirt added hastily and Medron chuckled back.

"Then I assume we should leave you alone to sleep with the...erm...fishies..." he finished awkwardly and Whiteshirt glowered at him.

"Don't joke about that," he muttered, and then pulled a bottle of bawls out from behind his back. "Oh, and a certain friend of yours asked me to give this to you. Only drink it when you have no idea what to do," Whiteshirt said sternly and Medron just raised one eyebrow slowly.

"And that would be different from normal *how*?" he asked after a second's silence and Whiteshirt sighed dejectedly.

"Don't you ever make plans?" he asked and Medron shook his head.

"Naw. Too old fashioned. I like taking things one step at a time. Blowing with the wind. It ain't worth it to make plans and then have to abandon them after all," he finished with a shrug and Whiteshirt's jaw went slack.

"My God, man. How do you expect to find the Lord of the Carp?" Medron blinked at that. Something about that phrase sounded familiar. Then he shook his head and shrugged.

"No clue," Medron finally returned. "But that's half the adventure," he whispered with a big smile. "And anyways, I usually get a clue when it knocks me upside the head," he added and Whiteshirt shook his head slowly.

"God helps fools, drunkards, and crazy Wobblies," he whispered softly and then took in a deep breath. "God go with you," he added to Medron strongly. "You'll need all the help you can get," he finished meaningfully and Medron smiled thankfully, having missed most of the last part of the conversation after noticing that a certain Redshirt had bent over to pick something up.

That night, they jumped back to Alphard, with the *Ragnarok* and the other Irregular ships, Medron returned to the quarters always waiting for him on the planet and went to bed, putting the bottle of bawls on the shelf above his bed. He awoke later in the morning as an earthquake hit the place, and looked up just in time to see the bottle of bawls falling towards his head.

He had just enough time to think about how much this was going to hurt before he lost consciousness to the not-so-gentle urgings of a bottle of bawls. On the positive side, when he woke up again, he knew what to do.

February 6th
Brightmoor
Motown OLA

There was a lot of interesting information in the dispatches from Roth the 204th acquitted itself well in the first contact with the mysterious raiders the pictures of the fish that had been in the cockpit of the enemy mech was puzzling. It was reminiscing of the Goldfish saga a number of years ago but they did not actually pilot mechs so this was distressing. The assault lance of the BoM had arrived to late for the battle but had linked up with the force under Medron Prides Command.

The next dispatch simply stated that the WoTD and attached forces were now leaving Roth to return to Alphard, having found and secured what they came for.

Bowtie was really upset to find out that Bawls was a non-alcoholic high-caffeine soft drink. Quite amusing really.

The revelation by Teemo that he had Wolverine blood in him was disturbing... Wolverine...the not named clan the mere mention of that name caused him to shudder. But the clan life was a long time ago and much of what he had been told about the non clan universe turned out to be in error at any rate this Hagar info along with the pictures of the...Class 5 Battlecarp Nightstalker called it called for

some action to be taken.

A request for the return of the BoM assault Lance was sent to Medron Every available unit was going to be needed for this operation since a lot of the Dropship units were not ready yet. Question is are the 1st Kilted up to strength yet .The 5th Drunken, 10th Starlost and BPDs were not and the BoMs Command lance was still AWOL. Great so I got to lead this fracking expedition myself well I had better get the beast ready to load and find out from Teemo where this Hagar was, and see if the 1st Kilted is read for battle I git a feeling that this is NOT going to be a walk in the park. Gawd I am too fracking OLD for this ramlatch.

"I can't speak for the other CO's in this mess, but I wouldn't have bothered bringing these machines with me if they weren't in perfect shape." Teemo said as he entered the 'Mech bay and tracked down Scrapper. "So they are all good to go?" Scrapper responded. Teemo grinned as he affected the half-assed brogue he kept in reserve for such occasions. "Nothing's worn under our kilts, laddie-it's all in fine working order! All kidding aside, we're ready when you are." "OK," said Scrapper,"but how do we find this Hagar place anyway?"

"Darn fine question. Nightstalker and/or his voices were the ones to point out that my coordinates were wrong, so we'll just have to....'convince' them to point us in the right direction. Unless we can come up with an *accurate* map in the meantime."

Chapter 7
February 7th
Alphard, Marian Hegemony
Pryde Residence

Medron Pryde woke up with a groan, feeling a pounding lump on his head and something wet all over his face. Almost afraid to look, he opened his eye and saw nothing but black. Reaching for his face, he peeled off a rigid plastic sheet that had been lying on his face and noticed a busted two-liter bottle of Bawls sitting on his bed.

With a groan, Medron levered himself up and wiped some of the sticky, partly-dried soft drink off his face and looked at the object, which had by the look and feel of it, drenched as it was in Bawls, come from the bottle.

The object was a laminated sheet, covered in colored points, random words, and numbers. It looked almost like a star map, but not of any place he recognized.

Pondering for a few seconds, he realized exactly what he had to do. Show it to Pyro.

One scene-change later.

Pyro awoke to an elbow in the side and a massive hangover, as well as pounding on the door. It wasn't a normal morning, and that much was obvious. The source of the elbow was Amy, who was already wearing a bathrobe. "Someone's at the door."

With a groan, Pyro pulled himself up as she went to continue her shower. Pyro pulled on one of his brown robes and opened the door. "What do you want?"

Standing outside was a freshly showered Medron, holding a bruised head in one hand and something plastic in the other. "Got something interesting here."

Pyro rolled his eyes. "And it couldn't wait?" Medron shook his head. "I think not. I was told that someone had left a bottle of Bawls for me and told me to drink it when I didn't know what to do."

Pyro blinked. "And you didn't drink it on the spot?"

Medron shook his head. "Nope. I put it on a shelf and went to sleep, and one earthquake later, it clocked me on the head and put me out for a good while."

"And?"

Medron continued. "And then I found this thing wrapped around my face. You know anything about it?"

Medron handed the plastic sheet to Pyro, who studied it for about 30 seconds before turning a peculiar shade of white. "Wha... You found this in a bottle of Bawls? My god man! Who leaves such a thing in..."

Medron shrugged. "Probably Mac. He has a knack for doing silly things like that. What's with you today?"

Pacing back and forth, Pyro calmed himself down slightly. "Well... this map is a certain sector of space that doesn't appear on any official maps. Even ComStar has only sketchy information about the nearest stars on it." Medron tapped his foot nervously. "And it's important exactly why?"

Pyro clasped his hands behind his back. "Who said it was?"

Medron shook his head. "C'mon, I can tell when you're holding back. You're acting like Aleksandr Kerensky's head just sprouted from the map and asked for Grey Poupon... whatever that is."

Pyro raised an eyebrow and got back to the point quickly. "My homeworld's in that sector, okay? We don't exactly hand out travel brochures in bottles of Bawls."

Medron blinked. "Homeworld? In a place ComStar's never..."

Pyro shook his head. "I don't really want to talk about it, but it's a hell of a thing to just find laying around okay?"

Medron realized that he was probably digging at an old wound of some type and dropped it. "Alright... so what now?"

Pyro paced back and forth for a few minutes, then folded up the star map and tucked it away inside of his robe. "I think it's time we assembled the Irregulars. Something strange is going on, and they might know something we don't. Since you're already cleaned up, go ahead and send the message. Call them to Alphard. I'll make sure the CSS Vision of Truth drops by so we can get everyone on KF(c) equipped vessels. Now if you'll excuse me, I need to find an Excedrin the size of a dropship."

Knights That Go Nananana...

February 7th
Marian Hegemony
Alphard

Medron sipped on his PPC, Marik variant as always, slowly and reflected on his life, or the last month of it at least. He found it hard to believe that a month ago he'd been on a routine trip to see bosom allies. Routine would not be the best way to describe his current situation however. They had a secret, super powered weapon to use against the bad guys. Whoever they were. The call for the rest of the Irregulars to move to Alphard had been made. And Julius was going *kill* him for bringing all those nuts here. Talk about the friends you didn't bring home with you. The Irregulars you didn't bring to your home *system* if you were smart! Not if you wanted it to be the same system after they left at least. But things could have been worse. How, he wasn't certain, but there must be a way for things to be worse.

At the bar, a dozen drunken Knights blared through more terrible songs than he'd known ever existed. He would have called it singing if he was in a good mood. After listening to it for two hours, he wasn't. Of course, he wasn't sure he wanted to leave. No. He wasn't sure he wanted to go through *that* experience at all. But he didn't want to stay and listen to their off tune "singing" either. The question was, which he wanted to go through the least.

He sighed and took another sip as the Knights went into another rolling ditty about...something. They were so smashed they couldn't get their mouths around the words, and he didn't know the song. He shook his head slowly. Isis had done this on purpose. She'd wanted these Knights out of her hair and had given them to him so *he* could suffer their horrible singing. And their other antics. Talk about getting the short end of the shaft.

They hit a particularly bad and off keynote and Medron galvanized himself to action. He couldn't take it anymore. He had to get out of here, whatever the cost. He slammed back the rest of the PPC, felt his eyes water and his mouth go numb, dropped a 20 C-bill on the table, and began walking towards the door. Behind him, the Knights turned, saw him leaving, and broke out in song.

"Nananana, nananana, heyheyhey, goodbye!" they blared out in an even louder and more off tune manner than their usual "singing". Medron just winced, concentrated on the feet that swam between him and the floor, and kept walking. The terrible sound finally faded away as the door closed behind him and he paused for a moment, taking a deep breath in the chill night air. He'd finally escaped.

His eyes opened and he turned to walk away, then saw Pyro and Amy walking towards the bar. He stopped them urgently, moving towards them as fast as he could. "You do *not* want to go in there," he noted slowly, not wanting his voice to slur. "Trust me on that," he added with an exaggerated wave at the bar. "The Knights are...crazy."

His gaze still moving around a bit more than normal, he caught the sight of a vehicle turning the corner and squinted at it. Something about the way it was driving. It weaved back and forth a bit and he frowned, hearing somewhere in the back of his mind a voice asking what was wrong. Then it clicked as the vehicle lurched again and began drifting their way.

Later, he wasn't exactly certain what had happened as his memory was a bit foggy from the PPC, but Medron did remember moving. He didn't remember Pyro grabbing Amy and jumping out of the way though. And he didn't remember tripping into their way and dropping all three of them to the ground. To him, the memory was of valiantly jumping into both of them and taking them down so they wouldn't all be smashed like piñatas between car and wall. Whatever a piñata was.

But he'd never forget the sound of the vehicle's tires popping as it hit the curb, the rush of wind as it flew over their prostrate bodies, or the sound of it smashing into the outside wall of the bar. And he *wanted* to forget the sound of "singing" that poured out through the hole in the wall as bits and pieces of rubble dropped to the ground.

He rolled off Pyro and Amy, not at all minding the later, slowly and turned to look at the car with its rear wheels still spinning. He took another deep breath before getting up on his feet slowly and then winced as the Knights moved to help the driver out of the vehicle. He looked ok and eagerly accepted their offer of a drink before walking towards the bar, singing with them and leaving the car in the wall, wheels spinning slower now.

Medron blinked slowly, turned to see Pyro helping Amy back onto her feet and said, "I think he's ok. Let's go...now," he muttered slowly as the Knights and their new

partner went to singing even louder before. And even more off key, if that was possible.

On another plane, the three fates railed impotently against the universe. Why oh why had the Redshirt survived?! Again!

7 February
Brightmoor
Motown OLA

Chainsaw finally got his ass over here and Varlon finally arrived as well the BoM now had air support and Chainsaw was there to take formal command, meanwhile Medron had put out the call for the rest of the Dropship Irregulars to assemble on Alphard. However the information on Hagar was still lacking. No matter ready or not it was time to move...Gawd 75 years old and going to war Am I nuts or what? Leading a lance of absolute psychos young enough to be my grand kids. What was I thinking WHAT have I done? I have GOT to be out of my fracking mind!!!! I am way to old for this ramlatch. Too late now though.

All over the space port dropships were being loaded last minute stragglers were still arriving even as the various units of the Dropship Irregulars were being loaded the Scrapppers own personal dropship the beast was being loaded with the BoM as well as the scrapppers salvage company. Damn it if I am going to war I intend to grab as much salvage as possible, I am going to be dammed if I will let this opportunity slip away

The Beasts mech cubicles were packed with the BoMs mechs plus some spares. His TigerSaw wielding Dismantler, the old Scarabus from his New Star Sentinal days, the even older Jenner JR7-Fbis Goldbug the mech he first used on Solaris, the Armoured Scrap van that was used in the Simian War gawd you can accumulate a lot of stuff in 50 years. The jumpships with the KF(c) and Wormhole drives were being made ready to jump to the opposite end of the human sphere the logistics of this move were staggering. Question was were we ready?

So did Tunnel Rat or the voices of Nightstalker have anything to say about this now.

February 7th
Marian Hegemony
Alphard

The 204th decided to head to Alphard instead of Brightmoor to head off any call to action to Alphard, it just seemed easier. Medron, Pyro and Amy walk in to find Fred and Michael polishing their handheld weapons. Fred is cleaning off his Targe with his crowned mace next to him and Michael polishing down a sizeable battle axe. Pyro is the first to inquire "What is up with those?" "Well Pyro, Mac came to both Michael and myself and told us we are both slightly in tune with the force. Neither of us can fully tap into it, but we can hold our own against dark kinigits" "It also would explain why our weapons, handed down through generations, are made of Jedi material, ferro-titanium"

Medron just grunts "Nice"

"You need to sober up quicker, *mon ami*?"

Fred reaches for a bag of goodies he has, mixes together some herbs, olive oil, and other liquids "Here, an old Vodoun sobering solution" hands Medron a small chunk of goopy substance "It tastes awful but it works, and drink lots of water, that helps after this kicks in"

Medron chews back the substance, grimaces, big time, "Vodoun does not taste good"

"Lewis back at the guild house has finished the 204th's own jumpship, it is small and fast and has a wormhole drive. We will keep out of the main engagements and hang back for support purposes."

"Like a cavalry should be?" "Da, tevorishch Pyro, da"

Medron shakes his head, "Hey that works out pretty good, I feel more stable already, but I think there is a headache coming on" "Water *mon ami*, water"

7 February 3087
Brightmoor
Motown, OLA

Leaving his XO in charge, Teemo hauled arse to his temporary office and prepared a message for the HPG network:

1825Z 070287
FROM: TEEMO
TO: DI COMMAND
RE: MOVEMENT ORDERS

Have developed possible lead re: Big [expletive] fish. Redeployment preparations underway. Request further instructions.

Teemo

MESSAGE ENDS

"I just hope it reaches them in time."

Nightstalker walks around aimlessly after loading his mech, *Happy*, in Scrapper's dropship. For some reason lately, the voices have not talked to him. He didn't know why, and it worried him, they had always been there.

As he continues to walk, he sees the Scrapper directing loading operations. Every once in a while, the boss would shake his head, as if he couldn't believe that there was actually some order to the chaos going on around him.

Then, suddenly, Nightstalker sees nothing but a blinding white light, and feels pain threatening to rip his head apart.

The Scrapper is telling Fitz where to store the BoM's extra drinking supplies, when he hears what sounds like someone screaming. Looking around, he sees Nightstalker writhing on the ground clutching his head in obvious pain. Pulling out his phone on the run, "Doc, get out to *Beast* ASAP. Something's wrong with Nightstalker. No, not his normal stuff. Something is really wrong. Just hurry."

February 7th
Dropship Beast
System Transit
Motown, OLA

Later, the Scrapper is on the *Beast's* bridge watching his crew as they transit to the awaiting jumpships. The communications officer taps him on the shoulder. "Sir, Doc says to tell you that Nightstalker is coming around. And there is something you need to see."

"Did he say what it was?"

"No, just that you need to come down there."

"OK, thanks. If anyone needs me, you know where I'll be." With that, he heads toward the mad, oops, med bay.

Quickly finding Doc upon his arrival in the med bay, Scrapper gets right to the point. "What in the frak is going on? And is there any permanent damage?"

Looking his boss straight in the eye, "I ran all of the tests that I could think of, and I can't find anything to explain what happened to him. At least, I can't find any physical signs. Except....well...maybe you had better talk to Nightstalker yourself." Doc looks visibly shaken.

"What is it?"

"Just go have a look for yourself, please."

Scrappy heads into Nightstalker's room and sees Nightstalker sitting in his bed with eyes closed. *He looks fine. Wonder what has Doc so worried?* "You feeling better now?"

Without opening his eyes, Nightstalker looks Scrappy's way. "Yes, I'm back to normal."

"Do you mind telling me what you think happened? You've got Doc all kinds of confused."

Nightstalker takes a deep breath, then, "The voices hadn't been talking to me lately. Then, all of a sudden after loading my mech, I got it all at once. It felt like a car crashed through the side of my head. And the singing was torture."

And he's in my lance. "So, what did they tell you?"

"They told me never save red shirts. Whatever that means? Also, we must go to where Pyro is. He has the information needed to pinpoint Hagar."

Nodding his head, Scrapper replies, "Well, we're already on the way to meet with him. I'll let you get some rest now. I expect to see you up and around soon." As Scrapper is about to leave the room, Nightstalker stops him. Turning around, Scrapper notices that Nightstalker has his eyes open. *Dear God, his eyes! The irises are pure white!*

"The voices also said one of us may die on Hagar, but only if we don't find *The Axman*. It is very important that we find him first. Time is running out."

Too shaken to muster a response, Scrapper just nods his head, and heads for his quarters and a stiff drink.

February 8th
MHS Subtrahos
Alphard system

One of the perks of command-level rank is that it let you go just about anywhere on a ship. Like many commanders and arch villains, Pyro had a habit of standing on the bridge, staring at the viewscreen toward the depths of space in a quiet, meditation-like reverie until disturbed.

Pyro was well into such a state when a sudden rustle behind him caught his attention, and he turned around. "Highball?" The Davion-born intelligence officer and MechWarrior, who had provided warship and unit readiness reports to the WoTD in ages past spoke up. "That's me. Can I have a word with you for a minute?"

Taking a quick glance to see who else was around, Pyro nodded. "Sure, what about?"

Highball continued, "It seems to me that we're heading into a lot of situations we know nothing about lately. It's difficult to put together intelligence reports when there's nothing to work with."

Pyro paced back and forth briefly. "I'll bet. I'm nearly as out of the loop here as well. I know some shreds and pieces of what's going on, but don't have the entire picture. Someone is breeding Carp a meter in a half in length and training them as MechWarriors, and training lots of Dark Jedi. I have no idea as to the source of either."

Highball nodded, and checked his notes. "Their mechs are easier to explain. According to the serial numbers, most of them are machines reported decommissioned by the Republic of the Sphere's disarmament program. Which I

must say is quite a joke, everyone with half a brain cell knows that Stoner was stockpiling the 'Mechs in uninhabited systems and only destroying those far beyond repair for photo-ops."

The logic generally agreed with Pyro. "So it's likely that we either have Republic cooperation, or they sacked a secret warehouse and the Republic kept quiet about it."

"Exactly", Highball said. "The source of the 'Mechs proves very little and that's all I really have to go on."

Pyro scratched his chin. "And?"

Highball smiled. "That's why you can't expect an intelligence report worth a dead rat until I know more about the situation."

Pyro paced slowly. "I'll tell you what I know as soon as I know it. That's about all I can do."

Highball shrugged. "Well, that's it for the official crap. I'll catch ya later, have a mountain of paperwork to get back to."

Highball left for his office and Pyro made his way to the training room shortly after.

February 9th
L5 point
Motown system
OLA
Dropship Beast

Orders finally arrived the task force was to be assembled in the Alphard system in the Marian Hegemony the First Kilted and the command and strike lances of the BoM were ready to go the other units were still working up. The OAS Nevada would take these units to Alphard the rest would follow when ready. A Vulture class armed jumpship OLS Condor Retrofitted with a wormhole drive stood ready to take the other units when they were ready.

Chainsaw approved of the new recruits for the BoM though he lamented that there were no more LAMs. The Beast was well under loaded plenty of room for additional equipment and cargo When chainsaw asked why there was so much empty space on the ship Scrappy replied that
"I gave up a whole lot of material to make this work I intend to collect as much salvage as I possibly can."

February 10th
CSS Vision of Truth
Alphard, Marian Hegemony

Pyro stalked through the corridors of the recently refurbished Potemkin, impressed that the KF(c) and UCS systems had been installed properly ahead of schedule and made a note to pass on commendations for everyone who had a part in such a

spectacular job. With the addition of this one vessel to the fleet, the Irregulars would gain the ability to carry every single ship in the roster on a modern KF(c) equipped vessel rather than rely on standard transportation or unproven periphery experiments.

Preparations were nearing completion, and all that remained was to wait for the last elements of the Irregulars to reach Alphard. And then... something would happen. What, he wasn't too sure yet, but definitely something. But for now, procedures had to be followed, and as the ranking officer in the system, Pyro had an inspection to finish.

Forbidden City, Sian
Celestial Palace
Throne Room

A Death Commando stepped forward and bowed to Kali Liao. "Gravest news, my lady." Kali looked over from watching a comedian who had thoroughly failed to entertain her dismembered with a butter knife and sighed. "What is it?"

The Death Commando returned to a normal stance and continued. "Contact has been lost with the worlds of Rollis and Corodiz. Though we initially suspected Davion involvement, transmissions from the militias indicate that they were overrun by 'Mechs bearing the insignia of a Fish."

Kali glowered. "I want that fish person skewered. With a barbed skewer. And something with sharp teeth to gnaw on them as they die! Do I make myself clear?"

The Death Commando cringed. "Certainly, Celestial Wisdom. It shall be done."

Kali dismissed the Death Commando, and he ran outside of the throne room like a scalded dog. Four of his comrades lounged lazily outside the door.

"What's up", said the other four. The first one shook his head. "She's starting to get really ticked off. I think it's more than just business as usual." The other four stared. "You mean..."

The first one nodded. "We'd better get to work. Let's find that dropship she wanted taken down a few weeks ago or that ComStar guy. Should be easy."

The others nodded and headed out, leaving the soldier that drew the short straw to guard the throne room.

Alphard
GHCDs Archangel

The 204th Bearded Cavalry and AirCav are aboard the Archangel in orbit of Alphard, waiting amongst the DI's warships.

"As the Cavalry, we are to stay behind and swoop in as a reinforcing unit, so do not expect to fire the first shots"

Fred is interrupted by Esme "uh, Fred" Fred just nods and directs everyone to a viewing screen to watch a warship drop out of Wormhole drive" I present to you the

Stallion on which the Cavalry shall ride"

The new warship burns towards their position at an acceleration twice that of other warships, the small, sleek ship, about the size of a corvette, docks the Archangel and the 204th members take the tour, finally arriving to the war room, to begin tactical briefing, waiting for further orders.

February 10th
OAS Nevada
Alphard, Marian Hegemony

*Damn, that **was** fast,* Teemo thought to himself as the donated JumpShip carrying the DropShips of the combined 1st Kilted/BoM taskforce popped into "normal" space at the jump point. Unbuckling his restraints, he hit the intercom to the bridge of his command DropShip. "Captain Bondarenko, kindly have your communications officer make contact with Pyro and let him know we've arrived." "Yes, sir." came the reply. *Now, we'll find out what the Hell is going on....I hope*

Scrappy pases back and forth on the deck {I must be out of my fracking mind...I am **75 YEARS OLD** what the hell am I doing here leading a lance of psychos young enough to be my Grand kids}.Nightstalker looked strange before but this loss of pigment in his irises really made him look eerie Ashton did not seem to care but Andrew fled in terror at the mere site of him. Thankfully Nightstalker seemed to understand and was careful to avoid letting Andrew see him as much as possible. How the hell we were supposed to operate as a unit under those conditions was any body's guess. Nightstalker was still talking to the voices though now it seems that sometimes one of them could be heard talking back it sounded like a little girl... {wait a minute...no!... I do so NOT need this}
Scrappy walks over to where Nightstalker is talking to this voice...it has a body
"TUNNEL RAT!!!! JUST WHAT IN THE NAME OF ALL THAT IS HOLY ARE YOU DOING HERE!!!!!"
"you need me"
"YOU ARE THREE YEARS OLD!!!!"
"Three and a HALF!"
"FINE THREE AND A **HALF** THAT IS STILL WAY TO YOUNG TO BE HERE!!!!"
"You are yelling at me"
"NO SH!T YOUR MOM AND DAD ARE FREAKING OUT RIGHT NOW!!!!!"
"I left them a note"
"YOU CAN NOT WRITE!!!!!"
"I drew a picture"
"Great just fracking great just how the HELL did you get on this ship anyways?"
"I climbed in there"
With that she points at a crate of SRM inferno rounds
"I am to old for this RAMLATCH"
looks at her
"you stay right here do not MOVE, understand?"
"yes sir"

February 10th
Brightmoor
Motown OLA

Discord and MercChik are frantic, their youngest daughter was missing, the last anybody had seen of her she was over by the supplies being assembled to be loaded on the Beast...that was 36 hours ago .All work had come to a dead stop as a desperate search was conducted for the little girl. So far the only clue was a crude drawing in a child's hand of a spheroid dropship a jump ship and what looked like skull wearing an ancient helm and plate mail shoulder armour. A breathless courier came running up to MercChik and handed her a Dispatch from the Starlink station .It is said that she could be heard all the way to the planetary capital of Palmer Park

"SHE DID WHAT!!!!!"

Discord runs over to her and she hands him the dispatch

"Dropship Beast

To Discord and MercChick

Tunnel Rat was found on board she apparently stowed away in a supply crate she is unharmed

Sorry I will try to find a way to get her back to you"

Discord did not say a word...but he put his fist completely through the wall next to him.

Alphard System
Marian Hegemony

{Well at least they know where Tunnel Rat is now. Who am I trying to kid there is no way I am going to be able to find a ride to send this kid back. Why me why does all the weird crap happen to me.}

He looks at the little girl chatting away with Nightstalker. Suddenly she turns and looks at him.

"They want him...if they get him we all die"

"What? Who wants him?"

"The fish people"

"And who is this they want"

"Kid older than me drives a mech with an axe"

"And who is this kid"

"A Jedi"

"what is his name"

" I'm tired I want to go to bed"

"O.K."

Turns to a female crewperson

"Could you find someplace for this kid to sleep, please"

Watches as they leave

"Well Nightstalker what do the voices say"

"She's right"

"Anything else"

'Nope"

Medron looks at the note and just scratches his head

{is this some kind of joke}

"Medron it is vital that we locate this Jedi before the Battlecarp do I do not have

much info about him he drives a mech with an axe and is older than 3 1/2 he may be with the Dropship Irregulars.

CSS Vision of Truth
Alphard, Marian Hegemony

Warning klaxons sounded on the bridge of the CSS Vision of Truth, announcing the arrival of another ship in the Alphard system.

"Sir!" barked an anonymous tech, "warship 10K off of starboard, Fox-Class. It's carrying a single Fortress."

"The Murmansk," growled Pyro.

"Negative, sir. Ship reads as the FSS Hanse Davion."

"Hanse Davion?" recognition began to dawn on Pyro's face.

"Receiving transmission. Patching it through"

The bridge speakers crackled to life, "This is Endo Steel and the Cult of Hanse Davion at your service. I heard we're killing fish."

February 11th
CSS Vision of Truth
Alphard, Marian Hegemony
Officer's Lounge

The door was locked, and inside the Officer's Lounge, a number of VIP's sat in a high-level planning meeting. Okay, so they weren't really important people. And the planning meeting looked more like a poker match. Okay, it was a poker match, with planning on the side, but I digress.

Pyro eyed his hand, which just screamed at him to drop every card he could and looked to Teemo. "Hagar, you say? It's on a star map I acquired on Roth. Perhaps we'll find some clue of what we're after there."

The command-level officers nodded in general agreement, and Pyro added a couple C-Bills to the pile, and threw away three cards.

Medron nodded. "He said that's where the fish originally came from. Think whoever we're against is dumb enough to stay there?"

Pyro shrugged. "Doubtful, but maybe they left a trail of custard mix packets like the last megalomaniac."

The Scrapper chuckled. "We can only hope."

Pyro kept a straight face as the next round of cards came up. Two jacks added to the one he already had, and the eight and 10 were worthless. Not a bad hand. He added a few more chips to the pile and waited.

A few minutes later, everyone lowered their cards and Medron grinned one fo those

grins that Pyro just wanted to punch. Three kings. Bastard...

Pyro took a sip of whiskey as Medron raked in the chips and vowed to get him back in the next round.

Marian Hegemony
Alphard
CSS Vision of Truth

Medron grinned and dropped his three kings down on the table before raking in his chips quickly. A glance around showed mixtures of disgust and annoyance and he smiled happily. "Never heard of Hagar," he finally muttered and then nodded towards EndoSTEEL. "But I suppose we should take a look and see what's up. In two days, *The Knights Own* and her escorts will be ready to move. Can everybody be ready by then?" he asked and received several nods. Then he sighed and let out a long tired breath.

"Well, I'm getting a bit tired. Been pushing paper a bit too much today so I think I'm going to bed now." He looked around as they muttered, most of them thinking he was just getting out after nabbing their money. His turn stopped at Pyro who's gaze seemed to drill through him and Medron nodded slowly. He really was tired. Getting too old for all this running around. Missing too many limbs from fights and heavy reconstruction. Only ComStar technology had even kept him moving and hearing normally over the years, but all the fighting and surgeries had left his body feeling old before its time.

And he was really starting to feel it. He blinked, suddenly getting the odd feeling that he was going to see Pyro later, and then shrugged. Must have been his imagination. He stood up slowly and walked out with a smile towards the other Warriors. He needed sleep. Badly.

I watched as Medron slowly left the room
{Damn he looks rough I thought I had problems}
I look at Pyro

"O.K. I am looking for this kid I know little about him he is supposed to be a Jedi drives a mech with an Axe and is older than three and a half...I assume quite a bit older...I have little information other than if the "Fish people get him first, we all die" Pyro looks at me like I have two heads or some thing

"And what makes you believe that?"

"I was Told"

"By whom?"

"The same person who warned Rick Raisly that there was a need to reassemble the Dropship Irregulars"

"And when were you told this ?"

"About 18 hours ago"

'So where is this person now?"

"On my ship, You want to talk to her?"

" I think I better"

"O.K. meet me on my ship in about two hours"

11 February 3087
Brightmoor
Motown OLA

Ya right, who was he trying to kid all of the KF(c) and Wormhole drive ships were needed to move the Dropship Irregulars. Their youngest daughter was clear across the other side of the human sphere a standard drive would take over a year. Somebody is going to find it hard to sit down when she gets back...If she gets back. They sent a message back telling them they were not worried...It was a lie...they were scared out of their minds. But they know that Scrappy would not knowingly put their daughter in danger...but some how she managed to hide on that ship and Scrappy had no idea how to handle children since he had none of his own. They had to get over there as soon as possible. Hopefully they can get there in time on the OLS Condor with the other Dropship Irregular units on Motown.

February 11th
DS Beast
Alphard system
Marian Hegemony

He read the dispatch. They said they were not worried they knew Tunnel Rat was safe. He knew they were lying .He had seen how close they were. He had also gotten another dispatch letting him know what had happened back on Motown. They were VERY upset mostly at her for getting in this Mess in the first place but at themselves for not catching her in time. And he knew they had to be worried. In an odd way he understood, he had no children and felt the hole in his life there was with out any. Now they were feeling it, which was not good. Hopefully they can get here before the fleet moves out...They had two days.

Hopefully when Pyro talks to her he can figure out who she was talking about, he was a Jedi after all. He looks across the empty cargo bay watching the small child playing in zero-G she was having a grand old time spinning in midair and launching herself from wall to wall. Clearly she had spent much time under zero gravity. Her giggles reverberated off the walls...This is why the mission was so important, for her and all the other little kids out there. He goes to his quarters to wait for Pyro.

Fred wanders along with Michael and Pyro, also trying to figure out who the "axeman" is.

"So, I drive a 'mech with an axe, Michael wields an axe in hand-to-hand, but we are not full fledged Jedi."

"Ve are both in tune with Force, and our training in Pagan and Vodoun practices makes us good like Jedi, who else could it be"

Pyro thinks for a bit "BrainBurner Jr. He is the original Axe wielder and is Jedi." He looks back over to Tunnel Rat, giggling away in zero-g

"Hey, speaking of BB Jr., my friend Lewis is headed over with some extra equipment for the 204th, as well as my gift to BB Jr. we will be headed to the surface to do the transfer, in about, 2 hours."

"Sounds good, I will talk to the young'un and see what I can find out"
"I will be on the Stallion, get the aircaev briefed on how to fight the next one"

DS *Nevada*
Alphard system
Marian Hegemony

Teemo sighed heavily as he reviewed the report his "I.T. specialist" had given him. *Every time I find an answer, I just end up with more questions. Did they fudge the location of Hagar themselves, or did someone else do it later? And whomever did it, if there is/was something there worth keeping secret, why not just delete that whole section of the....**expedition's** records? Something here doesn't add up, and I want to know **why**.*

GHCDs Archangel
Alphard system
Marian Hegemony

A new ship drops out of Wormhole drive in the system, after a little confusion, the DI's ships are re-assured it is a friendly ship. Although not here to join us in the next battle, is carrying some equipment for the 204th.

After both the Archangel and the Rabid Hamster touch down on Alphard. Fred hops out of the Archangel watching a Berserker, painted in huge red flames being unloaded.

Walking towards Fred is a large man. Bald, with a long goatee and a very, very, very large mug of coffee.

"I like the new ship *mon ami*, it is, however, very load when we go full burn, fast though"

Lewis puts on a very big grin "I know! Ain't it great!!" The men exchange a firm handshake. "Oh, by the way, I got you something else you might use in the future" Behind Lewis approaches the 204th new ride when not in their 'mechs, a nice, minty Tyr Infantry Support Tank

"Nice! That can be handy" "ya, I made the inside a little more hospitable, Have you felt anything about this next battle your in for"

Fred looks around "Well, I consulted the spirits, it seems it probably won't end up to good...."

Lewis, being Vodoun himself just nods "but you have to be there, right" Fred in return, just nods

After a little catching up, the two men part and return to their ships, the GHC Fluffy Bunny leaves the system. Fred decides he needs a drink.

GHC Stallion
Alphard system
Marian Hegemony

Fred walks into the galley, finding no one there except for Natalya at the bar, sipping some tea and having a Cig. She looked just perfect, in her flight suit that was just a little too small in size, and her jet black hair pulled back into a pony tail, with one wisp of hair fallen to the side of her face. As Natalya spots Fred in the doorway, she flashes him an inviting smile, *oh, those pouty red lips look so good!!!* Shivers just ran up and down Fred's spine. Finally he makes his way to the bar.

"It is good evening, Komandair"

"Please, Fred, unless you want me to call you Karpaul"

"oh, you learned my rank in my language" *your language, oh just keep talking in that accent....*

Fred clears his thought nervously, spilling a bit of the MacAllan's 25 year old Scotch on the bar. Natalya, being a woman, picks up on his nervousness immediately and looks straight at him with her hazy grey eyes, and puts on a half smile. "You are nervous *mon ami?*"

"Well, quite honestly, you are...just...." Fred thinks for a moment, but not too long, he doesn't want to look like a goof, oh, wait, he's a guy so he is a goof...his father taught him well "...Krasseviy"

"you flatter me so, Fred" *oooooh say my name in that accent again pleasepleaseplease!!!*

Then, Natalya reaches over and places her hand in Fred's, what went off in Fred's head was like a dropship *falling* out of orbit.

"I don't think Michael would like that too much" "Pour quoi?"

Natalya, just takes another drag of her cig, reaches behind the bar and pours herself some vodka "Years ago, when I was very young, my older brother died and Michael was there, they both try to defend me. Michael said he would be my brother and never let anything happen to me, including men" She half smiles again.

Suddenly, Michael bursts in, wielding his Jedi axe, *merde* Fred thought. Natalya lets out a little giggle, "I will let you two alone for a moment" She leans over and gives Fred a peck on the cheek, Michael scowls even more, and she leaves.

Michael steps over to the bar, sits down, lays his axe on the bar and looks very sternly at Fred, who reaches over the bar and pours some Stroika Vodka for Michael "You are trying to butter me up, *tevorishch?*"

Fred says nothing, thought he tries hard to find words

"I felt your brain explode from my quarters, I assume she made first move?"

"Ummm...ya, she told me of her brother and you, um, taking that role" Fred again clears his thought nervously

"So you know it is my duty to threaten your life if you hurt her, Da?"

"Da, but you know I would never hurt her, the Force lets us see into each others minds and hearts, da?" "Da..." "So what does that tell you"

Michael smiles, "I will still be looking over her" Fred smiles nervously in agreement "But, I suppose, she is old enough to decide for herself" Michael takes his new found Vodka and holds it up to Fred, looking sternly still " Za zdorav ye" "Cheers" Fred holds up his scotch, feeling the tension relive itself, ever so slightly.

February 11th
CSS Vision of Truth
Alphard, Marian Hegemony

Pyro watches the growing fleet assemble, and picks up the communicator. "ComStar Battlegroup reports ready for jump."

Reports come in from across the fleet. "Irregulars, ready for jump. WoTD, ready for jump. Knights of the Inner Sphere, reporting ready. Bearded Cavalry, ready to initiate wormhole drives."

With some satisfaction, Pyro turns to the sensors officer. "Some traditional jump music, please." The ancient strains of a martial song known as the Imperial March sounded through the communications, a personal preference of this particular Precentor-Martial for some reason.

With that, he turns to the Precentor. "Initiate jump when ready." Apparently, the Precentor was ready, because it was then that the universe decided to flush itself like a toilet...

Chapter 8

11 February, 3087
CSS Vision of Truth
Alphard, Marian Hegemony

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Unknown Ship
Hagar System

Lieutenant Michael Nobunaga cursed as the sensors display suddenly crowded itself with more contacts. "Captain Kurtz! Incoming vessels. Looks like we have a lot of them."

Natalie Kurtz nodded and looked to the jump station. "More of them? Looks like we're in for a fight. Prepare us for jump if you can."

The officer shook his head. "That's a negative, ma'am. Jump drives are still offline."

Kurtz nodded. "Then we fight."

CSS Vision of Truth
Hagar, Far Periphery

Pyro cleared his head and checked the system readout... and what he saw was quite amazing. Not far from the entry point was the shattered remains of another Potemkin-class vessel, still burning under the hellish beatings it had recently taking.

"Sensors, can you give me an identification on that ship?" The sensors officer scanned repeatedly then spoke up again. "Markings don't match up, but it appears to be a Clan-modified vessel. Fusion signatures nonexistent, no recognition possible at this time."

Pyro stalked back and forth on the bridge, considering the ramifications. "Continue

scanning for other signs of activity. Deploy fighter screens. Prepare to move in-system."

Michael Nobunaga looked on in surprise as the task force sped past them a long way away, not noticing the drifting vessel. He looked to his Captian nervously.

"New arrivals read as ComStar, Free Worlds League... some others."

Captain Kurtz's face turned to a picture of shock. "Send a message to commander battlegroup. We were on a routine pirate hunting investigation and were ambushed by a large battlegroup. The system is a trap. Unknown vessels are hiding behind the planet's moons and attacking all comers."

CSS Vision of Truth

The communications Adept looked up in obvious surprise. "Precentor-Martial, got something weird coming in. Message from a ship identifying itself as the ESLiES St. Paul. They claim that unknown hostiles are hiding behind the destination's moons."

Pyro's eyes went wide. "Red Alert! Signal all forces; expect hostile attack upon orbital insertion. Go to Red Alert!"

The Precentor walked up. "This sounds like some kind of trick. I'm not familiar with that designation."

Pyro shook his head. "It's legit, trust me on that Open a secure frequency to the St. Paul."

ESLiES St. Paul
Aegis-IV Class

The communications officer looked up. "Captain Kurtz. Incoming message from CSS Vision of Truth."

Kurtz nodded. "On speakers."

"This is Precentor-Martial Pyro of the ComGuard. St. Paul, I need to know your status immediately. Are you battle ready?"

Captain Kurtz's initial look of surprise slowly became a savage grin. "Captain, we're on fire, leaking oxy, and our jump drive is temporarily out of order. We're right as rain, point us in the proper direction and we'll figure out where to shoot."

A chuckle sounded from the squawk box. "Loud and clear, St. Paul. Join formation if you can, we have a battle to go to."

CSS Vision of Truth

Pyro watched as a heavily modified Aegis-class vessel joined the Irregulars formation and continued toward Hagar. Sure enough, sensor activity spiked as the ships began to enter orbit...

Adept Fitzgerald blinked. "Precentor-Martial! Aerofighters! Hundreds of them!" Pyro turned to the comms officer. "Signal all forces to prepare for battle." Turning to the Precentor Augustus, he nodded. "Take good care of the ship. I've got a battle to join."

With that, Pyro headed to the shuttle bay...

Pyro stomped the reverse thrust pedals as everything moved in the half-time speed that things seemed to go with the UCS engaged, out flying the pilots in the far-faster Tridents, which overshot badly. Adept Redshirt finished them off with a pair of salvos shots from the wings, burning through the reactors all the way into the cockpit. At the last second, Pyro overrode the nose weapons, catching a Seydlitz in the side, leaving it wingless and spinning out of control.

The shuttle, faster than transport dropships but not much else, turned back to the incoming forces just as the first warships emerged from behind the moon....

It was then that Pyro's jaw decided to drop to the floor as an Avalon cruiser swung around in the lead of a number of more common Star League designs, and even an old Monsoon-class battleship that had worked its way into the group somehow. "Andrew Davion or nothing, never heard of what became of that one after the war..."

Pyro never finished the thought, as it seemed as if the hand of God had suddenly smacked his shuttle on the front, sending it spinning into space.

Ryan Furey knew what to do.

He panicked.

And when he was done panicking, he wiped the blood off his forehead and pulled the stunned crew into their cabins as a brace of pulse lasers raked the gunner's turret melting it into a molten lump of slag.

Somewhere on another plane, the three fates again screamed in frustration as the turret had just been emptied seconds before. Foiled again, this time by a bloody Smoke Jaguar! Of all the insults!

The shuttle continued to take a pounding as he made his way back to the cockpit. The view was quite inspiring. It was an inspiring view of the Inner Sphere's increasing technological prowess and the inevitable advancement of mankind.

It was an inspiring view of .4 tons of nickel-ferrous metal sticking out the nose of the ship, still shaped suspiciously like a medium naval gauss rifle slug that had somehow been stopped by 16 centimeters of that miraculous ferro-titanium armor.

Furey's thoughts of awe and wonderment were interrupted by the sound of ballistic weapons smacking the wing. Not quite sure what to do, he grabbed the stick and pulled hard, then kicked in the afterburners, aiming at the Vision of Truth...

Pyro opened his eyes, surprised to realize that he was still alive. And then, he realized that he was in utter and extreme pain. Every cell in his body was screaming at the assault it was receiving from the innocuously clear fluid of The Fishtank, that infernal healing/age-reducing machine that ComStar had developed based on Clan technology and new science.

Thankfully, the pain subsided and Pyro was dumped wet and gasping to the floor of the medical bay. Dr. Strangenstein nodded. "It is good you recovered so fast. Fishtank is miraculous, ja? Precentor Augustus needs you on the bridge."

Pyro entered the lift and headed for the bridge, surprised to see that the battle was still going strong. How long had he been out of it?

DS Beast
Hagar System

Be careful what you wish for You just might get it. We jump in system and all hell breaks loose. We barely arrive in system and hostile fighters...a LOT of them show up our fighters scramble but there seem to be more of the hostiles. Chiansaw turns to Varlon party time and both run towards their LAMs. I took longer to launch them than it would standard aerospace since the mech bays that carried them were not designed for aerospace launch so they had to exit in mech mode and convert after leaving eating up precious time plus LAMs were inferior to dedicated aerospace fighters of the same size, but they were needed to provide close defense for the two BoM dropships the Stars and Bars moved to the out board position with its slightly stronger armour and weapons with the Beast inboard. Scrappy took command from the Beasts CiC.

"Charge all weapons, Everybody suit up"

Suddenly he looks over at Tunnel Rat. She stands 1 meter tall and weighs 15 kilos, there is no way in HELL that we have a space suit that can fit her.

{Oh God what do I do with her}

In a near panic he grabs her and runs to the nearest mech bay and places her in the cockpit of the Goldbug flips on the life support

"You stay here until I come and get you understand"

"but"

"NO BUTS KID we do not have a space suit that fits you if we have a hull breach and you are out there you die Understand?"

"yes sir"

He closes the hatch and locks it down

Returning to the CiC he watches the Holitanks the fighters of the Third Knights are engaging the hostiles the LAMs are positioning themselves to protect the Dropships he watches as the battle begins to unfold The BoM dropships are in the middle of the formation being the weakest in the fleet He checks the status readouts on the all to light weapon load

{Damn are we even going to make it in time}

He watches as the fighting comes closer to the BoM ships
{Looks like I am going to find out how good these weapon upgrades are real quick}

GHC Stallion
Alphard

As the rest of the Dropship's ship disappear from view, the 204th sits and waits. Fred and Michael on the bridge"5 minutes Kapitan"

Fred walks up to the helm with the ship's Captain, Dimitri, and looks at the map of the region they are about to jump into. "The Vormhole drive does not get close to planet as KF(c), but it can get us most any where in system, the Irregulars jump here, ve vill jump further back here"
"Sounds good"

"Helm, Conn, 5 minutes up"
Fred strolls over to Michael, "Have you been on the bridge of a naval ship" Michael shakes his head "It sounds like radio chatter in the middle of a battle, watch"

"Conn, Helm prepare to jump"
all of a sudden it seemed like everyone on the bridge is talking at the same time, Michael just lets out a laugh, and the universe that once surrounded them disappears

CGH Stallion
Hagar, Far Periphery

Looking out of the viewscreen, seeing the enemy fleet emerge from the moon Fred thinks to himself, stuff that will not be written here. Luckily, the Stallion is in a position that the enemy fleet is between them and the Irregulars. A few of the ships turn about to meet up with the Stallion.

"Open them up, Kapitan!!"
the captain shouts the orders, Heavy N-gauss naval lasers and Kraken-Ts start flying out of the nose of the Stallion.

Fred straps himself into his mech, feeling the shifting from the powerful engines on the ship, Fred could hardly picture this warship moving faster than most aero fighters going around and around and around the enemy ships

"Kapitan, let us know when the Irregulars have landed, then in about 5 minutes drop us off this hell ride"
"Da"

DS *Pointe du Hoc*
Somewhere over Hagar
Far Periphery

'Bout frelling time! Teemo couldn't help thinking to himself. *If we'd sat around any longer, Lord knows how rusty we'd have gotten.* "OK, Captain, let's get dirtside!" He shouted as he left the bridge to head for the 'Mech bay. He had just finished

strapping in when he felt and heard the unmistakable signs of a DropShip undocking. Starting up his 'Mech's computer, he tied one of his screens into the ship's tracking system, and saw two other dots representing the *Merrill* and *Darby*. As the three *Leopards* threaded their way through the fighting en route to the planet, the comm circuit came alive with somebody half-jokingly asking who had told the 1st Kilted that they could go in first. Teemo just laughed. *Hey buddy, it's not my fault we were ready first.*

DS Beast
Hagar system

CiC

The Scrapper watches the approaching battle with concern the two BoM dropships were both lightly armed and armoured compared to the other vessels in the fleet. If the fighting engulfed them there were no illusions as to how long they would last ...but a crazy solution came to mind

Cockpit of the Goldbug

Three and a half year olds get bored easily Tunnel Rat is no exception sliding under the neuro helmet she starts hitting switches

{This looks just like mommy and daddy's mech pilot game}

With that the mechs Start up program activates since the mech was carried as a spare it is not imprinted ...yet

"Welcome mechwarrior please give call sign"

"Tunnel Rat"

"Call sign recorded please give Id Code"

giggle

"Id Code recorded"

Poor Scappy he thinks he had troubles before????

CiC

"Yo chainsaw what you say we blow this mess and get our feet on the ground."

"Are you nuts?"

"I am 74 years old I am leading three certifiable psychos young enough to be my GRANDKIDS into battle WTF do you think?"

"I know you are nuts"

"Right, that is beside the point I figure if we break to the right and do a three Gee burn toward the planet we can probably get away with out being noticed, be a little rough but I feel our odds are better on the ground."

"You have a point Bowtie you like Scappys idea?"

"BUUURP"

"I'll take that as a yes O.K. Scappy on your mark"

"Right...O.K. people strap in we are going to pull some Gees...

chainsaw ,Bowtie you guys ready?"

"yup"

"BUUURP"

"O.K. people on my mark ...three...two...one...go"

And with that the Bom's ships break to the right and do a three Gee burn towards Hagar; DS Beast in the lead DS Stars and Bars following with the two LAMs covering their six... Soon the BoM is leaving the battle for behind and heading towards Hagar at three gees to face...what?

The Battle was going well. Of course, in his eyes any battle that was not killing you was going well. Titanic mountains of metal clashed in space all around him as he screamed about like some crazed angel of death screaming insults and jokes at his

prey. His Null signature system on full he was as a ghost to the enemy and the Giant sack of doorknobs he wielded like unto the reapers scythe. Then he finally broke through to the other side and saw what was waiting.

"Ach! I dunna know what that is, but I'm going to need another keg of stout."

The mad Scotsman Grinned wildly and fire burned his eyes as he raised a pint to his foe and quickly downed it as he charged in and spent an ancient Curse on his new and oversized foe.

"May the Fleas of a thousand Camels infest your armpits, and may your Kilt catch on fire!"

CSS Holy Flame
Hagar, Far Periphery

Pyro walked into the MechBay, wearing a Star League style cooling jacket and wiped a few strands of white hair out of his eyes, looking very much like the dashing young MechWarrior that had stared down the Jade Falcons nearly 40 years ago on Tukayyid... except for the white hair, of course. It had only been graying at the time.

By the time he was climbing his ladder, he was forgetting the torturous soak in the Fishtank. He felt alive at the moment, like every cell in his body was giddy, drunk, singing, or all of the above. Even in spite of the terrible pain, it was good to be young and healthy again. Amy Redshirt looked up from below, also in a cooling jacket. "Good luck!"

Pyro smiled. "You too. Let's go smash some fishies."

The Holy Flame shot ahead, trailing behind the other transports but quickly gaining on them due to her overpowered engines. Numerous fighters buzzed around and many were quickly swatted down by quad ultra autocannon turrets, an array of smaller weapons, and a wing's worth of ComStar aerospace fighters.

The ship fell through the atmosphere like a brick with wings, glowing with the heat of re-entry and made no effort to simply slow down. The appropriate landing zone was chosen, strafed with every weapon the ship mounted, and every 'Mech and battle armor suit comprising half the 666th Division leapt out of the doors of the ship and onto the landing zone.

With the operation done a few circling flights later, the Holy Flame rose through the atmosphere to rejoin the battle above...

SPLORT. Pyro hated sounds like that, because it reminded him of so many years ago on Blue Dot. Swamp. His landing zone was a swamp again. Same scatological humor, different day...

Working the pedals slowly and gently with the experience of decades, Pyro levered his Hauptmann onto its feet and out of the muck, and turned to the other ComGuard

'Mechs, only to notice that some of the enemy had survived the dropship's flyby.

He contributed an ERPPC and a Gauss slug to a Bushwacker, taking it down for the count and addressed his forces. "Looks like the manure's in the fan. Defensive formation. Contact the Irregulars and tell them we're down."

"Swamp?" Fred asks over the Comm.

"Swamp" Pyro replied between an exchange between him and a Bushwacker

"Look around, *mon ami*, is there a lot of undergrowth?"

"No" "Deciduous, or coniferous?" "Deciduous"

"Ok, 204th to all Irregulars, do not step in anything that looks like water, perfectly flat mud, sandy coloured mud, yellowish-green moss and unless you were born, raised and learned how to use a mech in the bayou, do not use jump jets"

"Pyro, let the Force guide you"

"Got it"

Fred keys up the 204th frequency "Ok *les boys*, we're goin' in early, 204th to Stallion, drop us off"

The Stallion heads to the planet, full burn *6gs!!! oy my stomach!!*

The Stallion pulls up sharply to rejoin the battle when it gets as close to the planet as possible, detaching the Archangel

"Esme, patch the overview of the battle to me"

"No problem, it would seem the Fishsticks are trying to outflank to the south"

"Ok, tell the helm to plop us 900 meters south of the Pyro's position"

"Excellent choice, lets out flank them!"

The 204th was on it's way to Hagar, Fred tunes in the general frequency, and hits a few special buttons on his console, all of a sudden, a guitar rift flows over the comm.....

Ah, when I was just a little boy, I stood up to my daddy's knee, my father said 'Son don't let the man gitcha, do what he done to me'....

"OK, people! Standard formation!" Teemo exclaimed as the trio of *Leopards* exfiltrated the DZ. "Our first order of business is to link up with whoever's closest to us." As the rest of the first company of the 1st Kilted to reach the surface chimed in, Teemo checked his map display. "OK folks, looks like Pyro is closest, about 300 meters west of here. Move out, and for Heaven's sake make sure your IFF transponders are on!" As the first sounds of battle reached his ears, his gaze flickered around the cockpit of his *Warhammer*. *Master safety is off, no caution lights are lit, and all weps are green. Now I just gotta find some bad guys.....*

DS Beast

Low orbit over Hagar

Pulling up short of the Space atmosphere interface the BoMs dropships enter a parking orbit while Chainsaw and Varlon reconnoiter the surface for a suitable LZ while the LAMs reconnoiter the surface the CSS Holy Flame came in for a landing they watch as a huge cloud of steam billows up as the Comstar ship lands.

"Hey chainsaw find us some place dry O.K."

"Right there are two flat topped hill about 500 meters apart 2 1/2 Kliks SW of the Holy Flame"

"Cool I will take the right one Bowtie you got the left"

"BUURP"

"O.K. people landing stations"

DS Beast
surface of Hagar

"Alright people mount up"

The members of the BoMs Recon lance make their way to the mech bay The Scrapper pops the hatch to the Goldbug

"O.K. kid you can get out now"

"But I like it in here"

"well you can go up to the bridge and watch from there"

"but I like it here"

"O.K. but do not mess with anything"

"O.K."

(Boy somebody is naive)

Nightstalker and Ashton quickly board their mechs and Scrappy starts to head towards the Dismantler he stops and looks to ward the door way at Andrew who is standing bolt rigid staring at Nightstalker

"Get your ass in your mech we got work to do"

Andrew points at Nightstalker and stutters

"he..he ..he"

"OH COME ON KID HE IS ONE OF US"

"but...but ...but"

"I am not afraid of him he's nice really"

he looks down Tunnel Rat is there she takes his hand

"come on he's nice really I'll show you"

She starts tugging and he reluctantly follows as she pulls him towards Nightstalker

"but..but..but"

"come on he's nice really!"

Nightstalker slowly turns around Andrew freezes

"see he's nice"

"Andrew I know I look scary but I am your friend if you do not come with us"

He points to the scrapper

"The voices say he will die"

Andrew stares

The voices say you will save his life

Andrew stammers

"a...a..alright "

'See I told you he was nice"

Andrew heads toward his mech Shortly they are all mounted up and head toward the doors

Andrew's first instructor had told him early in his training, "Man, you've got potential. I have a feeling that you will be one of the best mech jockey's I've ever trained." On

the other hand, that was right before Andrew missed the target and clocked the grizzled veteran's Hatchetman in the back of the head.

The instructor survived, but he never let Andrew get over that. *Oh well, at least in the Barrel of Monkeys everyone else is just as weird as me.* He popped the cockpit on his Blitzkreig and stepped inside. Toggling the power button, he leaned into the mike and spoke. "I am the very model of a modern major general."

"Pass phrase accepted." Lights started to flicker and Andrew heard the comforting hum of his fusion engine start up. He slipped the neurohelmet onto his head as a brief jolt told him the dropship had landed. A voice crackled over the radio.

It was the Scrapper. "OK, Let's go!" As the door cycled open in front of him, Andrew broke his mech into a run. The scenery started to go by at 110 KPH. The Scrapper spoke again. "Hold up there Andrew! I'm even more of a speed freak than you are, but at least let me get started and off the dropship before you're off to the races!"

"Acknowledged." Andrew lowered the mech into a crouch and waited.

Tunnel Rat climbed back into the Goldbug. It was still halfway powered up. She was bored; not much to do while waiting for the adults to do things. The cockpit certainly was familiar; it did indeed look like Mommy and Daddy's mech simulator. She put the neurohelmet on, and grabbed the joysticks. She then let go of the joysticks and pulled the helmet up so it wasn't over her eyes. She turned the mech around and eased it out of the bay. She could see all her friends over in one direction and wondered what they were doing. The Goldbug started running that direction.

The Scrapper loped towards Andrew, his Cheetah striding across the ground quickly. He was very careful not to approach Andrew from behind, and gave himself about a hundred yards to one side. He had had to fix too many mechs that Andrew had panicked and destroyed, and didn't want to be in one of them himself. He started to come up on a clump of woods. He wasn't expecting a large mech to come rocketing out of the woods right then.

Andrew stared off into space through his cockpit glass, and was not expecting a tap on the mech's shoulder. Andrew jumped and span, fingers going to the trigger to fast to stop. His heart almost stopped as he recognized the Goldbug, and a giggling Tunnel Rat inside it. Luckily the shot missed wide to one side. But it did hit something.

No sooner had the previously unseen enemy hit the ground from its jump, it hit the ground from the impact of two large autocannon shells.

The scrapper stopped dead. "wow...Nightstalker is *good*..." Then he saw the Goldbug. "Tunnel Rat! Please, get back to the dropship?"

DropShip *Stars and Bars*
Approaching Hagar

Blasty lounged boringly within the cockpit of his *Atlas*, his fingers twitching impatiently around his joysticks wanting, needing to kill. *Dammit!*, he thought, *Land already!* At that moment the Dropship slowed, and he knew they were about to touch down. Thoughts of the approaching battle brought a broad, toothy smile

around the unlit Sheridan cigar he held clenched in his teeth.

He keyed his mic, "'Bout damned time!" Over the com, Bowtie belched noisily in response. And as if that noise was an order, the mechbay doors opened, slowly letting light spill into the mechbay...

AS7-Bonsai *Atlas General Lee*
Hagar

Before the doors were fully open, Blasty rushed out to meet the enemy. He quickly judged the situation and picked out the MAD-5S *Marauder* as the biggest threat. The *Marauder*, in turn, quickly closed on him but Blasty kept the *General Lee's* speed down, in case that surprise was ever needed.

The *Marauder's* pilot was quick, he was smart, and he was dead. Blasty, not being a rookie, quickly turned his attention on the rest of hostiles only to find that they, too, were dead.

"Dumbasses," He spoke over his comm. "They didn't even let me turn my radio on!"

"BUUURP! Good job, you guys. Now let's link up with the rest of the BoM."

"Roger," both Clarke and Blasty replied.

Blasty turned on his radio as they made their way towards the *Beast*. Soon his cockpit was filled with the sound of his own horrible voice singing out of time with the radio as it played *Dixie*.

Gone Fishin'

Hagar orbit

A *Shadow Hawk LAM* flew past Medron's LAM, sending a stream of doorknobs into the enemy fighters, along with missiles and a steady laser beam as it carved its way through the advancing waves of fighters. Around them, the LAMs and ASFs of the Third Knights filled space with the explosions of enemy craft, and their own as well as they twisted back and forth as hard as they could, fighting to give the DropShips time to land.

"Thanks Fokker," Medron transmitted and pulled his *Zero LAM* around hard, Marcus Hunter on his tail, firing lasers into any attacking fighter unlucky enough to get close to them. "Now let's plow the road boys," he added and slammed his LAM forward as the *Incidios* flashed past, particle cannons, lasers, and missiles burning more fighters out of the sky as their engines roared at maximum output.

In the distance, an *Avalon*-class WarShip, an old *Monsoon*, and two *Lolas* fought to get between the fleet and the planet. Poor bastards. They didn't know what was about to hit them. And they were just too slow. The fleet of fourteen *Incidios* turned to the side and shot towards the moon, still at maximum thrust, as the Third Knights began moving to defend the DropShips as they attempted to land. Fighters came in from all sides, trying to break through their defenses and explosions riddled space, raining debris into the atmosphere where a steady stream of "falling stars" wowed anyone on the ground.

Suddenly he realized that he'd lost track of the *St. Paul* again and sighed slowly. What the heck was going on with that WarShip? It just kept on fading away. Ah well. No time to worry about that now. Medron pulled his LAM around, transforming into 'Mech mode, and aimed both particle cannons at an enemy fighter. It exploded nicely and he spun to fire on another target as Fokker and Hunter continued dispatching their own targets.

A quick glance showed him that the DropShips were getting down. Good. But the real battle was still coming up. The enemy warships were almost in range. This was going to really hurt. "Ok men, let's get their attention!" he shouted and shot towards the *Avalon* as fast as he could as his sensors started picking up two more incoming warships. A *Congress* and a *Sovetskii Soyuz*. Oh great, just what they needed, More ships. Around him, nearly half of the surviving Third Knights followed and soon had the warship surrounded as they started pecking at it like bees stinging a bull. Then he picked up the *Incidios* as they moved out from behind the *Avalon's* drive plume. Well, *that* was good at least.

The fleet had no warning of their arrival, and they'd shot into range of their weapons before the ships had any chance to fire on them. And then they opened up with all of their forward-facing weapons. Particle beams, lasers, and missiles belched out of their tubes and smashed into the engine section of the WarShip, smashing armor in with each hit. And then the rockets flashed to life for their single brilliant explosion. Space between the tiny DropShips and massive behemoth filled with the exhaust of thousands of individual projectiles shooting into the ship and smashing more of her armor to ribbons. But then the *Avalon* fired back. Autocannon streams, gauss shells, lasers, and missiles struck back at the tiny minnows nibbling on it and several of them felt the sting of naval weapons, and survived.

Armor flaked off like confetti, filling space with confusing radar returns, but the *Incidios* kept moving, pulling away from their larger enemy. Its engines powered up further as it turned to follow them, and then another barrage of weapons laid into it from behind. It was Medron's first clue that the *St. Paul* was back. Busy with his own concerns as another wave of fighters hit his people, he barely noticed *The Knight's Own* and her three escorts shoot past him into firing range of the *Monsoon* and the two *Lolas*. Once again, autocannons, lasers, and missiles filled space as the ships smashed back and forth at each other with everything they had.

And then he noticed that the *Avalon* wasn't moving anymore. And that boarding shuttles were headed its way. Looked like the *St. Paul*, whoever she was, wanted that ship. Then the *Incidios* screamed back into the fight with the other three WarShips at maximum speed, weapons at maximum output as they shot through the lines and in between the WarShips like rocks skipping over water.

In the end, the *Lolas* died futilely and then *The Knight's Own* sent boarders over to take care of the *Monsoon* as the *Kai* and *Merlin* shot away from it. No one had seen a ship like that in centuries. It was time to see what all the fuss was about. Wait. What about that *Congress* and *Soyuz*? And where were the *Kai* and *Merlin* going? He looked around, wondering where they'd run off to and managed to lock them in just as they came up alongside the *Soyuz*. Between them and the ComStar *Potemkin*, the *Soyuz* simply didn't have a chance. It exploded brilliantly into a large debris field. Well, that was one. Looking around more, he noticed the damaged *Congress* and nodded slowly. It wasn't fighting anymore. Sweet. So space really was clear. Finally.

Medron sighed slowly as he looked at his fuel levels. Good. He had enough to get to the planet.

"Ok boys. Let's support the leadfoots. They need all the help they can get," he ordered and the LAMs of the Third Knights and the WOTD began burning down towards the planet. It was time to go fishing for carp.

CSS Vision of Truth
Hagar, Far Periphery

The Vision of Truth cruised leisurely at 1G through the battle, pouring out long range firepower at the enemy warships. Two latecomers, a Congress and a Sovetskii Soyuz arrived behind their faster comrades, too late to add much to the action. They realized that they were in over their heads a little too late. A number of secondary explosions blossomed across the aft end of the damaged and fleeing Congress-class frigate after another particle cannon salvo scourged her, and the ship's drive flare sputtered out.

The Holy Fire turned toward the Congress and began launching a number of dropshuttles of its own.

The ship shook again, this time from the not-so-gentle ministrations of a Sovetskii Soyuz's autocannons. The Vision of Truth returned fire as the Kai and Merlin pulled alongside the fragile vessel and laid into her, burning through deck plates and out the other side... A blinding white flash lit up space, followed by a rapidly expanding metallic debris field.

They barely knew what hit them...

A pair of Cheetah aerospace fighters shot overhead as Pyro walked his Hauptmann forward with his eyes closed, sensing the terrain with the Force and moving as fast as many far-quicker machines through the terrain. The radio squawked.

"Black 6, this is Violet 2. Recon flights completed. There's some kind of complex about five clicks due west of here. Probably our science station."

Pyro thumbed the communications switch and opened his eyes. "Good work Violet 2." He switched the frequency to the Irregulars' general frequency. "All forces, be advised that there is a major facility five clicks to the west, likely the objective. Complete linkup and prepare to advance."

Pyro turned his attention back to the local terrain, and noticed a swarm of rapidly approaching mechs. Watching the range indicator count down, Pyro snapped off a shot at the lead mech, a Red Shift with his Gauss Rifle and ERPPC. The PPC shot sailed into the muck at the Red Shift's feet, sending up a geyser of dirt and steam, but the Gauss Rifle shot struck true, smashing through the lighter mech's thin right flank and crushing the large XL engine within. The mech's arm continued sailing forward almost comically as the mech itself splashed down into the muck.

Advancing, backed by the rest of the ComGuard Battalion, Pyro picked up the Red Shift's arm by the medium pulse laser's barrel as if it were a handle and brandished

it like a club. With a feral smile, Pyro remembered BBJr's battlecry and put his mech into a powerful stance. "Who wants some!"

It just hit Scrappy Who was driving the Goldbug!!!!

"TUNNEL RAT JUST WHAT IN THE NAME OF ALL THAT IS HOLY DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING !!!!!!!!!!"

giggle

A flight of missiles missing by centimeters interrupted

"INCOMING!!!!!"

Andrew charges straightforward right at a Maurader firing everything the missile rip into the cockpit and the AC shells both plow into the Center Torso. Mechs start appearing out of the swamp the Stars and Bars was half a klik away; they were on their own. The gunners on the Beast started to fire in support a stinger jumped toward the Beast only to get Swatted down by the weapons in the right side 12 SRMs and a bunch of lasers making a shambles of the Stinger Ashton and Nighstalker put a literal wall of fire in front of group of lights. Scrappy kicked on his Supercharger and swung behind a Hunchback ripping his lasers into its back and neatly slicing of the head. He quickly grabs it and runs for the Beast with his prize

" I have a special crate for you "

The fish just looks at him confused, TR lets loose with all 5 lasers at a pursuing commando and one hits. The commando spins and fires 8 missile tear into the Jenner the laser goes wide. The missiles scatter over the front of the mech. Scrappy jams the cockpit with its pilot in a crate slam the lid and leaving into his salvage team to secure turn to the next foe, a Stealth. Scrappy let loose with all three of his lasers spreading fire across the torso as all three hit it fires back two missiles slam into Center Torso and a laser burns across his shoulder the rest going wide. TR pops off with everything again and manages to hit with two Center Torso and Right leg, to go with the earlier left torso hit. The commando lets loose with a full load again 5 more missiles tear into the Jenner, ripping across the legs and the laser tears into the right armllet. Scrappy again kicks in the supercharger as the Stealth kicks in its MASC and tries to pull back, but not quick enough. Scrappy bring down those saws slicing the right arm right off and playing laser fire across the torso. The Stealth misses with every thing suddenly a piercing scream came through the comm link at the same time there is a load explosion. Scrappy turns to see that TR had managed to hit the Right torso again on the commando setting off the ammo. The Jenner had taken more hits as well and was now showing signs that it was getting hot.

giggle

"I got it"

giggle

"Right Tunnel Rat you got your first kill. Congratulations now be careful you are over heating and if you do not watch out they will get you"

Scrappy turns back to the Stealth in time to watch it jump over the Beast and out of LOS. Unfortunately it has a full shot at the back of the Jenner and caps off every thing. The missile all miss but the lasers both tear into the back of the Jenner it staggers the Giggle are replaced by crying

"MOMMY I'M SCARED!!!"

"She is a long way away you have to fight on your own kid you are the one who decided to be a warrior act like one!"

She flips her arms and fires both lasers and one hits. She fires her own jump jets and lands near the fire starters. Scrappy kicks in his supercharger again to whip around and almost run into the Stealth. Slice, slice, He gots him another cockpit

11 February
Hagar

The swamp was quiet as the BoM's assault lance pushed towards the *Beast*. Blasty began to question the quiet.

"We've got hostiles," Clarke yelled over the two-way.

"Where," asked Blasty as both his eyes and his sensors saw nothing.

"Don't know. They were there just a moment ago. Must of switched on to locate us and then switched off."

"Just what I need. Another damned ambush!"

"**BUURP!**," Bowtie responded, "Keep checking your screens and your sixes for hostiles. But don't forget to watch were you step!"

Blasty responded simply, "Wilco."

They made their way slowly through the thick swamp, stepping carefully and keeping an eye out for enemies. Every once in a while the *General Lee* would lurch forward, tripping over a hidden root or sinking into the muck. But Blasty kept the mech standing. *500 meters*, he thought, *we should've been there by now!* He kept raging in his head about how this swamp slowed them down until all hell broke loose...

Steelfang was the last one off the *Stars and Bars*, The *Harbinger* was a little stubborn getting out of its 'Mech cubicle. His weapons were cocked, locked and loaded. The Twin RACs were set for a 6-shot burst, so that whatever came at him first was going to get a lot of lead flying its way.

He couldn't see Clarke, Blasty or Bowtie, but the tracks in the muck and mire of the swamp were easy to follow. His sensors were on full scan and he was tracking the torso left and right just in case his sensors missed something and he had to catch it with the good ole Mark 1, Mod 0 Eyeball. He kicked in his supercharger to catch up with the rest of the lance, mainly because he didn't want to get stuck out here alone.

The BoM assault lance had just entered what was pretty much a clearing marred only by a few trees and shrubs when two lances powered up and engaged from the more heavily forested areas. Blasty quickly identified and ranked the level of threat each had. *Four LCT-3M Locusts, dangerous if they flank you. Two SHD-5M Shadow Hawks, dangerous when together. One LGB-7 Longbow, it's missiles aren't effective this close in. One AWS-9M Awesome, if the pilot's a poor shot and alpha-strikes he'll not be a problem.*

By the time he had done this, the Locusts had closed and the bigger mechs had let loose with their first volley. Luckily, most of the missiles missed, but the Awesome connected on him with its two lasers. The medium pulse laser etched a line across his torso while the small pulse laser took him in his head.

Blasty, returned fire from all but the medium laser mounted upon his right arm. He fired high explosive rounds out of his ATM-12 at the Longbow, managing to score a few, heavy hits upon it that seemed to jar the pilot. With his RAC/5 he fired near-full

speed at the Awesome with most of his shots hitting the torso and one on its left leg. His own small pulse laser struck one of the Locusts and pierced its armor just enough to set off its AMS's ammo, gutting its left torso but its CASE prevented it from being destroyed.

Around him Clarke and Bowtie fired as well, both scoring hits. A shot from Clarke managed to penetrate the Awesome's left leg and set the ammo stored there off. The poor bastard hadn't been a very good shot. Bowtie hit heavy on the Longbow with most of his shots hitting upon its right torso. Despite its CASE, the impending ammo explosion tore out its extra light fusion reactor, leaving it a smoldering pile of metal.

The Locusts and Shadow Hawks closed trying to use their mobility to counter the BoM's heavy hitting power. Crossing often in a vain attempt to confuse the lance's pilots. Unfortunately for them, Blasty's RAC/5 took one of the Shadow Hawks's head clean off and one of the Locusts tripped putting it's head in kicking range of Bowtie's 'mech.

The Drunken Monkeys continued to fire mostly energy weapons, knowing that the most of their hits would miss. Few scored and those that did didn't do much. It was the same for their enemies.

However, this changed when Sten arrived in his Harbringer of Doom firing endless streams of fire from its Rotary Assault cannons. Through the continued use of his weapons, Blasty's TSM heated up to its effective heat. Strengthened to twice the normal amount, he surprised one Locust with his greater than normal speed and grabbed it by its medium laser and used the shocked pilot's 'mech bash in the head of one of his comrades, which was the previously gutted Locust. Sten's shots shattered trees behind the Locust they had just penetrated and this gave Blasty an odd feeling that the man was whistling while he worked.

The unrelenting stream of rounds blazing out of the business end of Sten's RACs filled the air with a deafening noise so loud that Motown and the rest of the BoM probably heard. The Locust was shredded within seconds. Now with numerical advantage, Bowtie and Clarke began to toy with the remaining Locust, but they grew bored quickly and it died even quicker.

All of their own 'mechs, except for Sten's, had been damaged but none too badly while their all of their opponents were destroyed. The ones who weren't killed by head chopping or reactor leaks, had their heads crushed under-foot before they could even open their cockpits.

Blasty turned his 'mech back towards the direction they had been headed and pressed his cigar against the metal of the cockpit, which promptly lit from the heat.

"Yeee-haaaaw! Wasn't that fun," he asked the rest as they continued to make their slow crawl towards the *Beast*.

Fred hops on the comm with the 204th "204th, follow this path and link up with Motown, Motown, whoever is piloting that Jenner, tell' em that in about 50m up from your position to not do that"

"It's Tunnel Rat"

"I don't want to know" "Esme to 204th" "Go ahead" "I've got traffic 2 clicks to the

east, slow-commin' through the Swamp, and heavy contacts 3 clicks to the north."

"Angel Flight, head to the East and harass those guys, Pyro, you're farthest north, head to the complex, Blasty, I am heading your way, you're about to get in the bayou thick, I suggest you swing south by 200m for now"

Fred breaks off from the 204th, the Ti T'sang darting through the swamp without a second thought, triple strength myomer activated.
c'est come chez nous! Just as Fred started to relax, 3 contacts pop up on his scans at close range, goodie...

A hunchback, Grand Titan, Uller.....um...prime

Where to jump.....ah!! Fred flies off to the right of the Grand Titan, exchanging laser fire, being pegged off by the Uller every once in a while, the Hunchback is stuck in the mud...good, as the Ti T'sang and Grand Titan duel it up, the Uller kept on peppering Fred's ride with laser fire

Mange d'la merde!!!, with two concentrated shots, the Uller's head caves in from 2 ER large laser hits, dead center...

Just as Fred plants the last hatchet blow on the Grand Titan, the Hunchback shears off Fred's right arm!!!! *'not suitable for print'* Fred Thought.....

Again a few large laser hits and the hunchback is down for the count....

"Blasty, I'm combing in fast so hold your Fire!!"

Entering Hagar Atmosphere

The atmospheric black out was brief, as they burned hard all the way in, streaking like hundreds of fiery darts through the upper atmosphere. In the end when they hit pay dirt altitude, they saw swamp, and lots of it. He had to remind himself to kick the person who picked the LZs in the most painful spot possible later. No time to think about that much though, the battle was already joined below. Like a cloud of rabid sociopathic hornets, they descended on the battle.

"A minstrel boy to the war has come"

The Hunter quickly converted from Fighter to Mech mode as he descended. Gaining speed and force for an attack that his first ground bound target would never see coming.

"In the ranks of death ye will find Him"

The LAM's foot came down on the Daishi's head hard from above, shattering the armored canopy effortlessly on its way through to the ground. The laser AMS spat out Blue bolts to knock out an incoming salvo of blind-fired SRMs as he boosted back into the air. The errant missile and laser fire had come from an old hunchback not too far away. It tried desperately to hit him as he came at it from the air Chewing through its torso with his lasers. The Mech collapsed in on itself under its own unsupported weight and crashed to the ground.

"His Father's sword he hath girded on"

Seeing no targets immediately in his area, he took the opportunity to switch back to Air-Mech mode and darted across the swamp just above the treetops. Searching for a likely victim. A huge burst of auto-cannon fire spat past him and he spun around to charge. Grabbing a tree on the way in he slammed it into the torso of the offending Rakshasa as he flew past. He spun around behind the enemy still carrying his movement to the aft and opened up on the rear of the Mech sending gouts of coolant and plasma shooting out, shortly followed by a small explosion as the reactor breached in a beautiful blue white fireball.

"And his wild harp slung behind him"

He fired up his external speakers and started his ancient battle music up. The sound of the Pipes rolled across the battlefield as he took to the air again brandishing his tree like a sword.

Hagar

As his company moved out from the LZ, Teemo pumped his 'Mech's right arm up and down. Glancing at his monitors, he noted the other 11 machines forming around him. As they moved up the low hill in front of them, they formed a double "V" formation, with the light 'Mechs of the recon lance in the rear. *I don't need them in front, 'cause we already know there are hostiles around, but we may need them later so...* Cresting the hill, he started scanning for friendlies. Catching sight of Pyro at the same moment Pyro spotted him, he waved his *Hammers* arm in the air. Seeing a return gesture, he set about looking for less-than-friendly units.

"Yo, I got hostiles at 2 o'clock, 500 meters out! Looks like at least company strength." reported Corbin Dallas from the cockpit of his *Negotiator*. "Hey, Pyro, you catch that?" Teemo spoke over the radio. "Yes, thanks." Pyro responded. "OK, people, here we go!" Teemo called over his command circuit as he led his company down toward the battle.

Slowing down as they entered the swamp, he gestured for them to spread out somewhat. "Keep your eyes peeled, and check IFF before you fire." He said, grateful that there had been time for the various commanders to exchange info about the make-up of their respective commands. *This is going to take some time getting used to*, he thought as his 'Mech slogged through the muck. Noticing a stand of trees ahead of him, he gestured for Natsuko's *Timber Wolf* and Roger Smith's *Negotiator* to approach from a slightly different vector. "Still with me, Corbin?" "You bet, sir." At that moment, an enemy scout lance came 'round the trees. "Tally ho!" he shouted, as he started ID'ing the machines in his mind. *A pair of Locusts, a Wasp, and a Valkyrie. So, how do you guys want it?* he thought as he waited for the enemy recon element to react to his force's presence. He didn't have long to wait for his answer, as the other 'Mechs opened fire. *Ballsy. Stupid, but ballsy* he thought as he assigned targets to his command lance.

"Nat, take the *Valk*! Roger, you have the *Wasp*! Corbin, you take the *Locust* on the left and I'll take the one on the right!" As his troops acknowledged, he moved towards his target. He blinked in surprise as he was met with laser and...**machine gun** fire?!? *A 1V? They sent you out here in a malking 1V?* Teemo almost felt like recalling his command lance and having his recon lance get the first kills of the day, but he remembered how almost every instructor he'd ever had had told him if he did

his job right it wouldn't be a fair fight. But still... a *Locust*? *Give it a rest, man, I'm in a frelling **Omni** Warhammer.*

Engaging his advanced targeting computer, he sent fire from his arm-mounted ER large lasers into the *Locust*'s legs, watching as the freshly-amputated torso dropped into the brackish water below. Absent-mindedly, he set a marker on his map, on the off chance that the Irregulars could figure out how to communicate with the pilot. Looking around, he noticed that the rest of his team had dispatched their targets with the same ruthless efficiency. "OK folks, reform and move out. There's sure to be more of them out here."

A swarm of fast mechs approached the ComStar line with great speed, firing everything they had. A great number fell from the high volumes of firepower put out by the predominantly heavy ComGuard unit. Only a few ComGuard mechs fell.

It was nearly as lopsided as the battle in space was turning out to be, Pyro thought... He canceled that thought as a large meteor that had once been a Lola III lit up the sky and shed parts of itself on the way down. Okay, not nearly THAT lopsided, but pretty bad.

Pyro slammed the Red Shift's arm into the skull of an Assassin with a mighty crunch, and the mech fell to the ground leaking water from its head compartment. Turning, he fired the gauss rifle and his entire short-range armament into an Osiris, that also came apart in a hurry.

Quite lopsided...

In the far distance, the Lola III slammed into the muck.

Many seconds later, a loud roar could be heard, followed by an intense rumbling like one Pyro had never heard before, followed by a titanic jolt that upended his mech and sent it sprawling into the muck. The earth itself seemed to heave in indignation of several hundred thousand tons of metal making impact at relatively low speeds (in astronomical terms, that is)... that kicked up massive clouds of dust, rock, and debris.

Pyro levered his 'Mech up and examined the surroundings, astounded by the carnage. Nearly every tree in the swamp had been felled, stripped of branches, or broken in two by the shockwave, and a cloud of dust and smoke obscured all vision. Damage displays on his 'Mech looked a lot worse than they did prior to the hit, and other units righted themselves and poured fire into the remaining enemy 'Mechs...

Morale appeared to break among the enemy, having seen one of their ships fall to the field, in addition to the horrible tolls taken on them so far. The remaining mechs fled into the newly created smoke...

The field belonged to the Irregulars for now... but who knew when they might come back for more.

Darkness receded slowly into light and Blasty heard Bowtie's voice over the com.

"Hey, kid. You okay?"

It took him a moment to realize that Bowtie was talking to him.

"Yeah," he responded, "I think so."

"What the hell was that?"

"Was what," Blasty asked, now aware of blood pouring down his face.

Bowtie sighed drunkenly, "Don't worry about it now. Can your 'mech stand?"

It was at this point that Blasty realized that the *General Lee* was laying on its back in the muck. Apparently knocked down by some powerful force. Ignoring the aches all over his body, Blasty clumsily stood the *Atlas*. He now saw that nearly all of the trees in the swamp had been leveled, pointing away from a smoking crater that laid some distance off.

"Let's move out," Bowtie ordered, to which the rest replied, "Roger."

A slight lull in the battle gave time to assess the situation. It was rough but not as bad as it first seemed the enemy had attempted a pincer. Having found one of the few areas of high ground there was a reasonable amount of maneuvering room. The hill top was approximately 350x475 metres. Ashton and Nightstalker had stopped the right thrust but igniting the east end of the hill top the left thrust had been broken by the counter thrust by the rest of the lance...Star. Andrew turned out to be all right under pressure. Tunnel Rat was the wild card her sudden appearance seemed to have caught everybody off guard and by taking out the Commando she had succeeded in helping to break the left thrust. Radio transmissions and battle noises indicated that Bowtie was on the way in. But it was not over yet. Looking down at the cockpit assembly in the hands of his mech he looked into the face of a VERY Terrified young woman. He then realized that he had been shaking the cockpit assembly. He quickly put it in the crate and turned to try to organize the defense. With the exception of the Jenner most of the mechs had taken little or no damage. The Jenner while battered was not in too bad of shape. The only breach was in the right torso rear and the telemetry readout indicated that while there was some structural damage no critical systems had been damaged. O.K. time to get serious.

Overhead, Chainsaw watched the battle. The hidden enemy units caught him off guard slightly. The first thrust had been at the Stars and Bars. Bowtie's assault had reacted quickly and smashed it. The Force that had hit the beast while slower was larger. Their slower attack had caught them out of position as they had moved to cover the first thrust that may have been a deception. A large force was trying to move around the firewall that those two pyromaniacs had started. "Scrappy they are regrouping east of you. Look alive...And who the hell is in that Jenner???"

"uh...Tunnel Rat"

"WTF!... uh never mind I'll find out later. You a large force getting ready to hit you from the east"

"Gotcha lets see what happens when we co-ordinate the defense"

"Good you hold them by the Nose and I'll kick them in the ass"

"Works for me where is Bowtie"

"I am coming up Behind you this swamp is really hard going "

"O.K. Get here when you can O.K. everybody sound off Ashton"

"Ready to rock, Sir "

"Andrew "

"Want to kick some ASS!"

"Nightstalker"

"We are ready"

"Tunnel Rat you O.K. kid"

"Yes sir a little scared"

"Not like the simulator is it"

"No sir"

"Want to take cover in the Beast"

"n..no sir"

"you sure"

"I..I'm sure"

"O.K. people listen up Ashton, Nightstalker I want you to use your fire to canalize there thrust Andrew break left Tunnel Rat cover the Firestarters O.K. people lets do it"

A Javalin tries to sneak through the fire line Ashton and Nightstalker both bury it in infernos and flame it gets off one salvo before the ammo cooks off three missiles cut across Nightstalkers front torso the rest are wide to the left a Ceasar cuts around the left Andrew rips into it one shell slams into the center torso the lasers and SRMs played across the side torso and arms but it hits back hard Guass to the CT PPC to the right Lasers hit both arms both mechs stagger. Chainsaw comes ripping down and Hits an atlas from behind and it falls face down Varlon nails an Archer from behind I spot a Whitworth just leaving the swamp I kick on the supercharger and come rushing in slice and dice time I bring the saws straight down both hit the left one cuts right down the center of the head the right hits its left arm...and breaks CRAP! I pull back to do a blade change.

"Tunnel Rat cover me"

"O.K."

I eject the broken blade and use my left hand to grab another Demolition blade.

Andrew Charges into the Ceasar hitting with both shells and cleaving the head with the ax the return fire savages the Blitzkreig .A Spider jumps over the fire line. Tunnel Rat fires everything almost point blank Medium laser hit RT micro hits the head the Commando hits the Jenner with a medium pulse laser to the RT. They exchange fire again both hit with every thing both engines are breached both shut down. Bow ties lance finally arrives. A little late .I look around at the mess. We had survived. The Jenner was now on its back.

"TUNNEL RAT!!!"

"ooowwww"

"you alright"

sniff"I bumped my head"

"O.K. some of my people will be helping you in a minute"

"chainsaw any more hostiles?"

"No all clear...now WTF is wrong with you are you out of your MIND?????. Just WTF was that kid doing in that mech?"

"I put her in the cockpit during the space fight because we do not have a spacesuit that fit her ...like how was I to know that she could figure how to drive it."

"And just WTF was she doing out there fighting"

"Hey I do not know yet she just came out by the time I saw her we were under attack and I had my hands full just trying to stay alive."

"You...ah...I'll talk to you when I land"

"O.K."{damn}

I look at the LZ got a LOT of salvage Andy's mech is looking rough the Jenner is going to take some work Tunnel Rat was out of the cockpit and standing, good sign

they were giving her head some attention.

"Andrew what is your status?"

"I'm O.K. Did I do good?"

"Yup everybody did good" {even Tunnel Rat}

I look at the fire that has reached the edge of the area cleared by the Blast from the Dropships landing thrusters the salvage crew has used some of our heavy equipment to cut fire breaks at either end of the firewall and it was already burning out. Time to set up the repair shops we have work to do

Chapter 9

It had been a slow march towards the *Beast*, slow *and* difficult. Blood continued to pour out of the wound on Blasty's scalp but at a much slower rate. He cursed at whatever the hell it was that knocked his 'mech over and made him blackout. But now the Drunken Monkeys were marching through the clearing that the *Beast's* engines had made, relatively safe with the rest of the BoM there with them.

"Well," said the Scrapper over the comm, "took you all long enough!"

"BUUUURP!"

"Yeah," he responded to Bowtie's answer, "we can get your 'mechs patched."

"By the way," Clarke cut in, "we marked the location of the 'mechs we killed if you want to send a salvage team to pick them up."

"It's good to see that you drunks can think. Now let's get you guys repaired."

Blasty pulled his neurohelmet off and climbed out of the *General Lee's* cockpit intent on getting his head bandaged. It was shortly after this when a tiny voice chirped from behind, "You're bleeding."

"Yes," he responded, "I am."

"What happened," the girl asked.

"I fell."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"Why?"

"I don't know"

"Why?"

"Go bug Motown!"

February 12th
Hagar, Far Periphery

Some ancient philosopher had said "Don't run when you can walk, don't walk when you can stand, don't stand when you can lean, don't lean when you can sit, and don't sit when you can sleep" as one of many bits of pertinent military advice.

That kind of thinking fit Pyro's kind of thinking perfectly, and shortly after the warship crashed into the field, Pyro was sleeping soundly while the technical crews went to work...

Morning came six short hours later and Pyro awoke, slipping out of Amy's grip and

getting dressed, putting on his cooling suit right away, suspecting another day of battle. Bending over and planting a kiss on her forehead, he stood and walked into the doorframe.

Cursing that they didn't build tents for people right at six feet high, Pyro rubbed his head where the steel pole had smacked him into full consciousness and headed for the command center.

Demi-Precentors Candace Dole and Terrence Hamill were already waiting for him. Hamill was studying maps, and Dole, as usual, was asleep in one of the briefing room chairs. A good MechWarrior and commander, but quite a narcoleptic.

Pyro kicked out a chair leg, starting a wobble that spilled Demi-Precentor Dole to the floor. "Ow. I'm awake, I'm awake..."

"Yep. Looks like it. So, what's the news?"

Demi Hamill spoke up. "Not a lot. The Fishies appear to have run to the facility during the night while we re-armed. They're probably getting ready to have another crack at us, but the weather's been interfering with our flybys."

Pyro blinked. "What weather?"

The Demi-Precentors eyed each other nervously, and then burst out laughing as Pyro reached up and noticed his head was soaked from the walk over.

"Never was a morning person. Damned door-posts and schedules..." "Someone get me some Bawls!"

The two Demi-Precentors grabbed onto objects to keep from falling over, howling with laughter.

"The drink!"

A few minutes later, after they finally contained themselves, Pyro sat at the map table with a bottle of ice-cold Bawls, processing the readiness reports. Seven mechs down. Nine salvaged. One pilot dead... Target Redshirt... better not tell Amy until after the battle.

One line caught his attention, describing the prisoners. "They're not all Fish?"

Demi Dole shook her head. "No sir. There are usually lot of expendable henchmen in there. Pro-Kats, Ex-Blakes, Smoked Kitties."

Pyro sighed, "Those clowns again? They're worse than those King-Marxists on that planet that ate our station crew. Won't they ever just give up their lost causes and get a real job?"

Demi Hamill shrugged nonchalantly. "People don't do that. We wouldn't still have a Capellan Confederation if they did."

DS Beast
BoM LZ Hagar

Well, Discord did not kill Scrappy. TR pulled her cute act and convinced him that it was not his fault. She got a nice cut on her forehead other than that she is O.K. that and Blasty's head cut were the only BoM injuries. Most of the BoM mechs are repaired. Andrew's Blitzkreig should be ready some time tomorrow. The poor Goldbug though; major damage to both the gyro and engine shielding. TR started to look at the Scaribus, Scrappy told her do not even think of it and if he caught her anywhere near that mech, he was going to duct tape her to a support pillar for the duration...and shook a roll of duct tape at her for emphasis...hopefully she got the message. Andrew seems to almost strut around now he even talks to Nightstalker. Scrappy notices TR staring at the Goldbug, she is crying and tries to avoid being seen. She will talk about her kills but tears up when the damage to the Jenner is brought up..says she did not mean for him to get hurt like that. She acts almost like it is a living creature.

The crash of that warship near here was quite a spectacle. Scrappy was glad it was not closer as the shock wave was pretty strong. It had been raining for hours now, that helped to put out the fires created by the battle. Most of the fallen mechs made into the Beast before the rains hit, and all air operations have been suspended because of the weather. There has been some interest by other commanders about my mini killer. *Great now she is becoming some type of celebrity a couple of people have even compared her to the legendary BBjr. That is all I need.* Scrappy thought

Scrappy sends the co-ordinates to Brightmoor and sends a report on Tunnel Rats activities to her parents. He also send another report to Mordels Bar and Grill.

12 February
Brightmoor
Motown OLA

SHE DID WHAT?????

Discord runs up to MercChick
"Now what?"
She hands him the Dispatch

Scrap Yard
Brightmoor
Motown OLA
Via Starlink
Discord and MercChick

You know it really would have been nice if you had let me know your kid knew how to drive a battlemech. I put her in the cockpit of one of my back-up mechs when the fleet was attacked for safety since we did not have any spacesuits that came even close to fitting her. That little psycho went and imprinted herself into the control program and drove it out right into the middle of a battle! BTW she got two kills a Commando and a Spider. She has a small cut on her forehead other than that she is O.K...My Jenner is badly damaged though. Can you please come rescue me from her.

Scrappy

Discord looks at his wife
"Thats our daughter for you"
She looks at him with a look that could freeze Methonal
"We have to get over there and get her"
"Yes dear"

12 February
CSS Vision of Truth
in orbit over HAGAR

"Hey BB guess what you no longer hold the record for being the youngest mech warrior."
"What?"
" the BoM as a Girl that is younger than you were"
"Sure she is...and just how old is she?"
"Three and a Half"
"Sure the BoM brought a little kid with them ,even THEY aren't that wiggy"
"She's that stowaway they found"
"OOO.K. And how did she get in the mech in the first place"
"Apparantly when the Fleet was attacked they put her in the cockpit of a mech for safety "
"Right and how did she end Driving it?"
"Her parents are both with Team Bonsai and they must have taught her they were on Motown together and the mech was a back up and the program was not imprinted"
"I've got to see this kid Send a message to Pyro tight beam I need to see what this kid is all about."

DS Beast
BoM LZ
Hagar

Motown checks the prisoners, and so far the fish that he had taken with the cockpit from the hunchback was the only one to be taken alive. It was now swimming in the special tank he had constructed in the #4 cargo hold. Outside of the EI implants and the socket behind its dorsal fin it seemed like any other carp. Tunnel Rat was watching it.

"It doesn't look so dangerous"
"No kid it does not"
"It does'nt look like it could drive a mech"
"You do not look like a mechwarrior either"
"But I am"
"That is debatable"
"But I fought good I got two kills"
"Right and everybody is jumping all over my ass about you being out there in the first place"
"And you would be dead if it weren't for me"
"touché" Come on let us go see the pilot of the Spider you took out"
"sure"
"They say he was a clanner"
"Ya Jade Falcon"

"How did you...never mind"

When she fired on the Spider the second time she hit it In the head for a second time with her micro laser and when it fell it hit the already damaged head crushing the lower part of the cockpit both of his legs were broken.

"He scowls what is that hatchling doing here?"

"I am the driver of that Jenner that took you down you are my Bondsman"

"Is this supposed to be some kind of joke?"

"No it is not you know the rules of Zellbrigan you fought well but you lost"

He just stares as she puts the bond cord on his right wrist

"Now you answer to me"

He looks at her and at me

"You use children that young?"

"Not exactly it is a long story though I know that any clan would love to have her genetics"

"You are clan too quiaff "

"Ice Hellion"

He looks at Motown

"How did you end up here"

"Long story"

The bondsman looks at TR

"Just how old are you?"

"Three and a half"

He falls back on the bed and puts his hands over his face

"It's too late for you to do Bondsref"

"TR you know out of respect to him you should not use contractions around him it is going to be had enough for him as it is"

"Yes sir"

"You rest now We are going to have some questions for you later"

"O.K. Thank you"

"You are welcome"

"Come on kid"

Motown and TR leave the room. Motown feels sorry for the poor guy to lose to a little kid has got to hurt. Hopefully they can get him to be Abtaka quickly

"I want to be a member of the BoM"

"what?"

"I want to be a member of the BoM"

"You are three and a half years old I do not think so"

"But I can drive a mech good"

"I can not make that decision you mom and your dad and Chainsaw all have to approve"

"Well ask them"

"Tell you what YOU ask them"

"Fine"

They check on the pilot of the Stealth. She has a lot of bruises

"Hey I am sorry for shaking you like that I lost control I apologize"

she looks at me

"Cute kid she your grand daughter"

"No she was driving that gold Jenner"

"Sure right"

"No that was me I am a mech warrior"

"For real?"

"Long story ,bad reason but that is why I lost it a little bit"

"Fish children...boy being a mech warrior just does not mean what it used to"

"Nope I just had to stop and apologize I should not have lost it like that"

"So what happens to me now?"

"That is not up to me"

"Who is it up to"

"You will find out soon enough"

Motown leaves TR, he has much to do yet. Motown takes TR to her quarters not that he expects her to stay long.

Fred started to head back to the LZ to bring his report to Pyro, after a grueling morning of scurrying around the bayou. He had gotten up 3 hours before anyone else, as with Michael, who is crazy enough to fly a VTOL in this weather.

So far his right arm is a jerry-rigged ECM suite, with that helping him hide, he scores 2 Locusts, a Bushwacker and another bloody Hunchback

He returns to the LZ, and joins most of the COs in the make-shift HQ and pulls up an aerial of the area

"Ok, this rain has made things really bad, but kinda good at the same time, I will start with the bad news....this area to the west is flooded so we cannot flank on that side, by the time the rain clears in an hour, this will be the size of the lake" Fred draws out a blue area west of the enemy compound

"The way in from the south-east is also flooded, and Michael spotted a company worth of mechs to the north, the good news, they have to detour severely to get to the compound." Fred heads off to his bunk for an hour of shuteye, knowing after that, he has to help the Irregualrs get through the muck, all accounted for.

ComStar Field Encampment
Hagar

Pyro swatted away another swarm of mosquitoes as he stepped into a spare tent. BBjr was inside, having landed a few hours before, practicing claymore attacks. Pyro walked up and nodded approval as he split two training robots in one swing. "Good, good..."

BBjr looked up. "Time to go?"

Pyro nodded. "Yep. Finally got one of our hoverjeeps free. Let's go before some Acolyte sneaks off with it."

They headed outside and got into the jeep, and Pyro sped off at speeds that went beyond insane and into the truly ludicrous - trusting the Force to help him dodge trees, rocks, fallen mechs, and the like. BBjr had no such trust in Pyro's connection to the force and held on in sheer white-knuckled terror.

The hoverjeep approached the BoM encampment in a blur of motion, and Pyro hit a switch on the dashboard, angling the lift fans at truly strange, nearly opposed angles and extended the stabilizer fins to the maximum extent.

"Watch this."

BBjr immediately had the urge to close his eyes, but resisted.

The jeep turned a sharp 90 degrees, and the lift fan angling was impeccable, launching the hoverjeep into a sideways barrel roll that just barely cleared the Mechbay's roof at something approaching 100 km/h.

Pyro retracted the stabilizer fins and realigned the lift fans straight down, and the hoverjeep's rear end dipped low, almost grazing the muck. Then it happened. The right-rear quarter hit a protruding tree root, causing the jeep to veer into an inflatable water tank. The jeep hit the tank at about 50 km/h and burst through the exterior, smashing inside before coming to a complete stop, thoroughly soaking the two.

BBjr glowered as the tank drained out the hole behind them, and Pyro chuckled. "What in the blazes were you trying to do?" Pyro got one of those wounded expressions. "It wasn't my fault!"

The two were surprised to hear the sounds of applause and cheers outside, and Pyro pulled the jeep out of the water tank before it completely finished devflating around them and shut down the motor. A few BoM members had observed the insane stunt and quite approved of it.

Pyro and BBjr stood, thoroughly soaked from the bizarre entry and looked to Motown. "All right... where is she?"

Not long later, Pyro was standing slack-jawed. "She killed two mechs?"

Motown added. "With a Jenner."

BB whistled. "Pretty mean feat right there. Especially at that age."

Pyro nodded. "Likely a very strong connection with the Force."

Motown blinked. "Don't tell me we're going to have a 3 and 1/2 year old Jedi running around now." Pyro paced nervously. "Too young. Yes. Too young to begin the training."

Tunnel Rat frowned. "You're no fun."

Pyro raised an eyebrow. "Me? I'm more fun than a barrel of monkeys." Several icy stares later, Pyro realized that he had put his foot in his mouth so hard that his tonsils ached. "More fun than MOST barrels of monkeys, not THE barrel. Being this barrel, of course." The BoM chuckled at the lame backpedaling and shook their heads.

Tunnel Rat looked up at Pyro curiously. "Are we going to meet the aliens out here?"

Pyro blinked and sat in dumbfounded silence as his blood temperature lowered about 20 degrees, and the others had what some maddeningly proper ComStar Adept had once termed as the Whiskey Tango Foxtrot look plastered all over their faces. "No, there are no aliens in the Periphery. It's just a rumor."

"Nuh-uh."

Pyro raised an eyebrow. "You know something we don't?"

"But you already..."

Pyro reached toward his belt quickly and drew a communicator. "Yeah? Can't Adept Drake handle it? This is the worst possible... Fine, I'll be there."

He looked at BBjr. "Staying or going?" BB looked back. "I think I'll stay for now."
Pyro ran out the door to the jeep and sped off.

TR looked confused.

BBjr spoke first. "What's wrong?"

"There was no call."

February 13th

Location Unknown.

Wicked Henchman (TM) Miguel sat inside the cockpit of his MAD 9L waiting for the signal to go. He still felt uneasy about his current rank. Years ago before being frozen for disagree with her Celestial Light (or Spotlight as she preferred now) he had held the rank of Shang-Sao but in the post Sun Tzu Confederation things had changed and sometimes for the worst.

Part of his discomfort came from the fact that if you were going to be with the evil guys you needed a rank like Evil Recurrent Overlord (TM) to last more than a few shots after the good guys were found. Also the fact that he was sent against his former friends in a rigged Marauder didn't make Miguel very happy.

"At least if the Dumb Sadist Officers (TM) were more businesslike we wouldn't be chasing the warriors with a plan more elaborated than jump to the closest planet and be evil" he sighted

During the last weeks the Death Commandos unit he was part of had been hitting Davion and Marik planets in an indiscriminate way, smashing through the defending units, giving no quarter and asking none, and then burning entire cities just for the fun of it, Miguel was sick of all of it.

He sighted again "Years ago we were mechwarriors, neither good nor evil, but after the Republic came to life it appears that we Capellans become once again the two dimensional bad guys that Hanse fought at the 4th SW"

Through the view port of his Marauder he could watch the other members of his unit going over a map where the next city was marked with a big red spot. At least if he had control of his Marauder he would teach those thugs why the True Death Commandos struck fear in the hearts of most of the IS but he was not trustworthy and his mech only activated when the master control on the Dumb Sadist Officer(TM)'s mech was online.

"I wonder if the techs bothered to stock my refrigerator yesterday" Miguel said while reaching for the door

Opening the small door Miguel found a box that he was sure it wasn't there before.

"Duh! Did somebody send me a Valentine today? I hope it wasn't Kali I'm not going to fall for the same trick twice, 20 years in the freezer were long enough"

Opening the box Miguel found a T-shirt with some kind of logo he couldn't see, a card and a small holocard with the Capellan sword in hand emblem. Activating the holocard Miguel was shocked when an image of Sun Tzu came to life.

"Greetings loyal Citizen, as the old Terran writer said reports of my death have been exaggerated" the figure winked before continuing "Alas, the Confederation of old is no longer and the farce my sister leads must end. Something has awakened in the Periphery and it's my duty as the true Celestial Light to protect the Confederation from itself. I need to gather all my loyal supporters and depose my sister before the Davions or the Mariks end us for good. Your former comrades in arms are gathering and if the Confederation is to survive we must build a corps pf loyal warriors that can defend the Confederation better that the goons that serve my sister." for a moment the image blurred and shaked his fist.

"Join me Miguel and together will control the Galaxy" the Holo Sun Tzu looked funnily for a moment "Did I say that? What a stupid thing to say isn't it?" " What I was trying to say is that it's the moment that you leave my sister, forget that you were her lover, I know you well and I know that you think that you still love her, but you rather love her name and the aura that surrounds it. And must I remained you that I have, at the last census, 456.829 unmarried cousins and nieces named Liao that would love to meet a true patriot like yourself"

For a moment Miguel lowered his eyes guiltily from the holo watching the tips of his boots trying not to think very hard on the last phrase.

"Leave my sister and join me in the planet Corey where I'll be waiting at the coordinates the card holds, wear your new colors proudly and come to me and join all the awaiting and giggling Liaos"

With a bow the image dissolved and Miguel unfolded the T-shirt, on the front written in bold red letters it said

"DARK AND EVIL RECURRANT BUT AT THE END HONORABLE VILLAIN (TM) "

Wearing his new "Villainous" T-shirt (TM) Miguel sat at the controls and picked the card Sun Tzu sent him, some holo letters reflected the dim light "Universal Unscrambler Card good for 6 years after date of purchase" Miguel's smile became a grin when he scratched the cards back and started inputting the numbers in the onboard computer.

When the computer came online Miguel activated the Super Stealth System his mech used and as the Marauder dissolved in thin air like a Bird of Prey from a show Miguel shouted through the external speakers.

"Someone is going to suffer his Hopeless Battle Syndrome today!!!!"

Minor Character Update (And Fan Service!)

February 13th

Mongol-II Assault Shuttle

Hagar, Far Periphery

Adept Erika Carson sat bitterly in the copilot's seat, finishing up the last remains of a bottle of whiskey.

Unexpectedly, another person sat beside her. "Something is bothering you, quiaff?"

Erika looked over, noticing a redhead that she barely remembered as some Clanner that recently started following them around. "And why would you say that?"

Fiona, that was her name... She spoke. "Because you are drinking your mind away like a laborer. Among Spheroids, it appears to be a culturally-ingrained behavior designed to either draw helpful attention or hammer a brain into such oblivion that it will not care if such attention arrives."

Erika's expression soured. "And what business of it is yours?"

Fiona shrugged. "There is nothing that needs to be done around here."

"Great, bored clanners."

Fiona remained.

"Well, I guess you're not going away till I tell you. Fine. I spent all those years trying to get Pyro to be a little less of a nutbar and he goes off and runs off with some Redshirt. Then I got shot out of my mech. Now excuse me, Mr. Beam and I were having a conversation."

Erika took another sip from the bottle.

"So you are angry at him for not jumping through hoops like a trained surat and finding an easier target?"

Erika glowered.

"You spheroids amaze me..."

"Who asked for your opinion, anyway."

Erika continued to drink for a while, and then realized the Clanner was still there. "What?"

"You seem to need some distraction."

"Are you coming on to me?"

Fiona sat unfazed. "I need help with something. I believe it could take your mind off the present situation."

Erika rolled her eyes. "I'm not that drunk!"

Fiona scowled. "Are you going to sit there being stubborn all day?"

Erika nodded. "Probably."

Fiona shrugged. "Fine. Trial of Possession for thirty minutes of your time."

"What?"

"With what do you defend?"

Around this time, Erika's brain was swimming. But she was pissed off, and had no intention of following through with anything. "Coin flip. Heads my way, tails yours."

"Bargained well."

Erika flipped the coin, and it landed on tails. "Trial of Refusal", she blurted, flipping the coin again. Same result.

Fiona seized her by the arm and dragged Erika to her quarters.

"It is hot in here, quiaff", she said as she took off her uniform jacket and put a box on the bed.

Erika inched toward the door and prepared to make a hasty escape.

"We must fix this", Fiona said as she pulled an unassembled ceiling fan from the box. "Here, hold this up so I can fasten it."

WOTD Encampment

Hagar

The drunken wailing of the Third Knights wafted across the space between encampments, seeming to echo off the rain clouds to come from all around, and Medron grimaced again. Sometimes he wondered whether they flew better drunk or sober. Then one of their LAMs shot over, barely avoiding a lightning bolt cracking across the sky, fell into a plummeting barrel roll, and shot past the WOTD command van with centimeters to spare. It pulled back up and EndoSteel and Doctor Raisley shot out of the mud-covered van to look around.

"What the hell was that?" EndoSteel asked and Medron shrugged slowly.

"Oh...the local drunken masters," he noted and pointed in the general direction of the Third Knight encampment. Raisley just scowled and looked towards the Team Bonsai encampment carefully before pulling a communicator out.

"Please deliver five HeavyMetal Coffee Makers to the Third Knights encampment," he spoke into the communicator and waited for an acknowledgement before turning it off. "Their going to need it," he muttered then and Medron laughed.

And that was when Hunter's and Fokker's LAMs shot overhead, following the Third Knight's route nearly perfectly, either on purpose, by accident, or through drunken stupidity. Caking EndoSteel, Doctor Raisley, and Medron with foul-smelling mud. "They're nuts," Medron growled after spitting out what mud he could and wiping his face off.

"They're crazy," EndoSteel added.

Raisley just smiled darkly and commented something about teaching them not to mess with techs as the heavy rains began washing the mud off them and the van.

"Well, I guess we should get back to planning the next moves huh?" Medron asked. "After we change of course," he added after looks of annoyance from the other two. "I think I'll go take care of my duties," he finished and walked off towards his tent as BrainBurner's lance started moving out to take over recon duty for Magic Pack's lance. They'd probably just loved the show.

Ah well. It really was time to get some more planning in. After changing into something dry, and disposing of the nasty-smelling clothing, he put in the call for the leaders of the various sub-units and allies to meet in the briefing room of the *Aquila*, currently stuck in the mud thanks to the heavy rains. Ah well. If it really *had* to launch it could probably just retract its landing gear and *slide* forward on the mud fast enough to launch. But they wouldn't be leaving for a little while at least. They had to take care of some fishy enemies first.

He winced at the bad mental pun and left his tent to walk towards the stuck *Incidio*-class DropShip. He had to get the briefing room ready for the arrival of all of the leaders. If any single ship could ever be ready for that much crazy packed into one package. Medron shuddered and kept walking. He'd thought the WOTD of old had been nuts, but they were downright conservative compared to the Barrel of Monkeys. He shuddered again and kept walking. This was going to be a scary briefing.

February 14th
DS Beast
BoM LZ
Hagar

Things we looking good all of the BoM mechs including the Goldbug as well as the 204ths machines were ready for combat again additionally the Whittworth, Commando, and Hunchback salvaged from the attack were repaired and battle ready so far so good. And best of all the rest of the Irregulars had finally arrived Tunnel rat would soon be out of his hair Happy,Happy,Joy,Joy.Funny though as much of a pain in the ass she was it was going to seem strange with out her.

Regis, his name was Regis, and he was in a very depressed state ever since finding out that a three year old had defeated him. I went to see him.

"So you came to mock me"

"No that child is scary she knows things that terrify me I do not even begin to understand what is happening there maybe some one from the Scorpions or Nova Cats could fathom her even the Jedi are in awe"

"She is a child I lost to a child"

"If it was any other child I would say some thing was wrong but not THAT one"

"And why is that?"

"She know things that cannot be explained she can tell things about peoples past that nobody knows she knew what was going on here before anybody else she made comments yesterday that scared the hell out of the comstar commander she knows secrets"

"Like what?"

"She knew of my childhood on Hector...NOBODY knows that the last person who new about my past died years ago"

"And what did she know"

"It is a long time since I talked about this"

" About what"

"I was born 75 years ago on Hector My father was labor caste my mother was a scientist"

"So you are freeborn"

"Aff, In school the had these simulators and I showed an early aptitude for combat and went through a number of trials and was eventually accepted as a mechwarrior and assigned to Zeta prime Galaxie"

"So how did you end up here the Ice Hellions are a Home clan"

"My unit fought a trial of possession with a Goliath Scorpion force over a mine on Marshal we lost I was the last one from my star standing I was taken as a bondsman"

"The Goliath Scorpions are a home clan too"

"Aff but I was bonded to a Seeker my father ran a salvage yard so I fit in he later made me Abtaka but I stayed with his team I enjoyed going on he quests one day we came upon an old StarLeague facility it was occupied by a salvage team from a place called the Outland Alliance we challenged them to a trial of possession after some bidding it ended up with me going against the old scrap collector in a Dance of Scars. I had never done that before I found out later he was a descendant of the commander of the DESS team that first met the Goliath Scorpions and practiced it all the time I had trouble getting the sequence right he did not I was defeated and I was claimed as his bondsman. It turned out he owned a scrap yard and had a fatal illness when he died he left it all to me in his will "

"So how did you end up here"

"I run the largest facility for military salvage in known human space Tunnel Rat that little girl that claims you as her bondsman Told the leader of Team Bonsai To come to me for the equipment to rebuild the Dropship Irregulars and it took off from there"

"And they took her word just like that?"

"There was another communication that actualy started the mission she sent him to me using a name few people know about that fact that she knew it gave her credibility."

"So she knows every thing"

"Neg but she does know a lot that can not be explained."

"You talk like she is some kind of superbeing I think you are claiming a lot for a small child"

"Well she put you there"

He looks at Motown and winces

"aff"

"There is a lot that goes on with this bunch I stopped trying to figure out a long time ago. I have things to do the Precenter may come by later with her If you play it right you could maybe speed your path to Abtaka quiaff"

"Aff"

Motown leaves as he has reports to prepare. While he is not the CO of the BoM, he is in charge of the repair and salvage team from Brightmoor, so he has to give a report on the repairs. Paperwork, yuck!

He passes Tunnel Rat

"Hey Kid you need to get your gear together your mom and dad are here and you will be going with them"

"No I will not"

" I am afraid you are"

"No I am part of the BoM now"
"Right we will see"
"I know this"
That sends a chill right down Motown's spine
"O.K. kid"

DropShip *Point du Hoc*
Hagar, Far Perihpery

Terrific, Teemo grumbled to himself, *here it is, Valentine's Day, and I'm sitting **alone** in my quarters, trying to kill some time before a staff meeting.* As he turned around to pace the four or five steps to the other side of his cabin, his eyes fell on his computer with its attached color printer. *I **do** have that greeting card program that came pre-installed....* What he knew of his XO seemed to indicate that she wasn't the sort to file charges over an entirely innocent card from a not-so-secret admirer.... Before that train of thought could pull into the station, another, darker one pulled out. *Exiled Star League in Exile.*

To the other Irregulars, that would/should not sound like anything more than another group of refugees who'd picked the wrong system in which to recharge their jump drives, and maybe look for a habitable planet on which they could stretch their legs for a bit. But he knew different.

My great-grandparents had had enough wandering about, and split off to find a relatively peaceful area to settle down in. From what I've been able to learn, it seemed like a friendly enough break-up. After all, it's not like one group could rat out the other to the nearest Trashborn. But still... The beeping of his chronometer's alarm interrupted Teemo's reverie. *Damn, time for the meeting already. Wonder if the ESLiE will have any representatives present.....*

February 15th
BoM LZ Briefing room
Hagar
03:45 hours

The man known as Chainsaw Assassin entered the briefing room, having to duck slightly as he did so. The Inner Sphere dropship hadn't been designed with people of his stature in mind. At Six foot six inches, he was nowhere as large as the Elementals the clans had developed, but small doors are small doors nonetheless.

He paused, and looked over the assembled motley crew of misfits gathered before him.

The "Barrel of Monkeys" were his babies. A unit of people so insane and impossible to predict as to make most enemy contingency plans ineffective. Soldiers who don't have a book to go by can't be expected to have too complex of a plan, so he had to keep it simple.

At the moment, the troops were busy cheering on as Bowtie bob was ingesting large quantities of some unidentified fluid from a "beer bong" manufactured from heatsink hosing and a coolant funnel. Tunnel Rat was sitting on Motown's shoulders and pouring whatever bottles were being handed to her by the mob into the funnel,

obviously enjoying herself.

"Ten-HUT!"

Everyone in the room immediately dropped what they were doing and faced their leader. Every hand in the room found a beer can, and was raised to the brow in the traditional BoM salute.

"At ease"

in perfect military unison twelve beer cans in twelve separate sets of hands "ker-shicked" open and their contents drank at the owners leisure. Or rather eleven cans of beer, and one can of "Mountain Dew: Code Red". Seems the only canned fluid present suitable for the young sprout was the vile fluid suitable only for "Red Mariks". She didn't seem to mind. With a nod, the group found their seats and the lights dimmed.

A map popped up in the dizzying three-dimensional holotank in the center of the room. Chainsaw took a position in front of it and began the briefing.

"Gentlemen... and Lady" he nodded a confused nod at the small child amusing herself with the reclining feature of her chair "We have the distinct honor of leading the assault on the east defensive grid of the enemy compound. Our task is to draw off anything we can, so the main push can hit from the southwest. We were chosen because of our... Unique equipment, personnel, and tactics"

A voice in the back piped up "You mean they couldn't figure where else to put us?"

Chainsaw smiled. "Something like that."

"We have problems here guys. The enemy outnumber us about ten to one, and while they don't have any Jedi, or doorknob based weaponry, the sheer weight of their numbers is enough to make this a long and drawn out campaign. Such a campaign is unacceptable."

Blank stares met him from his personnel. Ok, time for another approach...

"If we don't hurry up we'll miss this years Commercial-Bowl."

This got him the desired response; suddenly the entire crew was booing and throwing popcorn at the holotank display of the enemy compound.

"The Viagra Patriots are playing the Nike Steelers. I got Buku C-bills on it. I'll be damned if I'm gonna let some walking fish sticks keep me from my game. I don't know about you, but I'm ready to gut me some fish."

The cheers died down as Chainsaw clicked the control panel to show off his "plan"...

"Ok, now this is what they're gonna expect, now what we've gonna give them is..."

04:15 hours

The assembled might of the BoM was gathered and ready to deploy. All the LAMS were burdened with expendable stores of special missiles. Packed to the brim with "fish flakes" they were supposedly an effective distraction against the fish. Battlemechs with hand actuators were issued their choice of combat fishing poles or Mech-nets, and the scrapper trucks had towed BBQ pits ready to fry up any POW's. All that was needed was the order to deploy...

"you want to go fishing, you gotta get up pretty early in the morning... And you gotta have the right kind of bait."

DS Beast
BoM LZ
Hagar

The...gods...must...be...crazy Motown thought, *They actually let her stay...she is now official a member of the BoM!* They said that since there really was no place of safety anywhere in system she might as well be able to shoot back. *The Gods must be crazy.* She talks to her mech, Scrappy's old Goldbug, like it was a living thing. The techs have modified the cockpit and neurohelmet to fit her better. It looks really weird in that cockpit now the controls have been moved close together the couch has been all scrunched up to fit her better so she does not rattle around the cockpit. Regis is beginning to accept being her bondsman. They talk a lot. She spends a lot of time with Nightstalker, that scares Motown a little. Motown has been trying to figure out how best to deploy the star. He thinks to himself *'if I pair the Firestarters together and put TR with Andrew since both of their mechs have the same speed. With much higher speed I will take point. This is nuts. I almost killed myself falling out of my chair the first time I saw her in that modified cooling vest.Right now they are making uniforms for her!'*

MHS Aquila
Hagar

Medron stayed sitting, sipping on the last of the Bawls in his inventory, as the various leaders of units allied with or in the Dropship Irregulars walked in, grabbed a drink from the bar, and chose their seats. He nodded and smiled at each of them, leaning back in his chair comfortably with his feet propped up on the table. Once everyone was assembled, he nodded simply and smiled towards Pyro.

"Well all," he began muttering. "I guess we need to come up with some kind of plan or something for what we're going to do next." He shrugged after that and took a deep breath, and a deep gulp of his Bawls. "Personally, I'm happy with just going in chasing tail and blowing up anything that moves," he added and got a quick cheer from some of the leaders present. "But I guess *some* people like being a bit more organized about things," he finished with a wink towards Pyro.

"So...does anyone have a...plan," he muttered with a wince, "on how to fillet these guppies?" He ended with a nod, swallowed some more Bawls, and waited for the explosion of ideas he expected to hear.

Pyro steps to the plate, "What I have in mind is pretty simple. We should use the Holy Flame to deploy the Brightly Painted Decoys within visual range of the base, drawing out the fish. If the decoys themselves fail, we should have them deploy the fish flakes. While this won't be effective against the human pilots, current estimates

state that at least 2/3 of the enemy forces are BattleCarp."

"Once the fish reach the trap, the Starlost should sweep in and blanket the area designated as the barbecue pit with a mix of inferno bombs to overheat and slow down approaching forces. When this is accomplished, the Vision of Truth can contribute to the barbecue with Naval PPC's, more easily able to hit the slowly-moving formation."

"These operations should help even the odds against us, if successful."

"At that point, we unleash the Barrel of Monkeys over here while the Knights and ComGuards take up the middle. Bearded Cavalry should serve as mobile reserve, and the Kilted BattleMech Division should form our flanks. Have I left anyone out?"

Members of Team Bonsai raised their hand, and Pyro nodded.

"Team Bonsai should support the ComGuards and Knights once we punch through the fish and reach the research base. Not only are they qualified MechWarriors to cover us, but we will almost certainly require their expertise to figure out exactly what is going on here."

Motown pipes in, "People I have a special little prize that you might want Doktor Raisly and his team examine. I have in a special tank in my # 4 cargo bay a LIVING Battlecarp and we also have some of the interface hardware and software. It is a little beyond my crews ability to break the codes but I believe that Doctor Raisly and Team Bonsai might be able to crack the codes and that could give us a potentially devastating counter to their fishy fighters."

As soon as Scrapper sat back down, Teemo took the floor. "I brought along some Spec Ops troopers when I left home. They're trained in building takedowns, and I want to bring them along when we hit this facility. Any objections?"

"Good!!" Fred chimes in, " If they can get some water transport, the can come in from the new wooded lake to the west after the forces are drawn off, The 204th will stay at the LZ until the BoM are outflanked by the enemy's northern forces, guys, the will be coming straight into your left side once they circle around this area of impassable muck" Fred points to the map he updated after surveying the area that morning.

"The AirCav will circle around out west and swing back to engage the rear of the northern forces once they engage you, if they could get a LAM or two with them, that'll help allot"

Teemo chuckled. "Will Maxim Hover Transports do? Sounds like I'd better have my infantry and armor commanders join us so they can get briefed in on the assault plan." he concluded as he patted down his pockets looking for his communicator.

Well, if they can get there undetected. I was thinking rubber Dingies with quiet outboard motors....but..."

Fred looks over at Michael, "Start up the Angel Flight, and head wide out west and get behind the northern force"

Michael simply nods and heads out of the briefing room

"The rain should let up in a few minutes" Fred looks out the window" I'd say...15 at most so we should load up and head out"

DS Beast Mechbay

BoM LZ

Hagar

Motown did NOT sleep well at all. He watches as the warriors of the BoM get ready. The Drunken Monkees are yakking it up probably all have had quantities of liquid courage. Veterans in big mechs, Blasty is their least experienced and he is driving an Atlas and has seen some combat. Chainsaw and Varlon are experienced warriors and their LAMS are dangerous. *No it is my star.* Motown looks at the two Firestarter pilots Ash and Nightstalker. They are both combat vets and can handle their mechs well, but Firestarters in a swamp after a heavy rain? That is going to hurt them; wet foliage does not burn well. Andrew is fresh out of the academy that was his first fight a couple of days ago, That hopped Blitzkrieg is a potent machine but he is still green.

He looks over at the Goldbug, Tunnel Rat is there looks like she is talking to the mech again. She looks comical in that cooling vest that hangs down to her knees. She is carrying this stuffed monkey now, has her hair in pigtails tied with pink ribbons. *She is just a baby! What the hell is she doing here! The other day was the first time she ever drove a real mech ...I think.* But she got two kills so now she is a mech warrior...at three and a half .She is all serious now. Motown lets loose in the back of his mind, *'Damn whoever created these damn Battlecarp. You put me in a situation I do not want to be in...You better believe that I am going to make you pay...BIGTIME'.*

Motown looks into Cargo Bay #4 a couple of Team Bonsai techs are working with a couple of BoM techs on the battlecarp. Motown hopes that they can come up with some good information from it. It took a lot of work to take and keep it alive.

"Star Commander?"

Motown looks down. TR caught him off guard with that

"What was that?"

"Regis says that is how I should address you"

"I see, I hope you are not planning to challenge me to a trial of position"

giggle"Not yet anyways"*giggle*

"Great I can relax"{thanks kid I needed that}

"You worry to much"

"I do not"

"You do SO"

"Kid all to soon we are going out there to fight an enemy that has us badly outnumbered...some of us might not survive it"

"We will"

" ARE you sure?"

"Yup,Now excuse me Goldbug and I gots to get ready"

And with that she turns and skips away

{she skips, she is a little kid. The gods must be crazy!}

Motown goes to the Dismantler, he has to get ready too...*'I am too old for this.She knows things, I hope this one is right'.* Motown checks the spare blades in the

Scabbard 8 Demolition 4 metal cutting 2 wood cutting+ fishing net. He stops to talk to Nightstalker

"So what do the Voices say?"

"We will make it but one of us will just barely"

"Do they know who"

"No"

"This will be rough"

He then walks over to Ashton, who is looking annoyed

"This crap is too damn wet"

"I know but what is it once we get inside the complex you should be able to find stuff to burn in side"

He grins and chuckles.

"YA"

Motown gives him thumbs up and go check on Andrew. He seems to be a lot calmer, there is a kind of confidence that was not there before.

"You ready Kid"

"Yup going to fillet some fishies"

"Good I am pairing you with TR keep an eye on her O.K."

"Don't worry I won't blow her up"

They both chuckle

"Thanks"

Chainsaw grabs the PA mike

"O.K. people mount up we got some fishies to fillet and we have to do it quick so we can make it to the Commercial Bowl"

Motown mounts up and does the radio check

"Ashton"

"Ready to Rock"

"Andrew"

"Lets do it!"

"Nightstalker"

"WE are ready"

"Tunnel Rat "

"Aff"

{Great Regis has her thinking like a clanner}

"O.K. people lets grab us some fish fillets"

And with that, the BoM pursuit star goes to war

Well, all the "I's" are dotted and all the "T's" are crossed, Teemo mused to himself as the the final pre-mission brief with the 1st Kilted broke up. As he walked to his 'Mech, he looked over to where the 1st's Ranger detachment was making their final preparations. It's times like this that I'm glad I'm a MechWarrior. Dismounting your transport when you're still a klick or so from the final objective and approaching on foot is bad enough when you're on solid ground. I can't imagine what it'd be like to slog through that swamp knowing you're going to have to do building takedowns when you hit dry ground.

As he climbed up his 'Mech and prepared to drop into the cockpit, he took a quick look at his assembled forces. One company of 'Mechs, and another of hover tanks (in addition to the Maxim Transports that would be transporting the Rangers). His one-of-a-kind Omni IIC *Warhammer*, Natsuko's *T-wolf*, and Corbin Dallas and Roger Smith in their matching *Negotiators* made up the Command Lance. The Fire Lance, with the least flashy machines in the unit. Sam Nelson and his *Thunderbolt-7M*. Sarah Connor with her *Grasshopper-5J*. Todd Connor in a *Grand Dragon*, and Mary Jennings' *Archer-4M*. The Recon Lance, whose machines were all custom jobs designed and built back on Alpheratz. Dave Thompson led the way in his *Pathfinder*, and the Lance was rounded out by Morgan Slattery, Les Jackson, and Rob Nelson in their trio of *Commandos*, with none of the three an exact match with any of the other two.

And the company from the Black Horse Cavalry: 4 Smashers, 4 Raiders and 4 Pershings (with additional infantry, just in case). Snapping out of his reverie, he noticed the assembled MechWarriors and vehicle crews watching him expectantly. Smiling to himself, he held his right hand up in the air, and with his index finger extended, made a circular motion. *Move out!* he thought as he strapped himself in and began running through the start-up checklist.

Chapter 10

15 February

Some god forsaken swamp

Hagar

Chainsaw and Varlon were flying top cover. The Drunken Monkees are on the right flank and Motown's pursuit star is on the left. Motown decides to use an inverted Vee formation. Andrew is placed on the left point, that Class 20 ultra cannon is scary and if he gets in close that sword can be nasty. Motown wishes he had an energy weapon for back up. *'I do not like ammo dependant weapons'* he thinks to himself, and he's am not happy with the armour on it either. Andrew has the biggest mech and the hardest hitter but he also has the lightest armour, even less than Motown's and he has the smallest mech.

Tunnel Rat is backing him up. She has the longest ranged weapons in the star with a decent throw weight a nice simple mech. The Jenner is very forgiving design. Nightstalker is on the right point. His twin 6 racks and twin medium lasers are a hard-hitting combo and he has the thickest armour, though still light for the weight. Ashton is trailing. His 4 flamer twin medium laser load out has a short range and while thy can make things hot for a foe but the actual damage they deal out is light, and he really has to get in close do anything. Motown is on the point of the vee with the fastest mech. He can react to threats on either side or attacks from behind the twin clan ER medium. Backed by the clantech ER small, that gives him a fair reach and the twin reciprocating saws are nasty close up. But this swamp really slows things down.

Motown breaths deeply, *'Well we have a job to do so we plunge in...Weird now that we are actually getting underway I feel a lot calmer there is still some nervousness but I feel confidant in my people...All of them'*.

The 204th stands at the edge of the BoM LZ, Fred watches the groups split up on their way to their objectives.

Sheepy comes on the line "So it begins" "That it does mon ami"

"Archangel to group" Esme's voice comes over the general comm line, "The weather forecast for the day shows sunshine within the next 10minuts, drying up the swamp slightly allowing for better scorched earth. On to traffic now, the Barrel of Monkeys are headed to a mud pit and are suggested to move 50 meters north to avoid so, south bound traffic is held up by a virtual lake, cutting down the enemy force by 3 mechs already..." *good* Fred thought "...Angel flight is moving uninterrupted due to taking the northern over pass. "

"Fred, does he always do that?" "Yup, he does Doc. Raisley"

"In other news, infantry from the west is scheduled for there appearance at center stage in 10 minutes, just when the BoM veers off some of the crowd from the front row. In sports, Team Bonsai is headed for their match up with the southern division of the Hagar SwampFish, looks for a good match up sports fans!!"

"Hunter 4-2 to 204th, lets move down further, stay tight on me and stay in Sheepy's ECM envelope, move where I move" Fred hears the four radio clicks from his group and the 204th moves in closer, judging form the enemies position, heads to the east side of the battle, waiting for the BoM to be out flanked....

The BoM is moving in two groups the Drunken Monkees is in a diamond formation on the right side the Pursuit star is in an inverted V on the left. Chainsaw and Varlon are flying top cover in their LAMs. Then all hell breaks loose.

"Scrappy Look alive you got Hostiles...a lot of them"

"Roger that how many?"

"Looks like a reinforced company"

"[censored]"

"I am going to see if I can disrupt them"

"Cool"

"O.K. lets see how these fish flakes work"

The two LAMs come swooping in wingtip to wingtip dropping a cloud of fish flakes on the advancing enemy the formation it does seem to disrupt them to a degree. On the second pass they fire their weapons and dropping nets creates more confusion but a number of mechs still advance

"O.K. people look alive we have company!"

Motown watches as mechs start coming from out of the brush. A Fire falcon D makes the mistake of coming out right in front of a Andrew two class 20 AC slugs literally ripped it apart a couple of short ranged missile added insult to injury. The laser and a hand full of Short range missile had little effect on Andrews mech. Tunnel Rat locks up with a Wasp...major miss-match the Wasp did not last long. The main pressure was on our left flank A Shadowhawk starts to mix it with Nightstalker that got ugly. Meanwhile a Piranha locks up with Ashton in a very nasty duel. Ashton's flamers were inadequate to stop the MG packing clan mech. Motown moved over to back him up and spotted a Bombadeer moving in. Kicking in his super charger, Motown charged in and started cutting. Just as he slices its torso open and laid open the gyro, and neatly cut it out. Then I hear this piercing scream.

"STAR COMMADER LOOK OUT"

Motown spins around just in time to see "Mr.Giggles" chainsaws LAM smash into an Artic Wolf that looked like it was about to plaster the Scrapper. Shades of the "Battle of Recycle Valley" The Artic Wolf fired a full load at the incoming LAM savaging it as it hit both mechs crashing to the ground and sliding into a stand of large trees. A Stinger jumps in and Tunnel Rat rips it apart with laser fire and Ashton finally dispatches the Piranha, but his armour has really been savaged .Bowtie and the Drunken Monkees Come crashing in Scattering the remaining mechs that were not destroyed outright. Tunnel Rat pipes up

*sob * "You got to get him out of there" *sniff*

Motown looks at the wreckage. The smashed mechs were half buried in a stand of trees. He switches out the left Demolition blade for a Wood cutting Blade and starts cutting away the trees so that the cockpit was exposed. Motown then carefully cuts out the crushed cockpit assembly and cut away the twisted metal freeing Chainsaw. Motown looks up to see that Tunnel Rat had exited her cockpit and was coming over to the remains of Chainsaws cockpit. Motown would have preferred one of the older guys for this.

"O.K. Tunnel Rat is he alive"

"*sniff* "He is breathing but he is really'*sniff*bleeding bad"*sob*

"O.K. Kid I got a med evac coming now"

Motown looks down to see what appears like she is trying to stop some of the bleeding with her hands.

"I key the med evac frequency"

"This is the BoM chainsaws down and is in bad shape we need med evac asap"

"Already on the way ETA 90 seconds"

Tunnel Rats mike is open and Motown can hear her crying.

"Please do not die"

"Tunnel Rat med evac will be there shortly keep holding the wound"

sniff"O.K."*sniff*

Motown watches the med evac chopper lower a rescue pod and a red shirted EMT relieves Tunnel Rat and prepares Chainsaw for transport.

Motown switches to the evac frequency

"How is he?"

"He looks rough but I think that if we can get him to a fish tank we can save him he should make it"

"Good I will get out of your way"

Motown sees one of the broken trees start to fall towards them and pushes it in another direction. He watches the rescue team take off, then looks over to where Tunnel Rat is standing. She is crying

"Tunnel Rat"

sob

"TUNNEL RAT"

"aff"

"come on kid pull it together"

"I liked him"

"You like him he is not dead yet"

sob

"Come on Warrior, time for paybacks"

sniff"Aff lets fillet some fish*snort*

"Good It is pay back time"

"aff lets do it "

"Good, Bowtie set your lance in a diamond formation. Ashton, Tunnel Rat cover their left flank, Ashton, Nightstalker you are with me on the right. Varlon Top Cover. Hey Freddy a little help would be cool"

Just then the Bearded Angels fly overhead. That makes me feel good.

"O.K. Monkees IT IS PAYBACK TIME!!!!"

I swap the wood blade back for the Demolition blade

"O.K. people MOVE OUT"

Unknown plain

Where did that LAM come from That was not supposed to happen and what is it with these guys they Insist on saving red shirts. The three Fates just stood there and scowled.

Esme to Fred, the BoM have encountered the eastern front line, Chainsaw is down, the northern force will engage soon."

"Hunter 4-2 to group, lets move straight north, Mo?"

"Go ahead"

"Push in from the east, Hard, we got the northern force"

"Hit them hard!!"

The 204th heads straight north through the brush, the swamp drying up nicely in the early afternoon sun. Fred looks at his sensor read out, *where are you Michael?* Just as the 204th comes into long range of the northern force, 5 VTOLs come screaming

in sensor range from the northwest.

"LET'S DO THIS!!!" Jimmy hollers over the comm, Worktroll's PPCs rip apart the first mech out of the tree line, poor little dragonfly.....

Another blasted Daishi!!! Fred raises his left arm, bringing his ER Large laser to bear, relaxes, and surprises the heck out of the Daishi pilot by cracking the cockpit, water leaking out of it.

"Sir, this is not good" Fred looks at his sensors, a company, minus 5 mechs....hmmm" "no it is not Major Tom"

The AirCav was flying acrobatics around the enemy forces, taking as many pot-shots as possible, meanwhile, the Drunken Monkees catch up behind the 204th, and unleash a few long range shots towards the enemy

"204th to Drunken Monkees, head west to your objective, we will scream if we need help, but clear that building for the infantry!!!"

"Ok...hic"

"1st Killed, Team Bonsai, you guys should be opening fire right about now..."

"Yes, Mother." Teemo muttered under his breath as he watched the enemy formation draw closer. " 'Kay, people, look alive. We'll have range on them any second." As the rest of the unit chorused their assent, Teemo glanced across the field in time to catch a glance of the Maxims cruising through what little cover they could find. *Good luck guys. Hopefully you won't be on your own for too long.*

Turning his full attention to developing battle before him, he felt a momentary pang of despair. *Geez louise, guys! What's with the variety? Some of us don't have a full set of TROs! I'll never recognize some of these machines!* He quickly spotted one he did recognize. A *Black Knight* broke from the pack and headed for him. "Alright, folks, looks like this one choose me. You guys pick yourselves a partner and let's dance!"

As the range counter clicked down, Teemo opened up with both large ERs and a pair of mediums. He grunted with satisfaction as the beams amputated the enemy 'Mech's right arm and sent the machine to the ground. Before he could pick out a new target, his mouth dropped open as the *Black Knight* picked itself up and headed towards him again. Glancing at his heat gauge, Teemo let fly with his lasers again, this time removing his enemy's left arm. As the 'Mech recovered and **again** headed towards him, Teemo lost control. Activating his external speakers he shouted: "This first one to say it dies!" centered his crosshairs on the enemy 'Mechs torso and opened up with all his weapons. When the smoke cleared, he was relieved to notice that there was no sign of his former foe. *I like that movie as much as the next guy, but we don't have time to sit around and quote it to our heart's content.*

"X, any word from the Rangers yet?" "No, sir." "Okay, lets keep pressing in. We're their backup if things get too heavy, and I don't want to leave them hanging in the breeze." As the 1st moved closer to the mystery facility, a *Berserker* came into view. *Crap!* "Bring him down!" he hollered over the command circuit. As he lined up his weapons, he saw it shudder as it was hit by the projectiles from a half-dozen Gauss rifles, one of which hit its head almost dead center. "Nice work! A few more like that

and this fight'll be over in no time! Now keep moving, our friends, old and new, are counting on us!"

Pyro lead his command lance away from the ComStar formation, treading through a particularly barren looking area of swamp leveled by the crash of the *Lola III*. Several minutes passed, and nothing but dead terrain seemed to greet the four assault mechs that strode purposefully along.

Erika Carson spoke up from her *Awesome*. "What are we doing here, anyway?" Ryan Furey's *BattleMaster* almost seemed to shrug. "Nobody has informed me, but I would guess we have a good reason to be patrolling the muck."

Pyro came across the radio next. "Something isn't right here, I can tell."

Amy Redshirt's *Emperor* lit up the comms line next. "Magscan's going all out of whack on me. Think it's ship debris?"

Carson rapid-fired a quick message "Contacts! Hidden BattleMechs detected. All units, it's an ambush." From there, the message degenerated into a litany of curses that could have peeled the paint off a dropship, and one still parked in orbit at that.

A few tense moments later, Pyro spoke. "All units, cease forward motion. Let them come to us."

Pyro fired an ERPPC at a concealed *Stiletto* to let them know that they'd been seen, and the bushes swarmed with BattleMechs suddenly.

"All units, open fire. Keep close."

Pyro watched his range counters tick down and fired off his long range weapons at the *Stiletto*, Gauss and ERPPC opening up its forward armor for a stream of LB-X clusters from Amy's *Emperor*. The mech's gyro exploded with a flat crack and spat metallic debris out of the chest cavity, dropping the light mech to the ground.

Eleven other lights advanced undeterred, some of them firing longer-ranged weapons at them. A *Gurkha* closed with Amy's *Emperor* and laid into it, smacking the head with a small laser blast that. Unexpectedly, the mech dropped like a sack of rocks, but the *Gurkha* was cheated of its victory by being kicked to death by Pyro's *Hauptmann*. Pyro stood his ground over the fallen *Emperor*, taking on all comers with barrages from nearly everything his mech had to offer.

The light mechs continued to boil forwards out of the swamp, but the assault lance met them one by one. A *Brigand* suffered under the touch of Carson's *Awesome*, and dropped to the ground as a multiple amputee as the four PPC's tore into it. Furey lived up to his name and ripped into a *Commando*, setting off its ammo stores and roasting its pilot, which Pyro really hoped was a Fish.

A *Cossack* came up trying to claim a kill on the fallen *Emperor*, but met the similar fate to the *Gurkha*, with its upper leg booted up into the XL engine, shattering the engine housing and dropping the 'Mech.

The *Awesome* fired again, peeling armor off a *Hollander* but failing to down it as it

fired, smashing a gauss rifle slug through Pyro's leg armor. Damage indicators glowed red and indicated moderate internal damage. Pyro shifted his weight off the damaged leg slightly, and was rewarded for the effort by having a couple medium lasers chip at it further, very nearly slicing through. Pyro returned fire as the *Emperor* regained its feet and spat a pair of cluster rounds at the *Hollander*, which dropped as its engine shielding was sanded away.

One of those infernal Marik *Locusts* rammed Furey's *BattleMaster* at top speed, nearly bowling it over and smashing a tremendous amount of armor from it, but the former Jaguar held his ground and gave back better than he got, smashing the mech's leg with a well-placed kick and savaging it with an alpha strike. Shortly after, he kicked it again and reduced the mech to scrap.

A *BattleHawk* engaged the *Emperor* up close, but was simply outmatched and ripped to shreds, and fell with a crushed left flank. The remaining enemies, a *Hermes*, *Firefly*, and *Eagle* tried to flee, but were cut down by the assaults before they could make it far.

In another dimension, the three fates screamed in impotent fury. Not only had that Force user spoiled an ambush that would have thrown the ComStar group in disarray at a critical moment, but he'd saved the blasted Redshirt again. Clearly, he was taunting them and it was time for drastic measures...

This is a crazy idea but it just might work

"Varlon, what does it look like between us and the enemy base?"

"You got the enemy in a line right now we are on the extreme end"

"And behind their front?"

"Open"

"Cool Got crazy idea that just might work. Bowtie link up with the 204th you are advancing with them. Varlon what does the terrain behind their lines look like"

"Looks like you have dryer ground there "

"Any enemy forces behind the front?"

"It looks like they are all forward"

"Good.O.K. People lets make an end run V formation I will take point we charge forward and hang a right and go straight to the wall Andrew on my left, Nightstalker on my right, TR back up Andrew, Ashton back up Night stalker Varlon you got top cover let me know if anybody gets in the way. On my mark ...3...2...1...GO!! "

Soon the Pursuit lance is loping along at a full run quick right turn and straight for the complex. Varlon is overhead, it seems that we caught them off guard there is no pursuit. For Motown's mech this is still a walk while the others are running. Within minutes, they are at the edge of the compound. Motown calls his people to a halt short of the compound.

"Varlon do a fly over what do we have"

"It looks like you have a row of bunkers and pill boxes with some guard towers "

"O.K. listen up people lets get them for chainsaw...Ashton, Nightstalker, start torching those bunkers I am going to start chopping towers Andrew, Tunnel Rat ,Varlon...cover us. O.K. people lets GIVE EM HELL!!!!!!!!!"

Enemy HQ

General Melissa is sitting in her HQ listening to the battle reports. The Dropship Irregulars have been mauling her forces but she is not worried there are lots of mechs to throw at them so she figures that sooner or later they will be overwhelmed so what if she loses a lot of her mechs most of them are fish anyways and as for the humans she has lots of them too so who cares? Certainly not her.

East side of the enemy compound.

All Hell is breaking loose Ashton and Nightstalker came charging straight on into the enemy bunker line laying flame everywhere, jumping over the bunker line and hitting them from behind, both of them are turning their flamers on everything in sight and Nightstalker is adding infernos to the mix...Fire is everywhere. Ashton is laughing insanely

"Burn baby burn !!!" HEHEHE

Motown moved around the end of the bunker line and started cutting the legs off of spotter towers watching them fall into the fires HEHEHE. Varlon is overhead when he spots vehicles and infantry coming out of bunkers in the centre of the base.

"Hey Scrappy you have incoming infantry and vehicles "

"Thanks. Tunnel Rat jump over and cover the Firestarters"

"Aff"

"Andrew watch my back"

"Right"

"Varlon see if you can make them duck"

"You got it!"

Motown adjusts the cuts on the tower to cut and drop them right on top of an infantry group, crushing the ones that are slow of foot. Nightstalker turns and sprays a group of infantry and light tanks with flamers and Inferno rounds while Ashton keeps torching bunkers. Tunnel Rat meanwhile sends a brace of laser fire into a Gallion hitting with every thing and Andrew puts two AC rounds into the front of a Striker, which promptly explodes. There is a lot of return fire but most of it is wild and little actually hits it would appear that we have caught them completely off guard.

Enemy HQ

Corporal Drums comes running it to General Melissa's office tripping over the door kick plate and sliding across the floor into the General's desk.

"General, General The Dropship Irregulars have broken through the east side of the base there is at least a division maybe more!!! With an air regiment covering them!!!!"

The General stands up, she knows the Corporal is a moron and panics a lot.

"I don't know why I put up with you"

With that she delivers a swift kick to his ribs.

"I will get in my Flaming Hammer mech and deal with them myself."

Right side of the enemy base

Chaos reins supreme the bunker line is now burning merrily and the field is littered with burning vehicles and bodies. Fallen guard towers are everywhere. Varlon is strafing anything that tries to exit the underground bays... that is the ones that are not blocked by fire, the BoM's Pursuit star is causing damage and destruction all out of proportion to the size of the force. Great plumes of smoke are now visible to the entire front line.

PPC, Doorknobs, LRMs, SRMs, Lasers, you name it, it's flying.....

"Keep them north, push them west"

The 204th lines up in a fire line, putting concentrated fire to the enemy's right side, pushing them towards the new lake, the AirCav harassing directly to the east.

5 mechs and 5 VTOLs vs 4..8..10..12....lots of them

"AirCav to Bearded...Protos...."

MERDE!!!MERDE, MERDE, MERDE!!!

"Drunken Monkeys...hic...to the rescue!!!"

A Barrage of fire came flying from behind our left side "Motown has broken the line...BURRRP!!"

"Good, force them westward, and don't let them get within firing range of the BoM Pursuit"

Just then, the protos come in to play.....

"Wortroll, the lead one, after me" A radio click affirmed the plan.

Fred lets his Large laser just high and to the left, forcing it to duck down and to the right, just in time to meet Worktroll's dual PPCs....no more proto

"Michael, how many??"

"2 points, the rest mechs, our armour will not hold up much longer"

"Head to the LZ.....get the bombs ready....."

Ohmigawd "Watch your fire! I've got men in that compound!" Teemo shouted over the commnet. *I know we have to take that facility, but....* His musings were interrupted by an incessant beeping from the comlink to his dropships. "Make it quick, I'm kinda busy here!" he growled. "Yessir! The choppers you requested are about to take off." *'Bout bloody time* "Vector them this way, and tell them to contact me when they're in range!" "Yes, sir! Will do!" "Teemo to all Irregular forces, I've got fresh units coming that can help with those defenses." As the 1st continued to push forward, Teemo wondered how the Rangers were making out in their mission.

Enemy facility

Hagar

As the strange building shook to a not quite distant enough explosion, Sgt. Mike Hartnett led his squad toward what he hoped was the center of the building. So far,

what they found didn't seem too far different from their base back on Alpheratz: Sleeping quarters, shower rooms, dining facilities; everything, that is, except for the giant chambers filled with what looked like giant aquariums. As the squad moved down the hall, his point man gave the signal to halt. As the troops settled into their respective crouches, Pvt. Clancy moved toward the door at the end of the hall. After a long moment he looked back down the hall and tapped his ear. *Finally. The lack of inhabitants was starting to creep me out.* Sgt. Hartnett thought to himself as he gestured for his squad to get ready to take down the room. As he watched Pvt. Clancy pull out a flash-bang grenade, he wondered what they'd find inside.....

"Mo you got a full assault battalion coming out of the center of the base and they are coming right at you!! And it looks like they have armour and infantry support"
"Shiza! O.K. people lets get the hell out of here NOW!! Ashton, Nightstalker lay down some fire. Andrew, Tunnel Rat give them some cover fire"

{We are all going to die. At least I will not be around to have to tell the parents of the youngens that I got their baby killed}

"MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY"

Motown watches Varlon as he switches to aerospace fighter mode and strafes the enemy force that most of their weapons cannot even reach them, and that unfortunately they have plenty that can reach us. Tunnel Rat's Jenner with 4 clantech ER mediums is the closest thing they have to a fire support mech...*yeow right like four ER mediums even Clan tech is going to mean much against that force the two IS ER mediums I carry seem like a joke.* The BoM pursuit star fires into the hoard cutting back and force and criss-crossing as they try to dodge the LRMs PPCs and large lasers that are incoming. Ashton and Nightstalker lay a nice wall of fire
"O.K. people lets get the hell out of here"
And they turn and run for their lives.

Pyro triggered his jumpjets repeatedly, leaping through the swamp terrain with the benefit of The Force to guide him to semi-solid landing surfaces as the rest of his battered command lance proceeded behind him.

In the distance, the battle loomed as the four scarred mechs moved forward with purpose. Pyro called up a map of the battlefield itself on a secondary display and watched the progression as the BoM moved too far forward, drawing the attention of what appeared to be a combined arms battalion? Nah, too small. Pyro assigned the designation crapload to the enemy force.

Pyro flipped one of the channel switches on his communications control.

"Barrel of Monkeys, this is ComStar Command. Commence fighting withdrawal. Just walk backwards and keep up the business as usual. Covering fire is inbound."

With that, Pyro switched to another frequency. "Hell's Angels, commence air strikes upon the following coordinates. Use D-Frag's and Infernos, support with a single strafing pass, then return to base."

An "Aye Sir" came from the comm and moments later, the thunder of heavy fighters could be heard overhead. Twenty ComGuard fighters split into pairs with well-practiced precision and delivered their initial bomb load of D-Frag bombs to the target area. The cluster bombs exploded upon contact with targets, scattering

doorknob sub munitions all over the battlefield, perforating armor in a manner similar to LB-X clusters. The follow-up infernos capitalized on the damage done and raised the mechs heat considerably.

For an encore, the fighters turned for a final pass and strafed the pursuing mechs, rewarded by two massive explosions and no less than three machines falling into the muck. Many others began evasive action to avoid what they believed would be a continuing attack as the BoM were left with a sudden opening...

"Fred, the BoM Pursuit lance is backing out, surprise attack from the city, the Comstar fighters cleared some of it up"

"Thanks Esme"

The 204th and the Drunken monkeys kept the Protos and the rest of the northern attack force from heading south and pinned them against the lake...but their armour was wearing thin...

damned protos Fred thought as he tried to snipe the little shnitz....

"Sir, I'm out of LRMs..." "No prob Major Tom, Head back and re-load and get back her, move straight south for 500 meters then straight to the LZ"

A Click affirmed the order

"Jimmy, hows the doorknobs?" "Still got some..."

"Aircav to Bearded, where do you want the glop?"

"K, everyone, coral the protos, Michael, slow those buggers down!!"

The 204th and drunken Monkeys circle around the protos, pushing them tighter and tighter together.....5 VTOLs come screaming in overhead and drop the thick soup, immobilizing the protos, ripe for the pickin.....

Just before Fred could smile, Esme comes over the horn, "Your left flank sir..."

Fred repositioned himself to take a gauss rifle round to the chest, blasted Hollander, followed by an Atlas...

Fred hit the jets, fired his ER Large laser, capped the head of the Hollander just to have loud warning bells go off in his cockpit, followed by a shut down as he hit land, the internal heating unit blew out....face to face with an Atlas....*great, c'mon heat come down now!!!....*

 The suspense!!! Will one of the Drunken monkeys post a miraculous save? Will Fred have his career ended by an AC/20 round? Will Fred every get the chance to be with the every so sexy Natalya?

Tune in Next Time, for the answer!!!

The Three Fates ponder the situation...why doesn't the Redshirt have an I.H.U.?.....well, we'll get the Redshirt later, now, what do we do with him?....

Another aerofighter shot by and Fokker nailed it with a steady stream of doorknobs as Medron pulled around to focus on his own enemy. His legs poured flames into the air, holding his LAM in the air as his arms came around, pointing the particle cannons at another fighter. Shells flashed past his wings from other enemies but he had eyes only for his target as it pulled around for another pass. He pulled the trigger, both cannons fired, and the enemy fighter spiraled out of control as one of its wings shattered under the assault.

Medron took a moment to look around as weapons fire continued to fill the skies over the ground battle, showering the wreckage of fighters and LAMs onto the land. This was turning into a major battle to be sure. A flight of ComStar fighters dove down and blew the dust bunnies out of numerous enemy 'Mechs, leaving a hole for the Barrel of Monkeys. Good. He twisted as a stream of autocannon shells shot into and by his LAM before returning fire with a single blast. His heat levels were too high right now for both weapons, but against aerofighters even one hit was enough to take them down. Unfortunately, aerofighters were more slippery than a Red Shirt was unlucky.

A squadron of them swung in behind another Third Knight fighter and blew it out of the sky with a concentrated volley of autocannon rounds before losing a third of their number to the fighter's backup. They scattered, pulling maneuvers no aerospace fighter could match, and formed back up for another concentrated salvo. Their target fell to the side, flames pouring out of its flanks, and Medron brought up his other cannon. A blast rang out from the weapon and shredded an aerofighter as the last ASF hit the gas and boosted straight up for space.

And then the three fighters knifed around to face him and began peppering him with streams of autocannon rounds. Alarms went off in the cockpit as Medron brought up his first cannon again and fired back. All around, fighters and LAMs continued to fight in the air over the battle, but in this moment it was just two fighters and a LAM.

They kept peppering him and he twisted the LAM around to follow as they shot past, missing with another shot. He tried to transform into fighter mode but warning lights came back. Those systems were shot. Literally. This was going to be fun. He glanced at his fuel level and winced as the fighters finished their turn and came back. It was time to make for the deck. He cut his jets, feeling the LAM beginning to drop like a rock, and braced as more rounds smashed into his armor.

He fired back with both cannons this time and one of the fighters fell out of the sky, but the last one kept on moving in as its nose-mounted cannon ablated more armor away. He glanced down as the ground rose to meet him and slammed the jump jet button down again. Nothing happened.

"Oh sh---" was all he had time for before his LAM smashed into the ground at over 100 kilometers an hour.

On another plane, the three fates cheered as it looked like at least one of their plans was working out

Looks like the enemy was shook when the BoM pursuit star crashed through the brush and burst upon the 204ths position and crap out of the fry pan into the fire. Fred's Ti T'sang is about to get clobbered by an Atlas...Not if TR has anything to say about it. She charges up point blank and pours everything into the back of the Atlas. 4 clantech ER medium lasers and an ER micro can make an impression even on an Atlas, especially when two of the mediums hit it upside the head. What a mess. Motown bisects a Minotaur with his right saw and caught a Satyr with his left, lopping off its legs. Andrew splatters a Wolverine with Both Ac shells and three SRMs spread across the torso, it hits back with its own AC and SRMs Andrew cleaves it with the sword and hits it with a couple of missiles. Tunnel Rat and Motown do a sandwich job on an Ostol. She hits it in the front and Motown gets it from behind. They chew a lot of armour off but it hits them back too. Another exchange and it goes down and so does Tunnel Rat. Motown's mech is showing damage to the engine shielding. Andrew's mech is showing damage as well. The Firestarters are looking only slightly better. Motown looks around as the 204th and Drunken Monkeys dispatch the remainder of the enemy but it is looking grim.

The Fates just look down in disgust once again things did not go as planned. Lebeau was toast then a 3 1/2 year old driving a Jenner took out the Atlas 3 1/2 year old!!! What was SHE doing there! This was getting beyond ridiculous

Blasty's RAC whirled into silence. *Damn*, he thought, *out of ammo!* Flashes of red, blue and green filled his vision, as lasers were exchanged between combatants. Wasting no time, he punched at his opponent, water flowing out of the crushed cockpit.

All around him the battle continued but he wasn't paying much attention to it. He was busy with some protos. A Siren came charging at him with weapons blazing, at which he kicked hard with TSM strength, making a parody of a field goal as it soared between Bowtie's and Sten's mechs. Many followed their flakey comrade, as the Drunken Monkeys were getting sober and wanted to make something's life a living hell for it. He fired his last volley out of his ATM, raining what once was a Mad Cat down upon them.

A hard hit to Blasty's right arm tore that arm's laser clear from it's housing. He was getting irritated. The *General Lee* lurched to full speed and struck the Warhammer that had fired that PPC hard, knocking it onto it's back at Clarke's feet. Clarke promptly used its cockpit for a leap board in his own fight. It was at this time that Blasty saw something hit the ground hard a distance away.

Motown looks over his battered command. Fortunately the enemy is following the track we made coming in and has bypassed us. They are in bad shape. Andrew's Blitzkreig is out of AC ammo has 11 salvos left for the quad rack and has damage to the engine shielding, and 65 % armour loss. Nightstalker has 6 salvos of standard and 1 of infernos left for the 6 pack and has lost 45% of his armour. Ashton lost a flamer and has 60% armour lost. The Jenner is down gyro and engine damage Tunnel Rat is out and has shed her coolant vest (dress?) Motown has 65% armour loss and engine damage. The Drunken Monkeys and 204th look just as bad. Only the air units are in Good shape...except for chainsaw.

"Star Commander, Star Commander"

It is Tunnel Rat. Motown looks as she is jumping up and down and pointing in the manner little kids do when agitated
"What is it kid"
"We got to save him!"
"Save who?"
"Save Medron he crashed over there"
I see the smoke plume in the direction she is pointing
"O.K. kid"
I reach down and put out my mechs right hand
"Watch out for the blade"
Motown opens his cockpit and she climbs in and jams herself into the space behind his seat
"O.K. lets go, hold on"
Motown runs over to the smoking wreckage. Medron's Zero-LAM had plowed into a stand of trees that broke his fall. Motown switches out his left blade for a tree cutter and start cutting away the trees. He lays open the crushed Cockpit...and sees movement. Tunnel Rat almost kicks Motown in the head scrambling out of the cockpit. scrabbles down the left arm and jumps onto the wreckage.
Medron opens his eyes and sees a cute face staring at him
"Are you an angel"
"Na I am a Rat"*giggle*"a Tunnel Rat"*giggle*
She grabs a piece of cable and a stick and winds it around his arm and tightens it
"We cannot have you bleeding to death now can we"
Motown activates a distress beacon
"I need med evac on this location It is Medron"
"Roger ETA two minutes"
"O.K. Tunnel Rat hows he look?"
"His metal limbs are all busted up his arm has a real bad cut and he has some bumps on his head...He thought Iwas an angel"*giggle*
chuckle"Obviously he does not know you very well!"
"HEY!"
"ya you are a little demon"
"HEY"
The Med evac arrives It is the same redshirt medic that Hauled Chainsaw away.
Motown leans over the side of the Cockpit
"Hey you look familiar...you got a name?"
"Ya Inconsequential Random Redshirt"
"That is a mouthful ...you mind if I just call you Connie?"
"No Star Commander that's O.K."
"O.K. You can call me Don"
"O.K. Don I got work to do now "
"O.K. we can talk later"
"I would like that"
Medron is loaded and they take off for the MASH

Unknown plain of existence

What the, How in the that Damn little kid AGAIN!!!~! 3 1/2year olds are not supposed to drive mechs!!! Not only that now yet Another Redshirt is getting it on with an officer down there!The three fates scowl at the antics of the Dropship Irregulars .This, this, this is JUST WRONG!!!

Back in the swamp

"O.K. people we are pulling back to the Beast to get the spare mechs. These are in to bad of shape. Fitz get those spares ready and be ready to do some more work."
"Right boss you got it"

As the great Jedi had once said, the manure had just intersected with the air circulator. Pyro and the ComStar command unit thundered ahead as the terrain gave way to the well-manicured grounds of the research complex.

Pyro heard about Medron's crash and met the news with an epic litany of curses, some of which were Star League era LosCurses forgotten even by the Clans, potent enough to prompt even a New Avalon Catholic Pope to violence. But still, he was driven forward by the dire necessity of the situation. Things were going to hell in a hand basket...

And the fates were smiling. Pyro, of course, didn't know this. He didn't even believe in fates, gods, or other powers. He just felt a certain compulsion forward, as fast as possible... and answered it by running his 'Mech as fast as it would go.

Damage monitors slowly turned deeper shades of red as Pyro pushed the battle worn Hauptmann to extremes that would make even the bravest of engineers cry, still thundering ahead. A number of enemy aerofighters thundered overhead, and a quick force-aided snap-shot put a gauss slug through the cockpit of one. Not before it released its bombs, however.

The ground heaved and exploded around the Hauptmann and the other 'Mechs, and Pyro watched the damage report for his right leg turn from red to black. With uncanny speed, he angled his mech's fall forward and pulled the D-ring between the legs of his command couch, catapulting his seat away from the doomed 'Mech and over the wall of the facility.

The other three 'Mechs followed, plowing through the ferrocrete wall and into the research complex's grounds. A swarm of protomechs boiled out of the facility to meet the breach in the wall and was met with a flurry of kicks and assaults from the three mechs.

Pyro came to, just in time to find his chair suspended in the air, and hanging by its parachute from a flagpole. Sliding out of the restraint harness, he grabbed his two swords and cloak from the compartment and dropped to the ground.

Pyro blinked at the strange sight that greeted him. It was a wholly odd object just shy of two meters in length, looking very much like those Darwin Fish bumper stickers and plates often seen on the backs of vehicles belonging to the irreverently agnostic. It also looked very ticked off, and suspiciously like it had a small laser strapped to its back, destroying the image entirely.

Calling upon the force, Pyro leapt upwards and drove down with one of his swords, driving the point of the blade into one of the round-eyed clear bubbles on the side of the head with a metallic crunch, and rolled away pulling the blade out just in time to dodge a missile from a protomech of some sort.

Amy's *Emperor* went down, but Ryan Furey quickly dispersed a swarm of the small fish heading for it with a few vicious kicks and a flurry of laser bursts. Erika Carson brought up the rear, frying protos with well-placed PPC shots. Suddenly, the ground shook as a *Warhammer*-looking assault mech strode up and fired what appeared to be a quartet of light autocannons, downing the damaged *BattleMaster* by finishing the job started in the first battle and crushing the engine.

Pyro leapt onto the *Emperor* and pulled Amy out of the cockpit, then hopped onto a flattened security guard shack and finally to the ground just as the monster of a mech crushed the fallen *Emperor*. Again, the fates screamed. Pyro only sensed a disturbance in the Force.

Carson fought the monstrosity valiantly, but fell as those infernal armor-piercing rounds the thing carried defeated her mech. She had the good sense to eject, not waiting for the DFA-mad mech to come to her. The ComStar team assembled briefly and then broke into a run for the facility. Erika turned and fired a few long bursts from the clips of the twin "custom" gauss pistols that Pyro had given her, then continued toward the facility as a line of tracers came disturbingly close to her feet.

The enemy assault mech tried to track the running warriors, but it was obvious that their gunnery was quite terrible... She even failed to hit Amy Redshirt on several occasions, and very nearly came close to hitting, and would have if Furey hadn't yanked her back by the collar and out of the way of a line of tracer fire.

Research Complex
Hagar, Far Periphery

General Melissa laughed as the four warriors ran away from her. Though she was unable to finally kill them off as they darted back and forth, she knew it was only a matter of time. And she had all day...

Goose looked down, tracking the battle from the air and saw a sight that made his blood boil. It was an abomination of a BattleMech, a munchkinish monster from the deepest depths of hell that should never be allowed to see the light of day. It was a mockery of the ideals of Team Bonsai, a technological terror that was constructed with abuse and malice at heart. It was the one and only *Flaming Hammer*, a 100 ton Assault 'Mech built to cripple 'Mechs and DFA them once they were rendered wholly helpless.

With a ferocious growl, he angled his *YF-19 Eagle One* LAM at the astoundingly munchy machine...

General Melissa smiled as her targeting computers finally coughed up an infallible firing solution and began to tighten her fingers around the trigger... Then her 'Mech shook suddenly, sending her tracers into a hapless fish, splattering it inside its armor suit.

With fury, she turned to track the newcomer... a nearly impossibly fast LAM that had

dared ruin her victory. She triggered a full burst at the intervening 'Mech and prepared for battle.

Goose laughed as another stream of autocannon tracers utterly failed to find his mech, moving nimbly in Land-Air mode as it was. One pair of bursts even went into the ground. What kind of amateur was he dealing with?

General Melissa scowled as the LAM continued to dodge and weave, constantly throwing off her shots. Finally, she just screamed in fury. "That's not fair, stand still!"

Goose laughed at the tantrum and triggered an alpha strike, burning into the rear armor of the abomination. Pulse Lasers were chased by SSRM warheads, which tore into the unprotected back and found autocannon ammunition. A series of devastating sympathetic explosions reduced the *Flaming Hammer* to flaming rubbish, and Goose cheered at the fireball below.

However, the last of the tracers astoundingly slammed into his left side, shattering the exhaust ports of two jumpjets. Suddenly unbalanced, Goose killed two jumpjets, reducing his acceleration by nearly half and limped away at low speeds, expertly correcting the spin the uneven thrust had introduced. The *Eagle One* sailed over the battlefields, trailing smoke and headed toward Team Bonsai's nearest repair facility.

Fred finally restarts his mech, in awe at TRs tenacity on the feild....

"AirCav, number 2 down, 300m North of you Fred, ve must vithdraw"

Number 2...NATALYA!!!

"Jimmy, you're in charge!!"

The TiT'sang moves forward, ignoring all other mechs going towards Natalya, A single Rifleman was trying to snipe the rest of Angel Flight on their way out

Mon p'tit gawdamn!!! Fred thought in a fit of rage. The Rifleman brought his ACs to bear, tearing into the already battered Ti T'sang, Fred simply ignores the barrage and pounces on the mech, slamming the hatchet over and over again into the enemy mech, the thoughts in Freds mind, even in French, are not suitable to publish....

A sudden fusion engine explosion was the only thing that snapped Fred out of his furious assault on the Rifleman, unfortunately, it snaps him into unconsciousness.

About 5minutes later Fred snaps awake. Quickly he pops the hatch of his totaled mech, straps his targe and mace to his back, and assembles his Rifle

The SoroSub PS-9 is a wholly powerful rifle, a mix of a slugthrower and hand held gauss rifle, the 15mm slugs can gut Battle Armour, and breach mechs armour in a few well placed shots, with an effective range of 200m. It is advised that 2 shots are not shot back to back, as shoulders tend to dislocate as a result of this.

Fred roles behind a tree in time to hide from a scout armour to come around and check the now vacant cockpit. Fred adjusts his scope, breaths in slightly

vvvvvvv-KATCHUNK

The round finds a nice little place in the back of the armoured infantry, dropping it fast.

Behind Fred, another scout armour makes his presence known, Fred turns to stare into the barrel of a large machine gun.....click-click-click.....

The unit looks at his gun vvvvvv-KATCHUNK, the round went clear through the armour, splitting a tree behind it.

A deep guttural laugh rang out from Freds, right. A Black man in Coat-tails, a top hat and a skull painted on his face "Meme les Trois Destins ne t'aurais pas aujourd'hui!!! Vien, vien!"

The man wves him over and points behind him and skips off into the swamp...and vanishes

Fred Smiles *The Baron Samedi himself will not let me die today!*
Fred heads off in that direction, towards Natalya.

Once Fred finds the downed Mantis, he checks the area thoroughly...nothing. He heads over and cracks open the cockpit, Natalya, barely consious lulls her head over, and coughs.

"Non, ma cher, don't talk"

Fred takes out his portable comm "Hunter 4-2 to Gator" The Tyr hovertank commander comes on the line "Gator here" "You are now call sign 'Dust-off'" "Where you at" "300meters north of the 204th BoM fire line, head in from the East, fast!!"

"Dust-off inbound"

Fred crouches down, and holds Natalya's hand "You no die on me b'fore you done try my gumbo, henh?" Natalya simply smiles, her gray eyes showing no fear

"Dust-off near position, beacon" Fred hits the switch on his transponder, moments later, the Tyr hovertank weaves out of the trees to pick up Natalya.

"Dust-off, take us home"

Research Facility
Hagar, Far Periphery

ComStar was once seen as a serene order of monks who dutifully maintained the HPG network, which formed the backbone of human communications, commerce, and interstellar diplomacy.

That perception largely fell by the wayside after Tukayyid, and took a major kick to the crotch with the Word of Blake's shenanigans. But if there was any doubt left in a person's mind that monks and warriors populated ComStar, they need only have looked at the four madmen (and women) bolting toward the research facility.

A squad of Fish battlearmor came around the corner and pointed their weapons out the door, hoping to stop the ComStar group from reaching the facility. However, they were mistaken in their threat assessment and quickly dispatched by a hail of gauss slugs from Erika's pistols and Amy's Thunderstroke, as well as a few PPC bursts from Ryan Furey's favored NAIS Banzai III PPC Pistols. The last of the bunch suffered a sword to the skull plate.

The facility was breached, and the ComStar team was in... and greeted by an unusual calm. Working room by room, they found no evidence of inhabitation until the sounds of gunfire started. Running, they found a team of infantry brought by Teemo.

Pyro spoke up first. "Alright. We need this facility intact. No demolitions. Covering fire!"

The infantry team lifted their weapons and fired at the mix of Fish BattleArmor and dregs of humanity that opposed while Pyro ran ahead, deflecting laser and ballistic weapons with his blades with nearly perfect precision. Nearly perfect, because one of the deflected bullets caught him in the left foot and forced a stumble. Pyro leapt with the right and held a sword out in front of him, spearing another fish suit, and threw the left-hand blade through the chest of a former Elemental.

Rolling off his recent aquatic kill, Pyro collected the other sword and deflected a sudden attack from another of the enemy soldiers in such a way that it reflected into a Fish battlesuit's tail, causing its inhabitant to thrash wildly. The infantry and the ComStar team caught up, forcing the enemy back into a control room. Pyro winced as he stood up and shifted his weight to his right side. "I really shouldn't have done that..."

Amy shook her head. "Jedi aren't invincible. You need to be more careful." Momentarily blocking the intense pain, Pyro looked over to the rest of the infantry. "Fan out by squads. Take prisoners if you can, kill them if you must. Make sure to call if you see anyone using swords, leave any Dark Jedi to me."

The infantry teams dispersed, and Pyro sat down heavily. Erika looked to him curiously. "And how are you going to deal with them?"

Pyro cringed. "Simple. I'll have to use the Headtank." Pyro pulled a long cylinder out of Ryan Furey's field pack and stuck his foot in it. The nanobots went to work and took a few minutes to process the fact that some random idjit had stuck something other than a head into the miniature Fishtank, and analyzed the appendage. Once

the onboard computer determined the nature of the wound, the offending projectile was removed from the wound and the cellular damage repaired in an efficient, fast, and highly painful manner.

After three minutes of screaming in agony and passing out, Pyro woke to Erika standing over him with smelling salts. Realizing there was little time to be lost, Pyro towed off the still-wet foot with the tail of his robe, and put his bloody boot back on. "Alright. Let's go kick some fish."

The Warriors and the Schola marched slowly through the swamp, towards the research facility, as Longwalker kept on herding them forward. Weapons flared on the ground and in the air, bringing down 'Mechs and fighters alike. A LAM smashed into the ground near them and they kept moving forward. They had a mission.

A Schola heavy 'Mech spun around an attacking BattleMech and blew its rear armor in with a single well-placed hit. Then it fell to the ground itself as an enemy vehicle filled it full of particle cannon fire. More 'Mechs on each side went down, but the rest of the DropShip Irregulars had already done what they need to do. The defenders were falling back, unable to hold all of the attackers off.

Longwalker lost an arm to an errant shot but kept moving as the depleted ranks of the Warriors of the DropShip and the Schola followed him. In the distance, lightning smashed into the ground, and the thunder rolled across the battlefield. Another storm was coming. It was time to end this.

Meanwhile, in Orbit

Hagar, Far Periphery

The *Cobra MASH VTOL* landed by the ComStar base, and the latest casualty, a mangled League babbling about angels rescuing him, was rushed aboard a waiting dropshuttle, one of many that was currently not in use thanks to the *Holy Flame* and *St. Paul* finishing up with the naval battle quickly.

Dr. Strangenstein removed the last bit of metallic rubbish from the patient. "He was lucky he had all these protetic replacements. Flesh crushed like this would have bled him to death." He threw the last bit of metal into a surgical tray and turned to one of the nurses. "Dunk him."

The first thing Medron woke to was intense and total pain, that subsided to a dull ache as the liquid he found himself suspended in drained from the tank. Once drained, the doors opened and a nurse threw a surgical gown on him.

With a groan, he realized that his phantom pain was in full force. He could feel every one of his missing extremities as if it were still real, and that never ceased to annoy him. He looked down at the hand he was flexing unconsciously, and was surprised indeed to see an actual hand there. Two arms, two legs, two feet... And his vision didn't have that grainy electronic look. "How?"

The ComStar nurse spoke as if from memory. "Your prosthetics were thoroughly destroyed and removed before the procedure. We had to re grow your limbs from raw biomass. Go easy on them for the next couple weeks if possible, as it will take some time for the muscular and skeletal system to reach normal endurance. You've been rebuilt from the cellular level up and now resemble yourself at your prime. Some disorientation may result."

Medron looked into a mirror. "Some disorientation?" It was like viewing at a picture of the past, though it actually mimicked his movements. *Now I know how Pyro does it...* "Am I dreaming? Or dead?"

The nurse shook her head. "No, but it was a near thing. Get some rest, doctor's orders."

A loud roaring scream came from another Fishtank unit as the warrior known as Chainsaw woke up. Medron cringed as he walked out the door to the rest of the sickbay. The door shut behind him, silencing the scream halfway. *I'm really glad they had the foresight to soundproof that room*, Medron thought as sleepiness and the dull after-nanosurgery ache crept into his consciousness. Another nurse helped him into a hospital bed and he was out before his head hit the pillow.

Still in the *%*)*#@^& swamp
Hagar, Far Periphery

As he fired off the last of his SRMS, Teemo looked around in time to see the medevac unit rushing away from what remained of Medron's LAM.

LAM and ASF parts falling like rain, the BOM and 204th are having to send units back for repair, Pyro's command lance have been blown out of their 'Mechs...what've we got ourselves into?

As he led the 1st forward, he noted with satisfaction Goose's downing of the presumed leader of...whoever the Bad Guys were. Further thoughts were interrupted when he looked at his own 'Mech's status board. *At this rate, Pyro's people won't be the only ones fighting dismounted.* "Teemo to all Kilted units, give me status reports now, please." As his company reported on the condition of their respective 'Mechs, he wondered if the Dropship Irregulars would be the ones to cede the field. "Okay, recon lance head back to reload and repair. Everyone else, on me. If we don't break through now, we may never do it." As his forces started to move towards Pyro's, he noted the arrival of his helicopters. He watched as the Super Cobras unleashed their wire-guided missiles at a group of (relatively) fresh enemy 'Mechs.

Though none on the enemy machines were knocked completely out of the fight, he knew that they could not afford to take too many salvoes before the damage threatened their ability to put up resistance. As his unit linked up with the ComStar delegation, he nodded with satisfaction as two enemy 'Mechs went down after a second salvo of TOWs. With the loss of their comrades, the other 'Mechs seemed to hesitate for a second. Teemo's heart lightened slightly. *Hmm, if we can keep this up a few more minutes, we might just get the momentum to shift in our favor.*

The Brightmoor Dream Team recovery vehicles arrive and pick up the Gold bug and some of the smaller mechs. Nervously scanning the tree line poop flingers at the ready. Motown looks around at the carnage . LeBeau's Ti T'sang is down as is the Aircav's XO's Mantis. Lebeau is out off his mech and appears to be in not too bad of shape but the Aircav pilot is another story she looks bad. It looks like Motown is the ranking officer now. He watches as they load Fred and Natalya in the Tyr in the distance, there is one chance now.

"BoM, 204th we are pulling back to the Beast to rearm and repair and re-equip "

Motown looks at the mechs. The four remaining mechs of the BoM pursuit star are all in bad shape the remaining mechs of the 204th look just as bad .The Drunken Monkees are in better shape. Motown looks over his shoulder at Tunnel Rat crammed behind the seat. She is looking real tired, poor little kid. With the engine damage the Demolisher is running hot. It is 40 degrees in there, and there was no room for her cooling vest. She is sweating like hell! Motown passes her a bottle of cold Code Red, she takes it with out a word, *'Man this sucks she should not be here. Just what the hell is wrong with me?'*

"204th you take the right side of the column, Bob, you take left, Pursuit star front "

We move out 12 badly battered mechs the six recovery vehicles are in the center of the group. Fortunately the enemy has pulled back to cover their base. But there was no time to screw around; reload and repair the mechs that are lightly damaged. The badly damaged mechs are parked and we fire up the back-ups

"O.K. People I want to move out in two hours hit the johns shove some food in your bellies and lets get back out there. We are needed so lets not waste anytime."

At that time, the TBDS Morningstar sets down not far from the Beast, a hover craft blasts out of an open hatch before the dust has time to settle, Calis drives while Discord tries to hold MercChick in the vehicle, the vehicle pulls up at the bottom of Beast's loading ramps with MercChick yelling for Tunnel Rat. Calis waits for the couple to dis-embark and goes looking for Goose.

While driving away Calis chuckles thinking Motown is in for a bad night, having found Goose he tells him that everything needed to repair his LAM is aboard the Morningstar. Calis goes off to help unload the rest of Team Bonsai's mechs and equipment and then climbs about his Bushwhacker and heads off towards the front lines to help out with picket duty.

Elsewhere, Medron ran through the swamp, feeling his 'Mech roll with each step from side to side, as the sun began to go down. One of the new 'Mechs built in Marian space, it flowed through the swamp like a long-distance runner, dodging trees and ruined weapons of war like it was an extension of his body. In the distance, the sound of fighting grew louder. Then he saw a flash of light. In the air, the battle looked like it was finally coming to a close. The Third Knights were winning.

He nodded as a defending fighter smashed into the ground near him, exploding into a thousand pieces, and kept on running. The Warriors needed him. The sound of Longwalker shouting at them to hook around the right came through the comm. gear and he scowled. Ok, so maybe they **didn't** need him.

On the map, he saw the rest of the Irregulars fighting away at the remaining forces and nodded again. It was close, but they couldn't hold much longer. He hoped. Finally he noted the WOTD dispatching the last of the enemy between them and the facility. Good. He glanced up to see them turning to defend it against the other enemy forces, weapons steaming from near-constant combat. Then he saw the

enemy charging again. He was too far away for his secondary weapons, but the primary weapons had the range.

His 'Mech rolled from foot to foot as he stared at his target and fired two streams of doorknobs from his torso. One enemy went down, but they kept coming as the WOTD opened up as well. More went down but more kept coming. They wanted that facility back.

Just great.

Medron loved being in high-demand areas.

Chapter 11

February 15th
Research Complex
Hagar, Far Periphery

The ComStar team headed deeper into the complex, following the sounds of gunfire within. Few additional teams of fish met them along the way, but a number of fallen soldiers, most of them enemies, littered the facility as they progressed inwards.

They passed the main thrust of Teemo's infantry several minutes ago and continued on, finding no signs of life, but plenty of signs of death. The facility was redecorated with carnage that'd have put Steven King off his lunch. Bodies, human and fish alike, lay in twisted positions that the living could never quite manage to mimic.

Pyro stopped briefly. "I have a really bad feeling about this."

Erika rolled her eyes. "No, really? And most of us just love finding mysterious piles of corpses."

Pyro sighed. "It's deeper than that. Think about it for a second, we already passed our own infantry, right?"

She nodded in the affirmative.

"Then why is everything here already fragged?"

A look crossed her face, a look once termed by an ancient eccentric philosopher as the HFS (an abbreviation for a descriptor of things divine, another word for coupling, and another word for poop) look.

Pyro turned back down the hall and started along again. "That's why the bad feeling."

The ComStar team continued on, passing massive banks of computer hardware and entered a hallway that was somehow underwater. Had they descended this deep below the surface, that they were now under a lake? The hallway was made of transpex, the same material as BattleMech cockpits, and obviously situated on a lakebed. A beautiful panoramic subsurface view could be seen in all directions, and the surface of the lake shone brightly under the sunlight about 20 feet overhead. A skinnier, non-EI imprinted version of the BattleCarp swam lazily past without blinking.

But as remarkable as this hallway was, what it held was more remarkable. A scene of carnage, much like the one before, but some of the bodies were wearing white robes. In addition to that were six people, decked in black, armed to the teeth, wearing Bad Guy (™) T-shirts.

One of them looked to Pyro. "Well, if it isn't the rogue Precentor-Martial. How fortuitous that fate dumps you into our lap on the day that we punish the Fish-people. Her Celestial Wisdom is quite displeased with your attention-getting antics and requests an audience."

Pyro blinked. "Long way to Sian."

The troopers, quite obviously Death Commandos, still stood.

Pyro continued. "And I got work to do. Afraid I'll decline that invite for now."

One of the Death Commandos smiled grimly. "She never said you were to be taken to her alive..."

They went for their weapons, and Pyro thrust a hand forward and catapulted them backwards as the ComStar team drew their own. The Death Commandos regained their feet, but two of them were too slow to avoid a hail of slugs from Ryan and Erika. Pyro threw his right-hand sword through the chest of another and leapt forward, smashing his head against the low transpex ceiling and knocking him for a loop.

Amy Redshirt contributed a Thundestroke slug to a fourth Commando, blasting a hole clear through his midsection and propelling him backwards about five feet. The two remaining commandos managed to fire back, hitting Amy and Ryan in the midsection, driving them to the floor.

The fates cheered as their chosen agents finally accomplished the seemingly impossible.

Erika fired back quickly, one burst from each gauss pistol at the remaining bad guys, punching through their armor with ease and reducing their internal organs to mush.

Pyro picked himself up off the floor, head swimming as he looked around. The white robed bodies clicked. "The scientists... the bastards killed the scientists."

The sound of a groan grabbed his attention next, and he turned, seeing Ryan Furey writhing on the floor in pain and Amy lying fairly still, bleeding. The haze of head injury was quickly pushed away. "Erika, call a medic!"

"I did... they're all busy at the moment."

Pyro's mind raced, and came to a solution. He spoke while picking up Amy and draping her over one shoulder. She moaned in obvious pain in response. "Stay with Furey and do what you can for him. Call Team Bonsai in once Teemo's people report that the facility is secure. You're in command for now."

She barely had time to begin a protest by the time Pyro broke off in a run, carrying Amy with the best speed calling upon The Force could propel his muscles to achieve.

Pyro burst onto the research facility grounds and handed off Amy to the nearest transport dropshuttle, and watched gasping for air and aching from the tremendous muscular strain he'd placed on himself as the shuttle rose into the sky.

The fates shrieked in outrage as another of their plans looked to be falling apart right in front of them. The third looked to the first. "KILL HIM!"

An errant long-range missile chose right about this moment to explode a couple feet behind Pyro.

On another plane of existence, the Fates cheered at the explosion and watched as what was left of Pyro tried to cling desperately to life. They laughed, not even noticing the slight hum that sounded as a man in a horned helmet, a very large canine, and a woman in a toga appeared behind them.

"Ahem."

The Fates turned, and found themselves looking at the newcomers. "Wha?"

The woman spoke up. "I thought Loki and I had made our point. Leave them alone!"

The second fate scowled. "We're all immortal here. What are you going to do about it, Eris?"

The toga-wearing woman smiled fiendishly. "You can't die, but you CAN spend the rest of your existence in pain."

The third laughed. "We didn't plan on it. You can't hurt us."

Eris and Loki looked at each other and grinned. "That sounds like a challenge."

Loki chuckled a deep, hearty warrior's chuckle. "Sic 'em, Fenrir."

The fates screamed.

Erika Carson ran onto the facility grounds, gasping for air as she dragged the injured former Smoke Jaguar behind her. Never one to follow blindly, she knew that she had to evacuate and save Furey. Her exhaustion was forgotten when a missile suddenly exploded behind the Precentor-Martial.

"Pyro!"

She ran, still unconsciously dragging the Jaguar, who by now was wishing she'd just let go and let him die as his head bounced every time he hit a bump.

Pyro was laying face down not far from the blast site, missing an arm, both legs, and a good part of the lower torso. She looked at him, and he looked back with a look that seemed to pierce her soul. "No!"

The look in Pyro's eyes began to grow distant, and Furey suddenly coughed and turned toward her. "Headtank", he said with a certain finality. Pyro spasmed, and Erika feverishly dug for the cylinder in Furey's backpack.

Pyro only managed a HFS look briefly as he stared uncomprehendingly at Erika, who now stood over him with one of his own swords. "I'm sorry..."

THUNK

Dr. Strangenstein looked in awe as the small cylinder was produced, containing a human head kept alive by nanobots forcefully oxygenating the brain constantly and preserving life. "Hahaha! The headtank works!", he said with a madman's glee as the cylinder was inserted into a larger Fishtank unit.

One of the nurses sighed. "Do you have any idea how much biomass this will require? We'll be up all night."

Strangenstein shrugged and spoke with a madman's glee. "Do you realize how much this revolutionizes battlefield medical care? I'll be rich! Powerful! Respected by the scientific community! I could spend all month on it if I had to. Activate the Fishtank."

The Headtank ejected the severed head into the Fishtank as a stream of biological mishmash was pumped into the water.

On another plane of existence, Loki and Eris smiled as the Fates extricated themselves from the raging hound and ran away, abandoning their crystal, shears, spindle, and cauldron. They'd be back, sure... nothing could prevent that. But for the time being, order was out to lunch and chaos had just clocked in.

Merc Chick looked to her left upon hearing the high-pitched voice of her daughter saying "MOMMY, MOMMY, MOMMY". Discord picked his daughter up as Merc Chick stormed towards the pair, the rage she had felt since first touching down now being replaced with relief at seeing Tunnel Rat alive and safe, Motown tried to slip into the background but was pulled up short when Tunnel Rat stuck out her tongue at him.

Motown flinched when Merc Chick turned her gaze towards him, I guess I should be mad at you but I am sure you never intended to send her off into combat.

Tunnel Rat looks at both her mom and dad and begins telling them all about her adventures since she hid herself away aboard the Beast. She tells daddy that she blew up 3 of the robot things. Discord gets a little white around the eyes as she tells him all seeing the people getting hurt by the bad people

After calling all the available COs and XOs to the briefing room, Fred storms in, a nasty gash from the left side of his upper forehead reaching down to the left side of his lip still bleeding slightly through the stitches.

"Ok, Pyro is being....re-constructed, the infantry has pulled out of the complex, the enemy CO is *apparently* dead, but I don't think so.....
We need to get in the complex again, see how far this thing reaches and raze it. The Archangel will drop a Kraken-T missile from high altitude, that should take out the complex pretty quick.."

All the other COs just kinda nod, agreeing that a Kraken-T, if dropped properly, could end things pretty quickly.

"The enemy seems to have lots of mechs, but we need to keep them pinned against

the lake and the complex, I will be on foot, moving in with the infantry and Pyro when he gets put back together, Michael will also be with me, we need all the Jedi-like powers in the building in case of apprentices. For the meanwhile, we need to prepare the LZs for an overnight assault...make sure the dropship gunners are on the watch, the Archangel will provide AWACS support in low orbit until its called in fore the demolition"

Fred sits down, exhausted from the day, opening the floor to any other plans....

BoM LZ
Hager

Team Bonsai has arrived Tunnel Rat is finally reunited with her parents, they took it better than Motown thought they would. But for Motown, the headaches have just begun. Most of the Command is down and Motown has to lead the Left thrust himself. Team Bonsai is going to help fill in the holes It looks like we have been ejected from the base the Comstar force has taken Heavy casualties the 204th BoM force is now in the best shape. *God help me I will have to use the kids again.* Motown goes to talk to the little family.

"So I am still breathing does she do stuff like this all the time?"

"Usually not quite this bad"

"HEY"

"Well she sure caused me alot of headaches"

"HEY if it were not were not for me you would be dead."

"Right,she can drive you nuts"

"Hey"

God for give me for this

"Right now we need every Warrior available and with 6 1/2 kills to her credit"

😁"6 1/2?"

"Aff Commando, Spider, Stinger, Wasp, Gallion Tank, Atlas, and we shared an Ostroc"

"She did?"

"Aff I did and I gots a bondsman too"

"You did?"

"And his name is Regis and he is a Jade Falcon...he was driving the Spider"

"Is this true?"

"And he was not happy at all to find out that a 3 1/2 year old defeated him"

"Impressive"

"Aff.and god help me we need her"

They just look at Motown

"Hey I am that damn GOOD!!"

"I know that is a lot to ask but we are desperate think on it please"

She looks at Motown

"I will"

"Thank You"

Motown walks away.

{God forgive me I actually asked them to let her go out into combat again I must be nuts...and the gods must be crazy"

Motown goes to the command meeting and after Fred speaks he stands up. He is now feeling his age. The adrenalin has worn off and his body is screaming in protest.

" We did a lot of damage in that penetration before they ejected us we left a weak point in there line if we can hit them with a large force I believe that we can break through the only reason we did not succeed when we made that first strike is that the force was way too small. Since the Comstar force was ejected too we can afford to wait till morning then and we can get our primary mechs repaired. With Team Bonsai and the other re-enforcements we should be able to turn their line and smash it"

Calis looks around the staff room, "I know that Team Bansai along with the 5th Drunken Irregulars, 10th Starlost and BPDs got here a little late but it was hell trying to load all those spare mechs into the dropships without having skilled pilots to get them into their cradles, I do have a couple of questions if someone would not mind answering them if possible.

1) I have been up to the front lines and I was wondering how wide is that God forsaken marsh out there. What I am wondering is if we can somehow get a force behind them to make a lot of noise to make them think that there is a third group coming at them from behind, I was thinking that this would be right up the BPD's alley.

2) With our forces spread so out so far would it not be better to hit them at different times.

a) let the BPD pop up from behind first

b) then say 15 minutes later have the right flank open fire

c) then have the left flank wait for a bit and then open up with everything they have

d) then when everyone is engaged we could send in infantry force to rush their HQ/ or maybe a combat drop right on top of it with heavy infantry support"

Calis sits back and waits for the brass to pool its collective brain and think about it

Merc Chick and Discord sit talking about everything that has happened with their daughter, looking over at the sleeping child it is hard to believe that she has been credited with 6 1/2 kills, Discord looks at his wife and asks the unspoken question.

"So should we let her back in a mech for the upcoming battle" Discord asks his wife

"NO" Merc Chick replies "It is out of the question"

Discord looks at her "Well dear we can always fight right beside her that way we will know that she always protected"

Merc Chick looks back at her husband "Well I guess if we can work out the details maybe we can get her in the center of a big enough force that she can be in combat and out of it at the same time"

Discord smiles and nods to his wife and gets up and goes looking for Motown and the rest of the brass.

After Calis brings up his concerns, Fred pulls up a map of the situation

"Well to the north, north-west and direct west is essentially a muddy lake, impassable to 'mechs. The lake extends eastward as you head north, ending up 1.2klicks wide at the apex. The lake at the complex goes about 900meters to the north and 400 to the west. To the east of the complex is the hardest ground, drying up nicely in the sun, should stay the same tomorrow. To the south, its a little boggy, but lighter mechs can wade through easily enough.

We are here of course, to the south east on 2 hills at the north-most edge of a mountain range, heading almost straight east-west....."

Calis looks at the map and grins mischievously, "Hey Fred is there any way we can get a company or two of hovers out there on that lake, it would be the last thing that the enemy expects from us to do. Maybe some hover infantry transports to over run their HQ while the rest of us keep their mechs occupied?"

Teemo laughed mirthlessly as he worked the pull-tab on a cold one. "Where have I heard that idea before? My guys did get some intel, mostly computer files, before we had to withdraw, and I've got my....IT specialist decrypting them as we speak. My hovers are almost back in fighting trim, and last I heard my Ranger's casualties made it to the "fishtank" in time, so they should be at full strength by tomorrow afternoon at the latest. My 'Mechs are getting patched up, and should also be ready in time for the second half. My troops are getting what shuteye they can, and unless somebody else has any ideas or information that can't wait at least a few hours, I respectfully suggest that we do the same."

CSS Vision of Truth
Hagar, Far Periphery

Pyro awakened on a hospital bed this time, dimly aware of the fact that it was currently ship's night, as evidenced by the reduced interior lighting and sat up in his bed.

Rubbing his eyes, Pyro noticed that his entire body felt leaden to him, and the dull ache of post-fishtank therapy only worsened the matter. Nevertheless, he rose from the hospital bed with great difficulty. Feeling as if he was moving in 1.5 gravities or more, Pyro proceeded to recover his belongings and changed into a fresh black robe.

I must have nine lives..., Pyro thought as he looked down at his relatively gaunt frame. Gone were the muscles built through years of conditioning, and the jellyroll built through years of eating doughnuts for breakfast and eating too many snacks. Even with the robe on, he looked far slimmer. *...and how many have I burned now? Three? Four? Maybe I should just go back home.*

Home, the word echoed through the tired mind. *Could I even go back after all this? Would they take me?* Regretfully, he pushed those thoughts aside for the dozenth time and sent for his crew to meet him on the hangar deck ASAP.

February 16th
Coalition HQ

The meeting dragged on into the early morning as plans were discussed and batted back and forth. Ideas were proposed, accepted, modified, shot down, and the procedure would begin anew.

The sound of heavy engines filled the chamber, and grew to a louder whine, then finally cycled to a low hum and shut down. A security officer ran inside to inform the generals that an assault shuttle had just landed without authorization, and was quickly followed in by a haggard-looking Pyro in a black robe who simply waved his hand.

"I need no authorization."

The guard nodded. "You need no authorization, sir. Move along." With that, he left to return to his post.

Pyro shrugged as he left and walked up to the assembled generals. "Can someone fill me in on what's going on?"

Medron looked at Pyro carefully, glanced around at the others, and then shrugged.

"Danged if I know," he muttered. "The Third Knights have taken heavy casualties. The WOTD and Schola are pretty bad off too, but with the last of Team Bonsai here, we've got the spare parts to get the 'Mechs on line. The bad guys are on the ropes right now. I figure another attack should be able to take them out. Or we could always bombard them from orbit until their fish flakes," he finished with an unconcerned shrug.

"I wouldn't suggest that," Rick Raisley cut in before anyone else could speak. "Most of Team Bonsai's damage has been repaired as well. In another few hours, we'll be ready to go. We need the data in that facility. I know we got some of it, but I want a look at that place. And there is probably data that was missed in the first run through."

"Durn it," Medron muttered as he jumped up to his feet faster than he'd managed in years. He was starting to enjoy being young again. "And here I wanted to blow something up."

Rick just sighed, thinking the hormones were taking over again. He didn't want to go through Medron YOUNG again. It had been bad enough the first time.

DS Beast
BoM LZ
Hagar

The Arrival of Team Bonsai gives the BoM force a major moral boost. Tunnel Rat is reunited with her parents much to the Scrappers relief. 3 1/2 year olds are impossible to comprehend. Motown feels he has a pretty good force now a full trinary of mechs plus 3 LAMs and a whole mess of VTOLS including two lances of Arrow IV carriers and Two of TAG carriers plus he can count on the four survivors of the 204th Aircav and their mech star. This time he am playing it smart and not running off and

trying to take that base with a single star. The 5th Drunken Irregulars 10th Starlost Rangers and BPDs are deploying with us as well, *'this time we are going to have a fish fry. Morning we go out and finish this job once and for all!*

When this is over I am going to have a nervous break down I have earned it I deserve it and NOBODY is going to deny it to me!

After staring at the map display for several minutes, Teemo took the floor. "I'm a little bit tired and a little bit wired, so excuse me if this isn't the most polished presentation you've ever seen. Our combined forces penetrated pretty far before we were turned back, so we've got a pretty good idea what kind of fixed defenses they've got left. Their 'Mechs and Protos seemed to ignore the Rangers once they actually got into the buildings, so it seems to be a pretty safe bet that that the other side won't damage or destroy their own buildings to prevent our troops from capturing them.

None of my people reported seeing any vehicles, but they might not have been expecting us to get so close. The biggest worry for me, right now, is their fighters. I don't know if any of them survived, but if they did we need to take them out as soon as possible, preferably before our ground units move in. I would've deployed my choppers sooner, but I didn't want to risk them with that big furball right overhead. If we can keep their fighters away from the area, I can have them come with us to hit the enemy in the flanks or rear as necessary.

If any of you guys have hovercraft, I'd be glad to see them, because if we can put a big enough cavalry force on our flank, it'll make life that much more difficult for their 'Mechs to decide who to go after. On the intelligence front, my...hacker is still trying to decrypt the files we recovered, so if any of your people have hacking skills, and they aren't needed elsewhere, I'd be grateful for whatever help they can provide. That's all I can think of right now, so..." he trailed off, shrugging as he returned to his seat.

The Scrapper very slowly pushes himself upright his 75 years showing. They had infantry and some vehicles, but you start hitting them with a lot of fire and dropping towers on them makes a mess we busted up a lot of them but they may still have some more. Motown's big mistake was trying to do too much with too little a single pursuit star that was totally inadequate. Fresh troops from Team Bonsai the 5th drunken irregulars and the 10th Starlost Rednecks have heavily reinforced the left force.

"I now has a much larger force and they have been already weakened at that point and I believe that if they get hit hard there a second time they will break. The installations on that side have been heavily damaged. I have 30 mechs with a hover comp to transport an infantry company with 5 LAMs and 20 VTOLs for CAS including 10 With Arrow IVs and 10 with TAGs and 20 fighters for top cover. If we punch that through the hole the we made earlier, I believe we can break their back."

Fred gets up and heads for the comm "Esme?" "Here" "Tie up with the LZ computer, we got a hacker trying to open up some fish files, give him a hand."

"ooh, Hacking, haven't done that in a while, patching in now..."

"I got a Tyr Teemo, Mo, The 204th is under your command, I am headed in the

building with the ground pounders as is Michael, so you got 4, I need some shut eye first, wake me when we load up"

Fred heads to his bunk to relax a little before the final battle.

"The Knights have been handling their repairs and they should have all surviving units ready to fly very soon," Medron noted quickly. "If there are any surviving enemy fighters, they won't last long, so I think we can plan that they'll be dead." He smiled nastily with that comment and turned back to the others.

"So, now that we've got this 'planning' under our belt, who's ready to go kick Bad Guy tail?" he asked, his smile turning positively evil.

The LZ is a flurry of activity this is going to one hell of a day. Motown looks at the preparations. With all of the additional troops it is getting crowded around here. Pyro sent BBjr. over here to mentor Tunnel Rat. He gets attached to the 204th to fill in for Fred who has decided to play commando. Right now he is talking to MercChick and Tunnel Rat They made a uniform for Tunnel Rat in those baggy Hammer pants and leather jacket she is quite the sight. He seems to have a calming effect on MercChick.

Motown has completely reorganized the unit to absorb the Team Bonsai people. His star is all mediums now...except for his mech, a light. He has a bold plan; a multi-prong attack in the part of the base they tore up yesterday, Calis is taking the BoMs striker star and the 5Th's Alpha and Gamma stars to rip into the northern part of the base. The BPDs are going to make a feint to the south of the actual attack point it is the main thrust which will be risky; The Lam Star under Gooses command is to strike at the centre of the base. Motown is going to make a deep thrust with his star, the 5Th's beta star, The Drunken Monkees and the 204th will follow to crush the enemy forces as they come up out of there holes. The choppers will rain havoc on any thing they can from above and the 10th is flying top cover. *'Crazy but I hope to be able to swamp their defenses and prevent them from organizing a cohesive resistance..Well it sounds good anyways.'*

The BPDs mount up and move out first as they are going to create a diversion...Motown has never seen a more gaudily painted force. It almost gives him a headache. The choppers fan out scouting ahead making sure there are no surprises. Motown does the radio check thing.

"Andrew"

"Ready to kick ass"

"Steel fang"

"Ready"

"MercChick"

"Ready"

"Tunnel Rat"

"THHP!"*giggle*

"Behave yourself"

"Yes mommy"

Yup it is going to be one of those days

"O.K. people lets move out"

30 mechs and 10 hovercraft move out of the LZ *'we have a job to do and I want to get it done and over with.'*

Northern edge of the lake
Hagar

Calis goes over the plans one more time in his head, about 2 clicks out of base Calis turns his force of 10 mechs and 10 hover craft loaded down with the infantry more to the north splitting off from the main party and pushing into run, once they reach a pre-determined point they turn heading up towards the lake getting into position and waiting for the signal that will have move out and punch a hole in the enemies base on the beach side,.

Calis sends a tight beamed message to Motown telling him that his forces are in place back in the tall grasses on the northern edge of the lake and that so far they have noticed no repeat "NO" enemy activity that would show that the enemy is aware of the strike teams presence.

Calis listens to the radio traffic as the rest of the combined forces move into position, opening the channel so all his troops can hear what is going on, they watch the fighters of the Knights and the 10th fly overhead waiting for some unlucky soul to pop its head up.

Going over the briefing one last time with his strike force Calis knows that it is important to get the infantry and hovers into the HQs compound as fast as possible to that they can secure it and give the special forces and comm techs all the time they need to get inside with out being bleed to death by the enemy.

So the waiting begins.....

Staging Area
Hagar, Far Periphery

What would be a short battalion in any other terms, the thirty functional mechs that formed the ComStar BattleMech command prepared themselves for action.

Reports came in from the headset. "White Six reporting. BattleArmor in position for rapid insertion."

From what Pyro knew, Demi-Precentor Shinto Watanabi, the commander of the Battle Armor force, had a tendency for unorthodox entry. Whatever it was, he had no doubt it'd be spectacular. "Roger White Six."

"Grey Three, report?", Pyro barked to Demi-Precentor Terrence Hammill, who lead the BattleMech section. "Ready to go when you are."

"Blue Nine, status?", Pyro said finishing the procedures. Demi-Precentor Candace Doles came back across the line. "Eh? Oh. Ready to squish some fish." With the aerospace ready, Pyro turned to his people standing behind him. "Let's get this traveling circus moving!"

Pyro moved the control yoke with a gentle, determined motion, causing the *Mongol II* assault shuttle to dip its left wing and pull into a loop, and crossed the body of ComStar mechs below him again.

The 1st Kilted and ComStar forces moved forward, shaking the earth under them as the aerodyne shuttle made another low pass overhead.

"All ComGuard Forces", Pyro began, "No sign of hostiles yet. Wait for the signal."

Switching frequencies, he continued. "Alright ladies, gentlemen, and absolute nutbars. We're in position and awaiting further orders. Now do that thing you do so we can stomp these guys and go home."

Pyro set down the shuttle near the 'Mech formation to conserve fuel and reduce the chance of premature detection. "It's in your hands now, guys."

Northern edge of the lake
Hagar, Far Periphery

Calis heard Pyro's voice come over the Command frequency and then switched his com set over to his units designated frequency, "All right ladies and gentleman, lets get this done"

Calis pushed the controls forward and walked his Bushwhacker out into the clearing at the lakes edge 9 mechs followed, the 10 hovercraft lurched out over the short distance to the waters edge and then picked up speed as they headed out over the water.

Calis watches as the Mechs move in to start pounding away at the enemies outer defenses at long range. Scanning the area he still sees no sign of the enemy. Maybe the brass was right and the enemy did not think we would hit them from this side.

The hovercraft stayed back just far enough to protect their cargo of infantry, the hovers zoomed in and opened up with their ATM 9 missiles, 90 missiles soared through the air to impact with their HE warheads on the enemy defensive barrier, before moving back out of range.

Slowly the mechs moved forward scanning for any sign.....would their actions pull enough of the enemy away from the main thrusts..

Back in the @(^((+_*# swamp
Hagar, Far Periphery

Like that ancient wise man said, "It's deja vu all over again." Teemo thought to himself as he looked around the assembly area. The Rangers boarding the transports that would carry them to the drop-off point outside the enemy compound, the helos being fueled and armed by their ground crews, the tankers and MechWarriors mounting their respective machines. *Once more into the breach.*

As the combined task force moved into position, Teemo listened intently for the series of radio dashes that would signal the Ranger's arrival at their designated position on the perimeter of the "research" facility. As the advance continued, he

looked around at the other units. ComStar to one side, the BoM/504th to the other, the remaining LAMs and ASFs circling high overhead, and Pyro's shuttle orbiting so low that it seemed as if he could reach upwards with one of his 'Mech's arms and touch its underside. Looking ahead to the facility, he was somewhat surprised to note that the other side seemed not to be making any preparations to stop the DI's approach. *There's no way you can't notice us, so what are you planning?* A moment later he was shaken out of his reverie as the awaited signal came through his headphones. *OK, boys, this time we're coming to stay.*

"Teemo to all Irregular units, the Rangers are in position, and they're waiting for our signal to move in."

Start-line
Hagar

Motown, et. al., arrive at the start line with out encountering any opposition. The flyboys report no activity. This is somewhat disconcerting there were no patrols. Motown expected to find at least pickets. The Base is quiet, that does not surprise him, and there was no activity until they breached the bunker line the first time either. The place is in shambles, the bunkers are scorched and fractured, and the area is littered with broken machines .It would appear that no attempt has been made to salvage anything. Did they achieve complete surprise? ...ye-ow right they should be so lucky. Motown hears the noise off to our right The BPDs are putting on a fine show. *O.K. people .SHOW-TIME!!!* Motown leads the Strike Star in a V formation charge, Andrew and Steelfang on the left, MercChick and Tunnel Rat on the right, the 5Th's Beta star is sweeping in a single file in a hook maneuver. Goose leads the LAMs in a strike at the installations in the centre so far no sign of resistance. *'Something is not right I know that there were active units when I was ejected. Hell they had a fracking Assault Battalion on my ass and I know that they did not get destroyed.'* Motown pulled up short and waited for the big guys to catch up. He scans the openings to the underground facility. *'This does not make sense. The other units are also reporting a lack of resistance. I do not like this.'*

The lakes edge
Hagar

Calis sends a flash message to Motown informing him that he is going to send in the infantry.

Calis switches to his tactical frequency and tells the hovercrafts and infantry to head in and secure the area. He also tells the mechs to keep all scanners set to maximum watching both the compound and the surrounding area.

Everyone watches as the hovercraft move in through the opening that the mechs had opened earlier.....

As the hovercraft enter the compound they begin to fan out and disembark their cargo of infantry.

All ears listen to their radios to hear what the infantry have to report, or to rush to their aid, which ever is needed.

BattleMechs marched across the swamp, the now-familiar sucking sounds accompanying each step breaking the silence. Medron scowled again as he looked at the scanners. Still nothing. He hated waiting. Blowing stuff up was so much more fun than waiting after all. More than twenty BattleMechs and Land-AirMechs marched with him, the Warriors of the DropShip and the Schola. Further to the east, Endosteel's men kept pace and Medron nodded as he waited for something to come up so he could chop its head off.

He sighed again and felt his 'Mech shift around him, echoing his action. If the Bad Guys were trying to torture him with their lack of response, they were doing a very effective job of it. He fingered the triggers of his autocannons lovingly, looking for something to blow up. Couldn't they give him *something* to shoot? Some generic troop of Evil Minions that nobody would miss? Anything?

He sighed again, his 'Mech once again echoing the movement, and kept walking forward. Come hell or high water he was *going* to blow something up today. And if the Bad Guys were going to deny him that, then he'd just have to pick something else. He smiled nastily and began walking more purposefully. The decision was made. He began looking around for something to shoot at with a discerning eye.

It was time to smash something. Anything.

Calis watches his scanners as his ears listen to the infantry reporting that all the doors to both the underground mech and vehicle bays are shut and locked. The infantry begins to fall back towards their hovercrafts.

One infantryman sets up a portable laser tag on the heavy doors to the mech bay before leaving the area. The hovercrafts make a mad dash for the opening in outer defenses by the lake. The commander in charge of the infantry lets Calis know that the door is tagged and that he can inform Motown and his accompanying VTOL's.

Just as Calis is informing Motown his sensors pick a large group of mechs coming in from North behind him. Checking the scanners one last time he lets the rest of the forces know that they have contacts moving in from the North.

"Striker Star to all forces" Calis call into his headset mic

"We have contacts 5 kilometers out and moving in fast it looks like a rough battalion over" Calis listens for conformation from the rest of the commands.

The Arrow IV missile hits the Door BAOOM!!! Things are quiet for a few seconds then ALL HELL breaks loose, mechs and vehicles come pouring out of the under ground. "O.K. People look alive we gots company! Beta star with me we are pulling a left hook. Goose take your LAMs and hit their back side Along with the VTOLs" They all start an encirclement maneuver the two assault stars start advancing in line abreast laying down a withering fire. Motown brings his star and beta star around their backside while Gooses Lam star hits their rear and the choppers start dropping Arrow IVs down on their heads. Andrew and Steelfang pull a double team on a Shogun, hitting it from either side. The pilot seems to be confused by the split attack Andrew lays the right torso open with auto cannon and missile fire and quickly closes to nail it with his sword. Steelfang rips into the right torso with his PPC and laser and starts to slash with his sword. Next thing Motown knows, the Shogun is belching fire as its magazines detonate and the shogun lateral falls apart the two mediums taking

only minor damage. Motown goes after a Black Knight and quickly cuts off its arms with his reciprocating saws. It continues to fire its torso weapons while Motown takes its Right leg off somehow it remains standing, he cuts off the left leg it falls on its back... and keeps firing. The guy is a lousy shoot but he is persistent. Motown cuts its head off and he keeps firing that small laser. Motown finally drop kicks the damn head.

Enemy command bunker

Corporal Drums come rushing into the room and falls over a chair
"They're back and are all over the base we are doomed."
She grabs him by the hair and drags him to his feet and slaps him.
"Idiot I have to show you fools how to do every thing."
She drags him out of the room by the hair and drags him to the mech bay where Meridian and Joshua Harrington are already she throws him at the Feet of one of the Grotesque mechs that are in there.
"Get your ass in there"
He climbs in the cockpit of this weird looking quad while she climbs into a grotesque assault mech and climbs it on the quad the rest of the weird mechs start to slowly make their way out of the garage.

The Battle is turning our way the deep drive has thrown the enemy into confusion. Then a lance of the most Grotesque mechs ever to see the light of day comes out. This weird LAM looking monstrosity jumps into the air and starts to clumsily fly toward us. Goose spots it.

{THAT is just wrong}

He pulls his YF-19 easily behind the lumbering monstrosity and opens fire blasting the single Jump-jet and watches with satisfaction as it tumbles head first to the ground. Just before impact Meridian hits the Eject and is ejected...Straight into the ground and the Almost LAM crashes on top of him. The Scrapper spots a smaller monstrosity and attacks playing laser fire across the front Torso. Inside the weird mech Joshua Harrington fires every thing and hits with everything the Dismantler is covered with confetti, Whipped Cream, and Perfume. Ignoring the mess the Scrapper slices the cockpit open like an over ripe melon. Suddenly there is an ear splitting scream over the com-link

"MOMMY!!!!!"

The weird looking assault that was riding the quad jumped off of it and flattened MercChicks Wraith. Just as she was about to deliver the coupe de grace Tunnel Rat fired her jump jets and nails the monstrosity square in the head flattening it. She spins and fires everything ripping across the head and shoulders of the thing she reaches down smashes the cockpit and rips out the pilot. Holding General Melissa up to face level she kicks on the external speakers.

"You hurt my mommy now I hurt YOU!!!!!"

"I'm alright honey"

"Mommy?"

"That's O.K. honey Mommy's Not hurt"

"MOMMY!!!"

She looks at the battered woman in her fist.

"You stink"

She spikes her and stomps on her

"THHP!"

Corporal Drums flees back into the underground charges over the side of the ramp and plunges 70 meters and lands on the cockpit crushing it. The remaining mechs and vehicles flee back underground. The allied forces pause to regroup while all of the mechs are damaged and are still functional. It worked! That screwy plan actually worked! The Scrapper stops to copy the radio traffic to figure out where to go next.

Sten "Steelfang" Borge sidles up to Tunnel Rat's 'Mech and gets a good look at her 'prisoner'. He adjusts the optics on his visual sensors and zooms in to confirm what he's seeing. As he keys the mic, he starts laughing, 'Umm, gang, General Melissa is not a woman. Look close, real close.'

Tunnel Rat chimes in, "She's an apple in her throat."

"That's right, kiddo. That's an Adam's Apple. *She* is, or was at one time, a man." Laughing some more, "Now, ain't that rich?"

"Like that was a Surprise to anyone...", Sir Henry chimes in....

The assault munchkins fell from the air as Pyro's *Mongol II* thundered toward the scene, followed in the distance by a column of ComGuard mechs.

"Save some for us, guys!", Demi-Precentor Doles called out as she rolled her *Huscarl* and dove in on a GoldFish-era *Balrog*, making a pile of chipped and melted goo out of it. Pyro followed closely behind the slow assault fighter, and Amy's gunnery ruined the *Balrog's* lancemates with repeated PPC blasts. The rest of the ComStar force thundered in as fast as their actuators would take them, hoping to arrive in time to help with the mop-up operations.

Pyro brought the shuttle to a hover over a secure area of the Complex's grounds and grounded. Pyro unbuckled his restraint and looked over to Fiona Moon, who had flown with them in the 5th bunk on this mission. "So, what was wrong with those assault mechs that were just taken down anyway?", he asked as a question.

"There was an Assault LAM and another of those things with mechanical jump boosters and a single standard jumpjet." Pyro nodded. "And?"

She thought briefly. "These things violate the balance of the universe as if it dropped the soap around a fat convict named Bubba." Pyro blinked. "Very good. Making progress on the spheroidization too. So, what conclusions can we draw from these mechs violating the balance?"

She pondered for a second. "Munchkinism is of the dark side. Another false power born from fear that breeds weakness, becoming a crutch for its devotees."

Pyro smiled. "Excellent. You're doing well. Now, on with the mission." The five disembarked from the shuttle and headed toward the facility again.

Elsewhere, Calis sent the hovercraft and infantry back into the compound and then turned and ordered the rest of his mech detachment to move into position to keep the enemy from getting into the compound while he scanned his screen and watched the rest of combined forces swarm over the compound and move to help pound the snail snot out of these fish. Sir Henry is on the comm., "Confirmed Calis. Bogeys Inbound....."

Calis watches as the Dropship Irregulars combined forces begin to appear on this screen, ordering his detachment forward they move to join in the battle.

"Strike leader to all mech north lets concentrate on the eastern flank" Calis instructs the mech under his command "lets not let them get around us"

Calis watches as the lead lance a Thunderbolt, Wolverine, Griffin and Shadow Hawk disintegrate under a withering barrage of ERPPCs bolts, Gauss Rifle slugs, ER Large Lasers blasts and Auto cannon rounds.

Feeling the heat of battle through their cooling vests the pilots of the Northern Strike force know that they must hold the Eastern flank while the main body of the force moves forward on their left to engage the bulk of the enemy.

Calis looks at his topographical HUD display and knows that the Western flank is mostly guarded by the lake, Calis leads his forces more to the east giving Pyro and Medron more room to array their forces.

Doorknobs smashed into the last of the Evil Minions and Medron scowled as nobody else came up to challenge the Warriors and the other Irregulars. Well, at least they'd given him *something* to shoot at. Things could be worse. He strode forward, into the compound, and nodded as infantry continued securing the buildings and the underground complex.

Then Team Bonsai began to march, roll, hover, or otherwise arrive in BattleMechs and vehicles and Medron nodded in approval. Time to let the geeks find out what they could about this complex. It was about time they figured out exactly what was going on.

After all, there had to be more than just this one little world under the command of the Evil Overlords, for want of a better name. He'd heard worse in cheap holovids before. And at least Evil Overlord had a ring to it.

What the... Teemo thought to himself as he saw what looked like a 'Mech trying to ride a horse. *You gotta be frellin' kidding me! How the frell did they get out of that frellin' asylum?!* He quickly opened a comlink to his TOC. "Contact the Nevada and tell them that there might be a "bop-drive" ship in-system. They'll know what to do if they find it." *Oh, lordy, I am **not** getting paid enough to do this....unless these idiots managed to find some more shipping containers full of gems.* His train of thought was derailed by reports of enemy 'Mechs coming in from the north. "OK, people, here we go again. With any luck we should be able to completely knock the fight out of these guys." As he shifted his units to face the new threat, he found himself hoping that this force would also be using "General" "Melissa"'s custom designs, if for no other reason than the fact that so far they seemed to be more dangerous to their own pilots than any of the Irregulars.

Everybody thinks it is almost over...Not yet. Motown hears on the comm-link that Chainsaw has recovered and is on the way with re-enforcements '*Thank GOD let him run this mess for a while.*' Calis is facing a large counterstrike. Motown dispatches the 5Ths Beta star, Gooses' LAMs and the rest of the choppers and the BPDs to back him up. Pyro and Medron say they want General Melissa alive. A med evac chopper

lands to pick up what's left of Him/her/it ,.It is Connie

"How you doing Kid"

"Alright Sta..Don"

"Is there enough to save"

"Maybe"

"See you after this?"

"We'll see" 😊

"Cool"

{Gawd I am acting like a love struck teenager}

The shattered body of the general is loaded on the evac chopper and is lifts away. Motown looks at the rest of his command. The front of MercChicks Wraith is looking rough some structure is exposed the rest of the mechs have just armour Damage. Chainsaw in now landing with re-enforcements, Task Force Emiril.

Enemy Compound

Lower level

Fred and Michael infiltrate the lower parts of the compound after arriving on their hoverbikes. They stumble upon a gate at the 'supposed' end of the underground compound.

"Fred to group, we found an extra wing of the underground complex"

Pyro comes on the line "Investigate and report back"

The duo advances into the gate and is met with the stench of rotten lemons. The gate closes behind them. "Fred to group...come in....Dropship Irregulars, come in...". Nothing.

"Ve are on our own now, tevorishch"

The duo moves into the compound, twisting and turning in its maze of corridors. They come upon 2 soldiers standing on guard. Their faces show that they are under-slept, overworked and disgruntled, they look zombiefied. Fred runs up and tries to knock out one of them with the shaft of his mace only to have it let out a loud growl and turn to face him. Fred then just dispatches him with a swift swing of the mace before he could fire. Michael takes out the other one with his axe. They take the guards weapons, a pair of 9mm handguns and ammo.

They wind their way through the corridors, dispatching less-than-happy soldiers, dodging left and right. They come up against soldiers wearing thick armour, with spiked shoulders shooting balls of napalm at them. Unfortunately the weapons are built in to the armour suits and unusable.

Fred eventually procures himself an old-school scattergun and Michael finds a chain gun. They easily dispatch all enemies in their way, constantly going downwards in the complex, every level's architecture getting weirder and weirder as they move along.

At one point, they find hand held rocket launchers. By this point, the decor looked like a bad joke, real horror b-movie like.

They test the new rocket launchers on some soldiers that disappears in puffs of blood and guts....

Then they walk into a room.....then it hit the fan....
"VHAT IS THAT!!!!!"

To units of Battle armour, looking like minotaurs come towards them, flinging mini-PPC rounds from their hands. The 2 Irregulars dodge left, right forward, back.

Fred lets loose a rocket and hits one of the BAs square in the chest, no reaction!!!

He lets loose another, nada. The third slowed it down. Michael lays in to the other one with his chain gun. Only the fifth rocket took down the one behemoth, but Michael runs out of ammo from his chain gun, and takes care of the other ugly thing with the scattergun, after a while. The 2 look at the BA suites wondering...what's next??

Chapter 12

Chainsaw woke up in excruciating pain. While the fish tank did a pretty good job of fixing everything that was wrong with him, but even the best in medical science couldn't have undone the hangover from his "post recovery" self-medication.

The empty keg of beer to his left was a testimony to the amount of alcohol it took to shrug off the effects of a good fishtanking. Hung over and royally pissed at the loss of his newest LAM, he staggered to the restroom to pay off the deposit on the keg. Sometime between the evacuation of his bladder and the process of refilling it with his morning Mudslide (only masochists drink their coffee straight) He decided on the proper course of action.

One of the provisos for the BoM being brought along for this was that they were to "behave" themselves....

"Well, that went out the window when that damn fish stick filleted my LAM" he smiled to himself, "It's time for some mayhem, MONKEY STYLE!"

Somewhere in that parallel dimension, the Gods turned to each other.
"About damned time" Loki said to himself.

Specialist Steven "Skippy" Schwartz was bored beyond belief. Ere was the first real battle being fought in over ten years, and he wasn't allowed to participate. Just because the higher-ups were intimidated by his antics. Ok, so "Giant Space Ants" weren't on his chain of command, Sock puppets weren't allowed to countermand orders, and despite his best efforts to the contrary, there was no battlefield use for confetti. He wasn't insane, just perpetually bored. That was why he was assigned to the BoM as mercenary liaison. Because he was one of them. The fact he couldn't be brought with the first wave due to capacity issues on the dropship had been a disappointment, but Chainsaw had personally promised to make it up to him.

The fact Chainsaw had gotten himself blown to tiny pieced by a fish somehow piloting a mech best described as "mediocre" put a damper on that, but the mysterious reassembly of his corpse by those comstar guys fixed whatever problems might have arrived there.

"Ok Skippy, sorry to keep you waiting"

"Oh, it was no problem sir, I was busy like you said painting sarcastic comments on all the autocannon shells and missile rounds. We now have stuff painted on every piece of equipment in every language spoken or read in the universe. No matter who's behind this, if they get hit by one of our shells, we quite literally will be adding insult to injury"

"Sweet"

"Also, as requested the drop barrels have been prepared"

One of the more plausibly combat-worthy and unique inventions the BoM had

invented was the Heavy-Armored Drop Cocoon, more commonly referred to as the Barrel. Aside from accommodating mechs, it also could be configured to carry re supply parts, armored infantry, or pretty much 120 tons of whatever miscellaneous equipment was needed.

"Sorry to do this to you, but we need to change up the mix there Skippy, I'm authorizing use of BAMs. I figure we'll need all five barrels worth. Load them in remote guided barrels fitted with TAG guidance. Program four for BoM tag assignment, and one for general use. I have a feeling that when news of these gets out, someone else is going to end up needing one"

"Sir, I'm pretty sure this goes against our 'behave yourselves' order in the rules of engagement. In fact I'm pretty sure rule three "if it makes you giggle for more than five seconds, you are specifically ordered NOT to do it" comes into play here." He said with a grin.

"What are they going to do? Fire me?"

In their parallel dimensions the gods flipped through their scripts...
"That's nowhere in here" she said to herself, Loki just smiled and held up a pencil...
"That's why they invented these"

The BoM was, on paper at least, a company sized mech force with "unspecified support elements". This was the only way a mercenary power would be allowed to get away with the stuff they did. No one looks twice at mech companies moving around. But say "reinforced combined battalion" and all of the sudden you get all kinds of unwanted attention. This didn't change the fact that aside from the units on the ground, Chainsaw could bring to bear an additional company of infantry, a lance of assault mechs, and the contents of the five giant, shaking, screaming barrels in the cavernous cargo hold. Which was good, because that is exactly what he now intended to do.

There were four mechs, each in their own barrels. One was his; the other was Skippy's. John and Jane Doe, a brother/sister pair who conspicuously dressed in red shirts, piloted the others. They had the unfortunate tendency to have whatever mech they happened to pilot get shot from under them, but never through any fault of their own. Chainsaw hoped their new 100-ton hardened armor mechs would help to break the trend. He hoped so, he needed the twin thumper cannons on those mechs...

The tenth barrel held the BPD infantry company who were suspiciously unarmed, and a stack of crates labeled "monkey-treats". They were doing their best to not read any of the magazines that a large open crate held.

"Ready to deploy" the voice came over his personal comm. Chainsaw climbed up into his fallback mech, an Awesome IIC, and smiled...

"It's time to kick ass and chug beer... And I'm not thirsty right now".

On the newly formed swamp, there was an eerie quiet. The enemy was obviously preparing to mount a counteroffensive, but from where? There were infantry units actually well within their own base. It didn't make any sense. But then very little had been making sense lately, where BOTH sides were concerned.

All of the sudden there was a horrible humming noise, as if thousands of giant retarded bees were staggering earthwards in one giant cloud of stupidity. One by one the ships, if such monstrosities could be referred to as such fell to the earth. Driving themselves into the earth like nails, one in ten exploded ought right. The rest opened up and along with some of the foulest smelling water ever, there poured forth wave after wave of mech.

Medron looked on in terror. "No wonder they use fish to pilot their mechs. No other pilot could survive such an impact and still pilot a Battlemech, and fish are expendable enough to load into those deathtraps"

Rallying the perimeter defenders into a makeshift battle line, he prepared himself for the worst. Jedi could do many things, but fifty to one odds with heavy and assault class mechs deploying within your own defense perimeter...

...Just as he was considering the alternatives a voice chimed in over Comm line "Don't just stand there, run you idiots, we're coming in right behind them!"

Recognizing the voice of Chainsaw Assassin, he instantly let his Jedi reflexes take action. Explanations were unnecessary, and in the case of a Chainsaw plan, would need further explanations and clarification anyway, something he didn't have the time or inclination for. Besides which, even long after they'd been executed, they often still made no sense.

"Let HIM deal with this," he thought, "I've got bigger fish to fry"

In their parallel dimension both Gods were un amused by this poor attempt at humor. Back in their own dimension everyone on the same channel had the same thoughts.

In a turn of events that under other occasions would have been humorous, five large circular shadows appeared on the battlefield. They started small and rapidly got larger. Just as the enemy units under them paused and noticed the turn of events, they were crushed to a pulp under the impact of 175 ton beer-keg shaped objects which fell at ludicrous speed, barely slowed by the almost cartoonish parachutes affixed to them.

Four barrels immediately opened and out from them poured four of the biggest assault mechs ever to grace the battlefields of the future. Or present. Or whatever the hell it was.

These mechs wasted no time plastering anything within eyeshot with firepower any clansman would be intimidated by. Hopelessly outnumbered though, they were almost forced back into their own cocoons, when Chainsaw screamed "Monkey Style"

as loudly as he could over the comm line.

At this prearranged cue, four hundred small combat chassis stored in the tops of the mech carrier barrels activated. Each was fitted with endosteel combat chassis and an ER small laser. Small quadruped designs, they were scarcely larger than the spider monkeys piloting them. Fully encased within their robosuits, the monkeys moved with the speed only MASC equipped units could hope to approach. The enemy mechs paused, obviously at a loss as how to respond to this new threat. This was their undoing, for the Battle Armored Monkey troopers had no such confusion working against them.

Clan ER small lasers are at best an annoying nibble to a well-designed assault mech. Luckily Hammertech was decidedly NOT well designed, nor were these "nibbles" being done sparingly. Mechs were being swarmed like unfortunate mice in the middle of an anthill. Within seconds the fifth barrel opened adding another five hundred B.A.M's to the fray. The enemy mechs broke and started to run. The lucky ones died quickly, the unlucky ones *almost* made it, before they were overtaken, dieing tired and frustrated.

In any other unit, it might be considered odd to pilot a 40 toot tall laser cannon wielding mech into battle against giant fish in other giant fighting robots, doing so under the command of an alcoholic reanimated corpse, supported by monkeys in giant suits of battle armor and infantry personnel in clown paint with bulls-eyes on their chest. But for a BoM, this was just going to be business as usual...

Motown looks up to see ten weird looking craft of some sort go smashing into the swamp. One exploded on impact the others opened up and mechs started to come out in a flood of water.

'Great just what we do NOT need'

Then Chainsaws voice comes roaring over the Comm Link

"don't just stand there, run you idiots, we're coming in right behind them!"

Watching the BoM craft come in top of the enemy force I figure this should be good.

Unfortunately, Motown has his own problems.

"O.K. people lets get back to work. BBjr. you got the left door, Bowtie the right, I got centre. Tunnel Rat your moms mech is looking kinda rough watch out for her"

Giggle"Aff"

"HEY!!!"

We start to move in when Tunnel Rat chimes in

"They are coming out!"

" O.K. people lets fry them"

They come charging carelessly out expecting no resistance...WRONG!!!! They walk right into a cloud of lasers missiles and shells many are dropped before they even get a chance to return fire. The mechs with Physical weapons wade into the mass.

'First time I have had the pleasure of seeing BBjr in action he is impressive with his sword!!'

Andrew and steelfang are slicing and dicing with there weapons and Motown is having a grand old time with the saws. Tunnel Rat and MercChick jump to the top of the entranceways and start chewing backsides. Within minutes, the resistance is broken and the few survivors flee back under ground. Motown quickly scans his unit. Most of the return fire had been ineffectual their mechs, while a little battered are still basically in good shape.

"O.K. people lets finish this off once and for all!"
And they plunge into the underground.

Meanwhile, Calis listens to the chatter over the comm channels, hearing Chainsaw give the order to fall back, he commands his detachment to move back to the central compound.

Standing side by side with Boilersman's Thunderbolt, Calis covers the withdrawal of all his forces and then slowly back pedals.

Pyro ran, escaping the battle outside and headed into the underground, followed closely by the rest of the crew. The sounds of battle went on as the group descended into the depths of the base, finally arriving at the scene of the last battle.

Pyro stalked through the underwater hall cautiously, followed by the others and stopped to loot a few Mandrake gauss one-shot pistols from the dead Death Commandos, intending on scooping up a small fortune from various sources later and continued.

Sounds of gunfire and shrieking metal could be heard throughout the complex, and lending a supernatural air to the place. Lights occasionally flickered, and the cumulative battle damage from the recent combats made the locale resemble a scene out of a horror movie.

The five walked along obliviously as two intelligent eyes stared from an air duct. Once they were past, it dropped toward the one wearing a red shirt, shrieking...

Fiona Moon was fast, Pyro had to give her that. "Look out", she yelled as her flashing scimitar lopped an armored fish in half just before it reached Amy, covering her in fish guts.

"Eew", Amy said in obvious disdain of her newly redecorated wardrobe. Pyro extended his senses with The Force and found no other living creatures in immediate proximity, though the Carp in the lake made things difficult. Continuing on, he opened the inner door...

"Black Two to all commands. We're in."

All told, perhaps thirty seesaw dropships wiggled their way earthward. Only ten landed on the continent the current battle was taking place on. The rest plunged into the sea slightly to the southeast. Of course "slightly" is a relative term speaking in astronomical terms. There could be no doubt, the other ships were dropping in that area for a reason, and what might have been a three degree deviance on reentry translated to almost five days of continuous cross-country ground to cover. Chainsaw was perfectly happy to let those wait, he had other worries at the moment.

Of the ten ships that landed in the battle zone, one had exploded instantly. This left nine of the oddly shaped dropships which had at first merely been content to disgorge their mechs. Now they were making further nuisances of themselves by

opening up with their rotary autocannons. Chainsaw's BAM's were making quick work of whatever mechs couldn't out run their ludicrous speed, but their Chemtec single use chemical batteries were only good for three minutes thirty seconds of combat time, after which the suits would power down so as to be collected and re-prepared for battle. The mission clock was already BAM+2, so he had a little less than two minutes before he lost his main advantage. He was starting to get worried until he noticed that there was a strategically placed aviation fuel pipe works in the center of where the dropships had landed. They had also pierced the underground tanks, and the fuel was beginning to work its way up the impact craters. The only reason they didn't explode on impact was the huge gush of water they had released on opening the mech bays. Unfortunately for them, Chainsaw had a plan...

"Attention Flyboys... Job opportunity!"

"We have call signs you know" one of them came on angrily.

"Sure you do, and we'll bother to learn them later, listen kids, us adults down here need some help. Any of you got them runway bombs.. whachagiggers... Drummels?"

"Durandals, yeah. Why.. you got some runway we don't know about?"

"Better than that, drop a handful between those dropships over there... And get the hell back" He switched to ground frequency, "All mechs fall back to points Zulu. all subterranean units... Fire in the hole!" This was gonna suck for them...

Few events even hope to come close to the sheer devastation mankind can visit on his surroundings like a nuclear weapon. Huge fireballs, Shockwaves felt for kilometers, massive things really. Few things could hope to match the kind of raw power such weapons casually loosed upon the mad world that created them. Hitting an underground aviation fuel depot with armor-piercing bombs designed to incinerate runways came fairly close though.

The thing that got Chainsaw was the realization that he could actually SEE the shockwave coming towards him, and that there was really nothing he could do. It was an odd experience to SEE air rushing towards him, and an even odder one to be knocked down in a mech by what was at its core just a really strong gust of wind.

Several other mechs had similar problems, and the BAMS had been blown for dozens of meters in every direction. God only knows what kind of devastation had been visited to the underground complex, but it had done it's job, where there had once been a full mech regiment and almost a dozen Dropship-cum pillboxes, there was now a slowly settling cloud of ash.

"God help the guys in the tunnels if that base was as poorly designed as those mechs" Chainsaw thought to himself.

Another BattleMech charged forward and Medron stepped to the side, swinging his left arm over to bury its hatchet in the enemy's head. It dropped like a puppet with its strings removed as yet another enemy moved into close range, stripping more armor off his 'Mech as it came. He spun and buried his right forearm into its side, feeling the cutting edge of the other hatchet penetrating deep into its armor. Then

an ammo bin blew and he jerked away as flames covered him. That was going to leave a mark.

Around him, the other Warriors and the Schola kept up their own fire on the onrushing enemies. Longwalker kept cajoling them on as Endosteel's men sent another coordinated salvo into the BattleCarp, bringing down over a dozen 'Mechs at once. Impressive. Then Fokker and Hunter flew overhead, filling the enemy formation with doorknobs and lasers. The Third Knights followed, a wave of LAMs and fighters coming in to give more of the BattleCarp a piece of their minds. Or three.

All around the Dropship Irregulars, the enemy dropped to the ground as they were hit again and again, but they kept coming in a human wave-like tactic that everybody had thought was abandoned by time. Against modern militaries it should be suicidal. Heck, it WAS suicidal. But the BattleCarp didn't seem to mind. They kept coming.

And then the monkeys went wild, and Medron slowly came to stop as he gaped at the odd sight of battlesuited honest-to-god monkeys killing 'Mechs. It was crazy. It was insane. It was...wrong.

"My word," he muttered over his private comm. channel to the WOTD. "I thought we were crazy in the old days."

Then several flights of fighters came overhead and blew the dust bunnies out of the landing craft. The resulting explosion of fuel was, to say the least, impressive.

In another realm, the gods gazed down at the battle in utter astonishment. Then Loki reached over with his pencil and put a check mark on the script.

"What's that for?" one of the other gods asked and he smiled slyly.

"That's for doing something too crazy for the WOTD," he whispered. "The BOM just earned a place in Valhalla."

"Assuming they don't all use fish tanks," another god added and Loki shrugged with another smile.

"They'll die sometime," he said mischievously. "Doesn't matter when or how in the grand scheme of things. When they do, they'll have a place."

"Hey, Scrappy, try to keep "Melissa" alive, I got some questions for her." Teemo called across the radio. As he continued to move the 1st towards the oncoming enemy force, his heart skipped a beat as his radar detected ten large objects coming from orbit. *Well, you wanted to know what they were waiting for....*

As his computer showed the predicted LZ for the incoming objects he frowned. *A battalion or so ahead of us, the compound on our right, and now we've got a landing force coming down on our left....* "OK, guys, we're going to slow our advance and

shift toward the compound, 'cause either accidentally or on purpose, they're set to box us in." As the 1st began to react, Chainsaw came over the comnet: "Don't just stand there, run you idiots, we're coming in right behind them!" With that, his air-search radar picked up five more objects coming down from orbit. *This day just keeps getting better and better.* "OK, guys, we're gonna pull back and wait for the lines to stabilize-without us being surrounded on three sides!" The 1st had no sooner reached the hastily chosen assembly point when the enemy "dropships", see-saws fluttering wildly, smacked into the swamp. One self-destructed from the impact, but the other nine spawned a fresh crop of fish-piloted 'Mechs. His battle computer was still tallying up the newly arrived forces when five large, barrel-shaped objects trailing parachutes touched down somewhat more gently than the enemy ships. As the first four "barrels" opened, Teemo started to assign targets to his unit. As they began firing, the fifth "barrel" opened. **What the?!? Monkeys???** *Monkeys piloting battlearmor?* Monkey-piloted BA which started swarming the fish-piloted 'Mechs. Teemo couldn't help himself. *M-m-m-monkeys, in b-b-battlearmor, f-f-f-fighting f-f-f-fish driving BattleMechs.....*

He started laughing uncontrollably. Not surprisingly, his aim suffered somewhat as he shook with mirth. *Thank God I've got a TC in this thing. Thank God the BoM are on **our** side.* A fresh wave of giggles overcame him. *Thank God I went before I left.* He quickly regained control of himself when Chainsaw announced his intention to call an airstrike on a fuel-tank farm on the far side of the compound. *Oh, [CRAP!]* "All units! Pull out of the compound **NOW!**" As the 1st's 'Mech detachment ran past him, Teemo held his position just long enough to see the Rangers pile into the helicopters that had been standing by for just such a contingency. As the choppers zoomed overhead, Teemo turned wheeled his *Warhammer* through a tight 180 degree turn and pushed it towards the Irregulars' DZ as fast as it could move, which, considering the ankle-deep muck, was not fast enough for his comfort. *Chainsaw, if I lose anybody because of this.....* On the screen he had set to watch his "six", he noted the fighters diving toward their target. "OK, people, brace yourselves! This is gonna be rough!"

The front assault team, led by Motown, enters the underground area through three different doors and find themselves in a giant chamber as big as the largest stadiums. They see enemy mechs and vehicles scattered around the area as we advance the defense is very disorganized. Motown sends the assaults around the outer walls as they advance the enemy units are herded toward the middle. The noise is tremendous, even with the external speakers and mikes off the noise level is painful. The assaults smash the enemy mechs and tanks as they try to get away a hand full of survivors try to rush the doors, and run straight into the pursuit star. Motown can actually feel the Concussion as Andrew fires into an Enforcer Ripping its chest open. Steelfang rips on a Stinger shredding it with laser and PPC fire. The mother daughter team does a nasty little tag team on a hapless Archer. Motown dismembers a Valkyrie that was a little slow and let Motown get behind him. As they continue to advance, the remaining tanks and vehicles are pushed into a tight group pretty soon it is like shooting fish in a barrel. If they miss our target the shot usually hits something else, while most of theirs are missing. The sound level drops as ammo supplies are exhausted after a few minutes resistance ceases, leaving an eerie quiet. Motown checks out the situation, the chamber is filling with smoke from the fires of burning equipment causing a fire suppression sprinkler system to activate most of the mechs under his command have little more than superficial damage the

exception is MercChick's Wraith that has taken engine damage and is over heated and shut down.

"Mommy you all right?"*sniff*

"I'm O.K. honey my mech just over heated"

sniff"Mommy?"

"Yo Tunnel Rat Give us A scan any Hostiles"

"Neg nothing on the scans"

"Good.All units the garage area is secure"

The sprinklers have pretty much suppressed the smoke and fire. There is a fair amount of damage to facilities but it looks like at least some of the equipment is intact. Motown orders the assault to cover the entrances and start to do a systematic inspection of the chamber to figure out where to gain entree to the rest of the complex, and wait to hear from Pyro and Fred.

MercChicks mech cools down enough to restart. Motown is scanning around for any decent sized doors to the interior when the floor starts to shake and the lights go out. WTF

" What in the name of all that is holy was that?"

Bowtie answers

"Chainsaw called in an air-strike on a fuel depot near by"

"Jeez I will kill him later"

Motown kicks on his spot lights and does a roll call

"Andrew"

"I'm alright "

"Steelfang"

"Im O.K. What the HELL was he thinking?"

"Hell if I know...MercChick...MercChick?"

"Mommy?...**Mommy?**"*sniff*

MOMMYYYY!!!!!!!_{sob} **MOMMYYYY!!!!!!!**

Motown aims his lights over at the last place he saw her mech...It is on the floor and it appears that the head stuck in a wall. Motown pops open his cockpit and quickly climbs down and runs over to her mech and opens the emergency hatch. She is breathing. Tunnel Rat quickly joins him... she is crying hard. MercChick groans and opens her eyes.

"Owww ! what happened ?"

"Chainsaw called an air-strike on a fuel depot and it blew"

"Owww!"

Motown checks her eyes...unequal...concussion

"O.K. Medevac for you"

"Mommy you alright ?"

Groan"I got a splitting headache but I'm alright"

"I need a medevac Here"

static

"Bowtie I need a relay call Medevac MercChick is hurt"

"got cha..how bad?"

"Concussion she should be alright"

"Right stand by....ETA 4 minutes"

"GOOD how are your people?"

"O.K."

"BBjr. how are your people?"

" Alright here"

"Good"

Motown helps MercChick out of her mech
"Mommy I am sorry*sniff*I did not mean for you to get hurt*sob*" "Oww I'm supposed to watching you...i'm not doing a very good job am I?"
"*sniff*"I sowwy"
"Well so far she is alright so I suppose you did not do too bad,quaiff?"
"Right mommy I am O.K."
The medevac arrives...It is Connie.
"Boy I just keep running into you don't I?"
"Aff that you do"😄
"You old flirt"
"Who me?"
"Ya you old man "
"Brat"
"See you later old man"
With that they load up MercChik and depart
Giggle
"Get back to your Mech...Bratting"
THHP!
"Why I oughta..."
"Giggle"
'I am too old for this Ramlatch'

As the dust settled from the massive assault, Chainsaw powered down his mech and climbed out. It was currently laying on it's back, and covered in mud, making it a difficult proposition at best to get up on it's own. He figured he'd wait until a recovery vehicle could come and assist. From the looks of the surrounding swamplands, most of the other heavy and assault class mechs were in the same position. Perversely, the smaller mechs, which went down easier ans were able to get up easier. Which was to say AT ALL.

Popping open a bottle of Tembiqui Dark and enjoying a long pull he slowly spun in place, enjoying the vantage point of his mechs chest.

Every tree, shrub, or significant terrain feature for as far as the eye could see was knocked over, blown up, or just... gone. Granted through the haze visibility was down to a half mile, but it was still impressive. And beautiful.

Chainsaw was pulled out from this line of thought by a chime over his personal Comm.

"Casualty reports sir" Great, it was Skippy... Oh well... Good news can wait, but bad news WON'T wait.

"Go on"

"Well sir, first the good news, aside from firefight casualties, we didn't lose any biological personnel to the... Um... Fireball. There are a number of WIA's but no fatalities. At least on our side, that is."

"*Biological Personnel*" He liked that, so not only did he not kill any of his own troops with that crapshoot, but he didn't even kill any BAMS. That was good. He was far from a member of PETA, but those monkeys were real party animals, to excuse a

pun.

“Go on”

“Well, as for equipment damage sir, well... That little assault did almost as much damage as the fish. We are going to be temporarily out of the fight, as far as mechs go. The assaults are all mired and buried in sludge that just doesn't want to let them go. The mediums and lights took a hell of a beating from that shockwave, and we lost all five drop barrels, and the repair pieces within them, so our BAMS down here have no replacement Chemical Batteries. We still have four barrels worth of BAMS up there, but they are fifteen minutes away should we need them. We have the resupply barrel too, but it might not be wise to use it now.”

“Yeah, because it's bad tactics to put all your monkeys in one barrel, right?”

Skippy wisely ignored the bad pun and continued with his update:

“Ok as for the bad guys. The original forces defending this compound, as well as the reinforcements, and indeed a good portion of the aboveground segments of the compound itself now exist only as gun camera footage, bad memories, and funny smells.”

Ok, so he traded a handful of WIA's and some dings in their mechs for a mech regiment worth of baddies. Acceptable. The WIA's might have something else to say on it, but Leaders weren't supposed to be popular, better to be hated by your men than to not have any to hate you. Besides by the end of that nights victory party it would have been forgotten. Victory without serious cost has a way of doing that.

“We dispatched fighters to investigate the landing area those other BOPships landed in, it came back as open sea, about five clicks out to the blue, perhaps three hundred meters deep. There was no sign of wreckage, so we can only guess that they landed successfully.”

Chainsaw thought about that for a moment.

“So what you're saying is, they moved in enough heavy movers for a mech division and managed to HIDE THEM? That's some BAD news there. But the question I want to know is... Dropping off or picking up?”

Medron chimed in: “I think we're all wondering that one...”

In their own parallel dimension the gods smiled smugly. It was good to be omnipotent.

“Ok chainsaw, you got a little explaining to do”

He could hear Medron's weird mix of emotions over the distorted minispeakers in his ear.

“First off, what were those... Things... you had with your mech lance?”

"Well, they are a cross shoot of Rhesus and Spider Monkeys, we use them like the clans use elementals or those guys use fish. Only ours aren't being controlled so much as aimed. We just point them at the baddies and let them go. They do alright."

"Yes, yes they do at that. Now... where did you GET them?"

"Mail order"

Realizing he wasn't going to get a better answer on the subject Medron tried another approach.

"Ok, I'll pretend that answer makes sense if you answer me this one instead. You said you aren't controlling them. Isn't that a little... Dangerous?"

"Not so much, we supply them with beer and food, they help us out. Now, if you're asking how we command them in battle..."

Medron cut in: "You give the monkeys beer?"

"Sure, we tried letting them have harder stuff, but it was.. a regrettable incident at best. Lets just keep it at 12,000 monkeys puking isn't a pretty sight, or smell"

"I'd imagine"

"Well, as I was saying, we just point them in the general direction of the enemy and tell them to have fun"

"The monkeys talk?"

Chainsaw was a tad embarrassed, and it showed. "Not exactly"

"Then how do you communicate? Don't tell me YOU use the force..."

"Not me, Valker."

Medron *knew* he's heard that name before...

"Jedi candidate that washed out of your school for not giving up worldly pleasures. Well, good thing he didn't. Because he's great"

"He's using the force to control innocent animals!" Medron could barely control his rage

"Nothing of the sort. He just gives them the idea there's a huge stack of beer, food, and monkey porno at the objective, and the enemy is the only thing standing in their way. Don't get between a technomony and his porn."

"And when they get to the objective and it isn't there?"

"We always make sure the objective is just outside of the range envelope of their Chemical Battery packs, so they shut down long before that becomes an issue. We just cart in their rewards after the battle. The monkeys don't know the difference, nor would they care even if they did."

Medron was flabbergasted. It was genius in its simplicity. Bizzaro type genius, but one thing a Jedi learns is to not question it if it works.

The lights went out and the floor heaved, sending the ComStar team sprawling to the floor. A few seconds or maybe minutes passed, and Ryan Furey finally found a chemical break light and threw it into the room.

They were in a lab of some sort, full of aquariums and mind-defying equipment. Off to one corner, a watermelon sat in a tensometer. Pyro could only guess at the function of that experiment, but didn't feel the need to bother with it.

"Everyone here?"

A series of affirmatives came from the team as they picked themselves up off the floor. "Good. Let's go." Emergency power came online as the ComStar team advanced, and dim red lighting cast an eerie color throughout the facility.

The ComStar team headed further into the underwater part of the complex, and stepped into what appeared to be a war room. The ceiling was transpex, and provided an excellent view of the lakebed, while numerous computer banks surrounded the circular edge of the room. Several data screens covered most of the walls, and two of the most obvious were readouts of ground-based and space-based local radar systems.

As they searched the war room, a door opened, and a black-robed figure strode into the room and drew a long sword, followed closely by three goons in what appeared to be light power-armor.

"Well well", Darth Nuclear said with a sneer. "Look what shows up. A Jedi... Good work bringing them to me, Fiona. You're coming along well in your training."

Pyro looked over. "What?"

Fiona shook her head. "I did nothing. Do not..."

At this point, Darth Nuclear shot her with a Sternsnacht and looked to Pyro. "Matters not. Just another expendable henchman either way. I do hope you came prepared to die today." Pyro shook his head. "Already cheated death twice this week. It'll take more than you to stop me from a hat trick."

The goons opened fire on the rest of the ComStar team while Pyro leapt at Darth Nuclear swatting aside her long sword with his left-hand blade and driving through to empty air as she dodged aside of the attack. Nuclear took a swipe at Pyro, only to have her weapon parried by crossed swords. Laughing at the sword lock, she suddenly received a boot to the face and staggered backwards, barely recovering in time to parry another attack from Pyro.

The two traded blows for a while, heading down the hall as the ComStar team continued to fight. Ryan Furey drew the first blood, firing a small blue spheroid energy ball from his Federated-Banzai PPC Rifle that left a smoking hole in one of the goons' faceplates. Amy Redshirt added a gauss slug to another thug with her

Thunderstroke, but failed to down him. The thug's return fire danced across the floor until it nearly hit her, but she pulled back behind a computer terminal before being caught by the hail of bullets.

Erika Carson fired a hail of slugs from her twin gauss pistols, crushing through the armor of the one Amy had hit and reducing his internal organs to chunky salsa. The last thug fired at her, catching her shoulder and knocking her to the ground as Ryan Furey finished him off with another blast from the PPC Rifle.

Erika gasped as she tended to the wound and Furey leaned down over Fiona. "She is alive... We must get her out of here." Amy looked up. "But what about Pyro?"

Furey shook his head. "We can do nothing to help him now. Come, we must leave." Amy turned reluctantly toward the door Pyro and Nuclear had left by, and headed for the exit.

Meanwhile, Darth Nuclear continued to drive Pyro back with a flurry of attacks, and Pyro backed onto a maintenance catwalk that allowed access to some kind of pumping mechanism that fed some substance into the tanks below. He had no time to examine the baroque monstrosity of machinery that surrounded him, as a really angry Dark Jedi was occupying his entire attention.

Nuclear dove forward again, drawing a cut across Pyro's left eyebrow that bled into his eye, partially blinding him, and followed up with a thrust that was barely parried, knocking Pyro back to a crouching position. She laughed. "You cannot win, Jedi! You have no idea what you are dealing with, you're just trying to be a hero."

She smiled smugly. "The Inner Sphere needs leadership, not pointless heroics. There are no heroes!"

Pyro shook his head. "I've heard this before."

Nuclear took a curious stance, briefly, but just long enough to give Pyro an opening. "Oh really, where?"

"Some guy named Trane said it. Just before he died." Pyro said as he leapt over her head, swords flashing furiously through the air, and landed well on the other side of her. Darth Nuclear laughed. "Nice stunt, Jedi, but you should have aimed for my head."

Pyro simply pointed up, and she looked only to notice that the steel cables supporting her section of catwalk had been severed. A look of uncomprehending horror dawned on her face as she leapt forward off the falling section, grabbing the section that Pyro stood on with one hand.

Pyro walked up to the edge of the catwalk and shook his head. "I don't suppose you're going to surrender."

Nuclear threw all of her effort in trying to swing herself up onto the catwalk as Pyro simply stepped on her hand really hard, breaking several fingers. She fell backwards and landed in the tank below...

"I do hope you remember how to swim." Pyro called out as he assessed her situation. "Not that it'll help much."

Nuclear laughed and treaded water, then raised her long sword above her with her good hand and threw it at Pyro, guiding it with the Force towards his location at the best speed she could manage. She was so lost in concentration that the first screaming pain in her side took her entirely by surprise and blasted her concentration away from the sword, which embedded itself in the pumping machine.

Pyro looked down as the batch of BattleCarp she had landed in mistook her for dinner. "What a way to go..."

Nuclear swam to the edge of the tank and nearly pulled herself out, but a determined BattleCarp bit her on the foot and dragged her back in. A frenzy of BattleCarp quickly obscured her position.

Pyro put a foot on the pumping machine and pulled the long sword from it, and left the room shaking his head. "What a way to go..."

After several minutes of less-than productive struggling, Teemo came to the unpleasant realization that his 'Mech would not be able to free itself from the swamp muck under its own power. Sighing heavily, he safed his ejection seat and began making his way to the entry hatch mounted in the top of his 'Mech's "head", grateful that his instructors had insisted that their students would learn how to dismount a 'Mech that wasn't standing erect. Pulling a personal communicator from its pouch on his cooling vest, he called his TOC. "Teemo here. Did our vehicles and infantry get out safe?" "Yes, sir. They arrived at our perimeter right about the time of the explosion." "Good, good. We're gonna need the recovery vehicles to get our 'Mechs out of this sludge. Teemo out." Reaching into another pocket on his vest, he pulled out the candy packet from the MRE he had wolfed down in the planning center the night before. *Alright, Chiclets! My favorite!*

The map in the war room painted a grim picture of the battle. Though the Dropship Irregulars were faring well against the current human/fish wave of BattleMechs they were facing, a great multitude slowly converged upon the position.

Heading to the communications station, Pyro keyed the frequency to the Irregulars general channel. "Ladies and Gentlemen, this is the War Room, under new management. Black Two reporting."

"I am detecting a large mass of inbound BattleMechs that will be arriving in a few days time. I am directing our dropships to land at the Complex's landing field and provide direct support to all forces, and ComStar engineering teams will get to work shortly. The defensive contingency plan discussed in the briefing will be implemented."

Pyro hoped that would be enough to tip them off that it was time for the batter fry, but if it wasn't, there'd still be plenty of time to do the entrenching and preparations

necessary to set it up over the next few days.

"In the meantime, carry on."

Pyro dialed the frequency to the BattleCarp channel. "All Forces, this is Meridian. The Base is under attack. Our units are failing to slow their advance. Assume combat formation and congregate. Hit them as one."

Pyro smiled devilishly, looking at the enemy troop movement in disbelief as they actually congregated into one lump. "Large formation tactics are so obsolete. If only the rest of the Inner Sphere knew... oh well, time to teach them."

"*St. Paul*, this is Black Two. Descend to ten thousand kilometers orbit and target following coordinates.", he said as he punched in a few numbers on the numeric keypad. "Full broadside, repeat four times. Fire for effect."

Pyro watched the map over the next few hours, and was rewarded to see large flashes of orange suddenly appear on it, and the formation of enemy mechs thinned rapidly, disintegrating as the significant numbers of survivors broke apart into smaller units to make less-tempting targets for the warship overhead.

Shaking his head in disbelief at their stupidity, Pyro called the rest of the Irregulars. "Enemy Forces will be slightly delayed in their arrival. Keep up the good work."

Deep underground
BattleCarp Compound

As Fred and Michael swept down further and further into the secondary compound, the ambiance kept getting weirder and weirder. They had found themselves body hugging armour and plenty of ammo. They continued to dispatch countless mindless soldiers who needed a dental plan real bad, as well as the BA demon/minotaur things.

They stumble upon a red glowing pad....with a reversed pentagram on it...lovely.

They step onto it only to have their brains sucked out of their heads and quickly shoved back in. They ended up in the middle of a room crammed with ammo, pick up as much of it as possible, and head for the door.

The empty cargo room was huge with a single, large room in the middle. The ceiling glowed a sickening red. As they wandered, a loud screaming howl came from around the corner....A minotaur...no really, the proto...

This thing toted a large missile launcher and looked like it had way too much armour to be a cannon design.....

The duo dodge left, right, left again...the missile seemed to have really big warheads as one of them knock Michael 20ft in the air....

"Good armour we found....." he winced....

After 45 rockets and 200 rounds of the rapid-fire PPC.....the thing blew like it was hit

by a N-PPC.....

Both the boys were in bad shape....they find their way to a door in the corner of the cargo hold.....

The central computer core. "Nice!!!, Lets shut her down" Michael, bleeding from his side after being hit by a mini-cruise missile responds

"Try to link with group, get all the info first"

They hack into the system, trying to find a line out to the world..

"Fred to Dropship Irregulars, come in.....come in....."

"Fred i#\$@@ you...wher&% ave you been" Fred could not be happier to hear Motown's voice....

Chapter 13

February 16th

Underground Complex

Hagar

"Fred glad to hear you are still among the living. Looks like the base is secure for the most part. Pyro's captured the control room. We got the garage area. Tunnel Rat took out General Melissa "

"She hurt my mommy...I hurt her"

"That she did"

"She still alive?"

"Barely... and she is a he"

"He/she/it is a doodoo head"

"What the hell was that that shook every thing up so bad?"

"Chainsaw called down an airstrike on a massive fuel dump"

"He is a doodoo head"

"What the hell did he do that for?"

"There was a big honking enemy force around it...the explosion wiped them all out"

"That sounds good"

"Trouble is there was collateral damage. A lot of our people got caught by the shock wave no fatals but a number of injuries"

"He hurt my mommy I am going to hurt him"

"Tunnel Rat...he is our CO"

" I do not care...he is a doodoo head"

"She is angry with him *Mon Ami non?*"

"I would say that"

"So is every thing secure down there"

"*Oui*"

"Good I am going to secure the Landing field I got some people waiting to start gathering salvage."

"*Oui*"

"O.K. people Bowtie hold the garage here ."

"*Buurp*"

"BBjr. hold the entrance outside"

"Rest of you guys on me sound off"

"Andrew"

"Ready"

"Nightstalker"

"We are ready"

"Tunnel Rat"

buurp*giggle*

{why me}

"Tunnel Rat...Not funny"

"I don't know I kinda think it's cute"

"Fine Bowtie you want her in your unit?"

"No thank you...to much trouble"

"HEY"

sigh"O.K. people time to move out"

They move to the surface...*gawd what a mess there is a lot of damage to above ground.* BBjr. spreads his force out. Motown has his unit advance in a line abreast we spread out across the Ferro-crete. The blast from the fuel dump explosion has scoured the area clean of anything that was not made of Ferro-crete. It takes 20 minutes to scout the area and determines that it was free of enemy forces. Motown opens the comm-line to the Beast.

"Fitz you copy"

"Sure do"

"Send a signal to the recovery people the base is secure and we got a LOT of salvage"

"you got it"

A hour later two Tramp Class jump ships arrive at the L5 point 3 hours after that 6 Mammoth Class dropships land and salvage vehicles cargo trucks and busses start pouring out and scattering across the base. Once they move in Motown pulls his people back to the Beast. Rick Raisly and Fitz are standing there grinning like a couple of Cheshire Cats.

"O.K. what is this all about?"

"We have a new recruit"

"Oh?"

"Meet Finious Carp"

And with that the Hunchback that Motown had first stripped the cockpit out of advances down the ramp. Motown look the fish is driving it. Motown's reflex action kicks in and he starts to raise his saws.

"Rick shouts hold up he is with us now"

"Impressive"

" We broke the code I have reprogrammed that mech so it's tied to our CaC system"

"Boy that will honk somebody off"

Calis walks his Bushwacker up to where Motown and Rick are standing; popping the top hatch he climbs down to talk with the two men.

Wandering over he looks back at the mech noticing for the first time just how much damage there is to the mech.

"So what is the damage" Calis asks no one in particular

Calis watches as the salvage vehicles move back and forth, "hey isn't that Merc Chicks Wraith?"

Medron sighed as he looked up at his damaged 'Mech, and then shook his head. It would take a while to fix up the damage, but it would take a while for the next wave of enemies to arrive. He paused for a moment, wondering if they were all caught in some kind of game where ever-increasing hordes of enemies were sent against them until they died.

Naw. Couldn't be.

He shook his head, turned away from the 'Mech, and started walking. He paused again, realizing he'd yet to give it a name, and shrugged. He'd have to think about that one. She'd worked well so far. Definitely good enough to deserve a name. He'd

just never been good with names. Ah well.

For now it didn't really matter. Medron needed a drink. Badly.

He'd thought some of the things he'd done in the past were nuts, but the Monkeys took it to a whole new level. For all the new life running through his veins, he felt very, very old compared to those...insane asylum escapees.

Yeah...that probably fit.

Now where was the booze? He looked around, frowned, and then stopped. Duh. The Monkeys probably had it. He sighed, waited for a second, and then started walking towards the Barrel of Monkey's camp.

Sten was exhausted and dehydrated due to the massive heat buildups that occurred during the days fighting. What amazed was how sharp the sword on this *Intimidator* still was after craving through all those Carp-piloted 'Mechs. The Carp Warriors looked so much sushi, it was too bad for him that he hated eating fish. He pulled the sword up to cockpit level just to see who made the thing and what he saw did not surprise him. It was Ginsu K3000 MetaSliceNDice™, the sharpest blades in the known universe. As he looked at the carnage around him, he decided that this 'Mech needed to have its own name, from this day on, this *Intimidator* would be known as *Benihana*.

DS Beast

Hagar

Every joint in Motown's body hurts. He maneuver the Dismantler into its stall and slowly painfully climb out of the cockpit. The rest of the unit is doing the same.

Tunnel Rat stops by the Wraith. She is crying. Motown calls the MASH unit on his Com-link. *'I want to talk to them before I talk to Tunnel Rat.'*

"I would like to know how MercChick I doing"

"One moment let me call up her file...She has a mild concussion...she should be back tomorrow morning"

"Thank you "

"You're Welcome ...I know her daughter has got to be worried"

"True she is standing by her mothers mech crying"

"Little kids have no business in a war zone"

"Right tell her that"

Motown disconnects, *'I do not need to hear that I already know that all to well'*. He walks over to Tunnel Rat. The custom cooling vest they made for her fits a lot better than the first one. She is crying softly.

"Hi kid, I just talked to the medicos about your mom"

sniff"She alright?"

"Aff Minor concussion she will be back tomorrow"

sniff"Good chainsaw is a doodoo head"

"Hey he does some weird things but it did knock out just about all of the enemy would have been a lot worse if he had not called that air-strike because all those mechs would have most likely overrun us "

" I do not care Mommy got hurt he is a doodoo head"

Motown is too tired to try to explain tactics and strategy so he just shakes his head and walks off. The other units are coming in. Chainsaw's lance comes in covered in mud. They dismount. Chainsaw is on his com-link.

"No wait till the Monkey porn, beer, and pretzels are over there before you hook up those power packs. You do not want those Monkey powered up if that stuff is not there trust me"

"chainsaw anybody tell you that you are totally nuts?"

"Ya and damn proud of it to those BA.M.s were great...really did a number out there."

"Maybe "

"And did you see that explosion awesome"

"No I was under ground that quake was not a good thing Knocked over MercChicks meck she struck her head and has a concussion. Tunnel Rat is mad as hell at you"

"Thats O.K. I'll talk to...EEP!"

Motown watches as his face turns as red as his hair.

"That is for mommy!!"

She had punched him; he stands at 1.9 meters she stands at 1 meter...guess where that punch went. He drops to his knees.

THHP!"doodoo head"

She turns and storms off. Chainsaw looks at Motown and in a voice 3 octaves higher than normal states, "I guess she is a little upset "

"yup"

The techs are laughing their heads off

He squeaks "I'll talk to her later"

"If I were you I would wear a cup"

The techs are rolling on the floor laughing. Motown chuckles and walks to his quarters. There are 4 Spamiches waiting for him and his shower is calling his name.



On foot in the 🗿 swamp
Hagar, Far Periphery

As the haze slowly lifted from the area, Teemo looked around for the rest of his command. The recon lance seemed to have come out relatively okay, their higher speed having allowed them to escape the full force of the shockwave. A bit closer to his position, Sarah Connor's *Grasshopper* had finally regained its feet, with a little help from Sam Nelson and Mary Jennings. In the immediate vicinity, he was relieved to note that his *Warhammer* was the not only command lance 'Mech not standing upright. Pulling out his communicator, he raised Scrapy.

"Teemo here, is the compound secure?" "Yeah, there's not much left above ground, but underground levels seem to be okay." "That's good. Is Chainsaw there? I owe him a good swift kick in the pants for that little stunt." "Hehehe, TR already beat you to it." "Heh, lemme guess, she didn't get him in the shin. My 'Mech's bogged down, so I'm coming up there for the time being. See you in a minute." Switching channels, he contacted his company: "Kay, looks like *Big Bad Wolf* isn't going anywhere for a while. Natsuko, I'd like a ride to the compound, if you wouldn't mind. The rest of you can head in. Roger, you're in charge 'till I get back." As his company chorused their assent, Teemo took a long pull from his canteen. *No infantry fatalities, the choppers and hovers were able to evac the blast zone in time, and 11 out of 12 'Mechs are returning to base under their own power. Somebody up there likes me.* As Natsuko's *Timber Wolf* approached, Teemo called his TOC. "Teemo here. *Big Bad* is stuck **bad**, so we gotta figure out if our recovery vehicles can get him out without getting mired themselves. Natsuko's giving me a lift to the compound, and Roger's leading the rest of the 'Mechs in. When I get to the compound, I'm going to see if we can set up a

remote connection so Ed can hack their files from there, but we may need to bring her up here so she can do it on-site. I'll call back if I think of anything else." As Natsuko brought her 'Mech alongside his, she lowered the chain ladder from its compartment. Grabbing hold, Teemo raised his communicator and said: "OK, let's go."

A few minutes later, Teemo dropped a meter or so to the ground as Natsuko's *Timber Wolf* came to a stop. Approaching the Irregular personnel gathered around an underground 'Mech bay, Teemo told them his plans for the moment. "I'm going to have a couple of computer techs chopper out here to try to set up a remote connection so my hacker can crack their files from off-site. Eleven of my 'Mechs are returning to base for repairs, my *'Hammer's* the only one still stuck in the goop. Where's Chainsaw?" The others simply pointed to a whimpering figure in a corner. Teemo walked over and said:

"If you ever, **EVER** do something like that again, you'll be piloting a 'Mech with three shoes; Two on your feet-" at this moment Teemo pointed down at his mud-caked size 13s "-and one in your **ass**."

About a half klick underground, Fred confers with Esme..."ok..I past the secondary block....shoot, another encrypted wall..."

"That should do it, don't worry.....can you get the satcomm to work.."

"I got access....linking up"

"Got it, not much of a connection, Teemo has got some of his tech hooking up equipment on the above surface command center, so I will help unlock the central core so they can access it from the upper levels"

After going back and forth, having one digital wall come down to have another pop up, they hit the jack pot....the full file system of the Battlecarp base, now all the above ground techs need to do is unlock the security systems up top and decrypt the sensitive materials.

Fred's eyes widen .."MO!! The moon is hollow, it's got about 10 more warships in it, they have not received orders to move but they could still pop up, get the fleet to fire for effect on the far side....20klicks south of the equator, get them while they are still fish in a barrel"

"Can they see what is going on?" "Negative, no external sensors on the moon surface, it would be too obvious...I am unlocking the gate to the extra compound, hold your breath when you get in, the gate is at the extreme north end of the underground complex, ignore the scenery on the way down."

"Have you unlock the by-passes?" "Sure have Teemo, most of the files are encrypted and you still need to bypass the main systems up there to get them."

Calis stands and watches as the techs swarm in and gets that prickly feeling on the back of his neck and walks over to where the techs have setup a satcom dish. Looking at the tech Calis hits the communications switch to standby and looks at the

frequency settings.

Calis notices that it is not one of the commands pre-determined frequencies; pulling the tech to his feet he pushes the man towards Medron since he is wearing the coveralls of the Knights.

Calis sends two techs from the BoM over to check over the transmitter and then report back to him.

Calis explains to Medron what he seen and that until the two techs report in he will just have to wait to download the encrypted files.

"Medron I think we have problem, I found this tech about to turn on the relay satcom but it was not set to one of our frequencies. "

Medron signals for a pair of security troopers to hold the watch the man while He and Calis walk over towards the transmitter.

The techs look up at the approach of the men, "well Sir, as far as we can tell it was code know to be used by the WoB."

Calis begins to swear.

"Well what do we do now Medron...."

Hearing about the fake ComTech, Teemo was struck by inspiration. "Hold on to that guy for the time being. Once we've finished downloading this stuff, I'll have Ed gin up some dummy files for our Wobbly friends. Unless you've got a better idea, that is."

Pyro pondered the news of the hollow moon with the warships, and smiled devilishly as ideas came to him. Firing off a Comm to Motown, he sent a message requesting for naval reinforcements from the OLA.

Reaching for a control panel on his right, Pyro aligned the HPG dish and sent a quick burst transmission, then leaned back in his chair and pressed the communications switch nonchalantly.

"Black Two to all commands. Do not make any hostile moves towards the moon base until further notice. Leave them in the dark, they will be dealt with shortly."

Pyro walked through the corridors of the captured *Congress*-class frigate, checking on the status of various systems. The best technicians in the ComStar battlegroup had spent days bringing the intersystem drive back online and re-arming the rear hull. Though there was plenty of structural damage, the newly rechristened *Inquisitor* was as battle ready as possible.

Battlearmor and a reduced crew hand-selected for personal loyalty kept watch, manned duty stations, and conducted more last-minute repairs as the plans fell into place.

Pyro simply sat in the Captain's chair, reading books on naval strategy while

occasionally fighting battles in the holotank to try to ready himself. He was cramming before the big test.

DS Beast
BoM LZ
Hagar

The Scrapper received Pyros request and fired off a message to ODF High command for reinforcements. They replied that the First Fleet would be sent including one of the brand new Montana class Battleships OLS Maine BB 01 along with the Bird Class sloop OLS Peregrine PS 01 OLS Archer CVE 01 name ship of the class Two Flower class corvettes OLS Iris PC 01, and OLS Sunflower PC 02, and the OLS Tobruk PC 09 Name ship of her class.

After sending of the confirmation of the receipt of the HPG reply the Scrapper slowly crawled in to bed and just crashed it had been a long rough day.

Inquisitor, Congress-class
Hagar Orbit, Far Periphery

Pyro paced back and forth, trying to work up his nerves. Breaking the news to the crew had been hard enough, but this would be one of the more difficult moments of his entire career. With a sudden determination, he hit the transmit button and faced the holotank's recording unit, speaking on the ComStar channel.

"All ComStar commands, this is Pyro. It is my sad duty to admit the inescapable reality that I will no longer be able to continue in my capacity as Precentor-Martial, for a number of reasons. As my final order, I relinquish command of the warship *Inquisitor*, not as yet capable of jumping back to the Inner Sphere, to the Dropship Irregulars. My resignation has been sent to the First Circuit, and should arrive within days, but I felt it necessary to tell the forces under my command directly."

"The crew of the *Inquisitor* and the 666th Division have decided to stay in Hagar and have tendered resignations as well, but all other forces, most notably the *Vision of Truth* are free to return to the Inner Sphere at your leisure."

Pyro sat back in the chair, and hit the transmit button on his resignation letter, then broadcast the recorded message. True to expectations, the *Vision of Truth* left the system quickly with her supporting elements, leaving without the *Holy Flame* and the half of the 666th Division that originally came to Hagar.

With a sigh of relief, Pyro leaned back in the Captain's chair. For the first time in years, he was finally free of the burden of commanding anything larger than a single ship. A Warrior of the Dropship instead of a ComGuard. Hallelujah, praise the toaster, free at last.

"All formerly ComStar commands, this is Captain Pyro of the *DIS Inquisitor*. Congratulations 666th Arsonist Heretics Battalion, Warriors of the Dropship Regiment, and welcome to the Dropship Irregulars. I hope you'll enjoy serving with us as members rather than auxiliaries. Now let's get ready to kick some fish."

Hagar's Moon, Far Periphery
Dreadnought

Admiral Chip paced back and forth, staring at the blank holotank that showed the ships of his task force, moored inside the moon complex which he'd pushed so hard for the Dark Lady to construct. Hollowing out a relatively tiny moon may have been a tremendous expenditure of resources, but it made for an optimal near-zero gravity environment to moor a whole lot of warships in.

But as impressive as the moon base was, the *Dreadnought* was his pride, the thing he lobbied his entire naval career for, getting himself ejected from every successor state. It was the only Bop Drive powered Warship in existence. And it was his.

He turned to his communications officer. "Any word from our satellite relays yet? How goes the attack?" The officer shook his head. "None, Admiral."

Chip continued to pace nervously. "I don't like this a bit. We've never gone this long without contact before. Cancel all leaves and call all personnel back to their ships. It's time we had a look for ourselves."

BattleCarp Compound
Hagar, Far Periphery

Calis picks the headset Satcom and sends a quick message to Team Bansai's jumpship.

"Captain Stewart, I need you to take a shuttle over to the Avalon class warship and take command of it during the up coming naval battle."

Captain Stewart sends back a message acknowledging the orders.

Calis sends a second message to Pyro informing him that Captain Stewart will be shuttling over to the Avalon.

Calis then pick up his field communicator and calls Motown and informs him of the changes.

Mjölmir
Hagar, Low Orbit

The sound of rattling plates and shouts wafted out of the bridge as Medron walked towards it gingerly. The entire ship was a real mess thanks to the fight to take it over, but she was an old ship and he doubted a simple boarding action would keep it out of action. After more than a millennium of life, it would be a real shame to see it die like that. Then he walked onto the bridge and paused as he glanced over the chaos of shattered panels and controls. Marik engineers huddled in groups around the bridge, working on the most important systems as fast as they could, and he looked around for the captain.

She turned to him and nodded before walking over from what he guessed was the helm. "Pryde," she noted simply and he nodded charmingly towards her.

"Captain Geraldson. What do you think of this ship?" he asked and she grimaced

disdainfully.

"She's old, she's big, and she's slower than a snail with its tail nailed down," she muttered and Medron winced.

"I didn't know snails *had* tails," he responded. She just glared at him. "Right," he added awkwardly. "So I gather you don't want to command her?"

"I never said that," she answered quickly, leaning towards him. "I've never commanded anything this large, but I'd love the chance to try it out. I'm just glad those bastards never refitted it for the BattleCarp! I'm not sure I'd be able to live with that smell."

"Well, we could have changed the water," Medron winked and her cheek twitched with annoyance again. "Or not," he muttered and looked away.

"Charles was right about you," she noted and he turned to look at her questioningly. "You never take anything seriously do you?" she asked and he sighed.

"I try not to," he muttered back seriously and turned towards the door to leave the bridge. "Life is much easier to live when you take things with a grain of humor."

"Life isn't always a joke."

"No it isn't," Medron responded instantly. "But I've seen what humans do to each other for power. What they do when they take things *too* seriously. What *I* do when I take things too seriously. I don't want to see that again," he finished with a shrug and opened the door to leave.

"So that explains things," she muttered in his direction and he nodded simply before turning back with a humorous smile on his face.

"So you want the snail?" he asked and she shook her head at him for a few seconds.

Then she nodded firmly. "You bet."

"Sweetness," Medron whispered. "We'll have some more support coming in soon," he added a little louder. "Enough to blow these carp into minnows," he finished with another wink and left the bridge behind. They all had preparations to make after all.

DS Beast
BoM LZ
Hagar

The Scrapper starts to walk away and stops. He realizes that Tunnel Rat just assaulted the CO. That is something that cannot be condoned even in a unit like the BoM. Unfortunately there is only one way to handle this type of situation. He gestures for two of the security detail.

"Tunnel Rat...come here"

She comes over giggling

"I puncheded him"*giggle*

"Yes you did "

She looks at her CO and stops giggling when she sees the look on his face

"You did bad thing"

"He is a DooDoo head"

"Irrelevant he is our CO you cannot punch out your CO"

"He is a DooDoo head "

"No excuse...You are charged with assaulting a superior officer"

He turns to the Security Detachment.

" Take her to the brig"

"Come with us"

"NO!!!"

Two strong hands reach out one grabbing each upper arm and she is carried out of the Bay

"NO!!LET ME GO!!! LET ME GO!!!!NO!!!

Her cries and screams reverberate in the bay. It had to be done but it sure did not feel good .Well now it was up to chainsaw how to deal with this. And the Scrapper wearily made his way to his quarters. Command SUCKS!!!!

Outside DS Beast

BoM LZ

Hagar

Feeling a little tense, Mowtown decides to take a walk outside the *Beast*. When he steps out he hears....hula music? Looking around, he sees Ashton's and Nightstalker's Firestarters in the center of the rest of the BoM.

As the Scrapper get closer, he sees an occasional burst of flame and smells cooking fish. In the center of the gathering, there are three Battlecarp, de-scaled and filleted, on spits, being cooked with bursts from the Firestarters. All of this while most of the BoM has a party and another five Battlecarp look on.

He climbs up to Nightstalker's cockpit and goes through the open hatch.

"Nightstalker, just what in the heck do you think you're doing with the fish?"

Nightstalker looks at him with his colorless eyes, "Having a fish fry," and with a smile," and trying a new conversion technique I was told about."

"By the voices? Or Ashton?"

"The Voices. Oh, they also said that you were going to bring the beer for the fish fry"

Motown looks surprised. "Well, I guess I better go and find some?" And climbs down in search of beer.

Ashton comes over the comms. "What did the old man want?"

"He wanted to know what was going on, so I told him. And our beer is on the way. Finally found someone to fall for it."

Hagar, Far Periphery
CSS Inquisitor

Lieutenant William W. Willard, still wearing his Adept pin and ComSta robe, announced the sudden emergence of the warships from the lunar surface.

Pyro nodded. "It has begun."

"Contacts reas as *McKenna*, *Black Lion*, *Mjolnir*, *Potemkin*, *Avatar*, *Fox*, *Davion*, *Riga*, *Quixote*, and *Luxor* by class, in addition to one unidentifiable battleship."

"Some identifications available. *McKenna* reads as *Blake's Sword*, *Mjolnir* as *Yggdrasil*, *Fox* as *Murmansk*, *Potemkin* as *Osis' Pride*, and *Black Lion* as *Streaking Mist*."

Pyro cursed slightly. "Heavy force. Scan the battleship."

The Lt. looked up. "You're not going to believe this. It's powered by a Bop Drive?"

"A what?"

"Kinetic acceleration. Some far-fetched idea that was abandoned by every state it was pitched to. I heard that the creator escaped from a mental asylum a while back." Lt. Willard turned back to his console.

Pyro nodded. "Alright. Initiate the battle plan. Head for the nearest lagrange point and transmit to Commander *Knights' Own*. Prepare to send reinforcement call and standby."

On the bridge of a munchkin abomination, Chip laughed. The *Dreadnought* sailed from the moon and the enemy fleet came into view. "What a pathetic force. All commands, full speed."

In a remarkable display of electromagnetic rail-fired projectile technology, the massive rail guns at the heart of the ship fired two slugs on in a circular path to create kinetic force to propel the ship forward.

The *Dreadnought* surged to the lead of the Battlegroup, ordering all others to remain behind it in formation.

Admiral Chip felt the ship shudder as the two massive slugs collided, and a loud screech. One of the techs looked up. "I'm sorry, Admiral. Someone forgot to change the slugs, they appear to have warped from repeated firing and jammed in the tracks. I'll send some technicians to remedy the problem."

Pyro looked at the holotank display as the enemy fleet slowly *coasted* toward him, with no active thrust whatsoever. "Are they mad? What in the almighty hell are they doing?"

Captain Kurtz of the *St. Paul* came across the comm. "Fouling up the plan, that's what. Perhaps we need to give them a little bit of a wake-up call."

Pyro nodded. "*Holy Flame*, launch all fighters. Commander Air Group, launch all fighters."

Other ships in the task force followed suit, and aerospace fighters screamed toward the enemy force.

Aerofighters from the *Avalon*-class *Acheron* reached the *Dreadnought* first as Admiral Chip received reports of battle readiness.

Admiral Chip smiled disdainfully as the fighters approached. What could they hope to accomplish? "Launch all fighters."

Fighters thundered out of the *Dreadnought's* massive internal bay just as the engine board cleared again. "Lieutenant, re-engage drives. Ahead flank."

The officer echoed. "Ahead flank."

The Shudder-Thud of the Bop drive repeated, accelerating the ship in maddening fits and starts again.

Chip glowered. "I said ahead flank! Make this ship move."

The officer blanched. "Aye, sir."

He pushed the controls full forward rather than the gradual increase.

Two massive electromagnetic rail guns firing is a remarkable display of physics at works. Electromagnetics itself is an interesting process, by which an electrified surface repulses an object of the same charge to high speeds. It will also draw an object of opposite charge at high speed. One of the quirks of ferrous metal is exactly that it is positively charged.

One of the quirks of the BOP drive is that it uses a negative charge to propel nickel-ferric (negatively charged) slugs in order to avoid complications with the ship's own power grid.

A 20-ton object coated with four tons of ferrous metal is, quite naturally, attracted to such a large negative charge as the ones powering the BOP drive.

It is no coincidence that several 20-ton objects covered with 3 to 4 ton shells of ferro-aluminum just happened to be exiting the *Dreadnought's* hangar bays to respond to the *Acheron's* fighter screen.

A loud crash rumbled through the ship, and Admiral Chip struggled to pick himself up

off the deck as a loud *WHUMP* ran through the ship, followed by the ever-present sound of high-tech electronics losing power and coming to a halt.

Admiral Chip finally regained his feet. "Report!"

The lieutenant was nowhere to be seen. Chip received his answer when the escape pod doors opened and closed repeatedly over the next few seconds.

Emergency lighting finally came on, drawing off the ship's batteries as a ringing thung-thung-thung noise came from the bowels of the ship.

Chip listened as the odd noise grew closer, and turned to face the bridge doors as the thung-thung-thung became unbearably close.

Finally unable to contain his curiosity, he opened the door.

And immediately wished he hadn't.

A nickel-ferric lump weighing in at several tons pinballed through the corridor, smashing through rooms and walls until it hit structural members, and came back the other way.

Admiral Chip ran onto the bridge and closed the doors behind him, and time suddenly lurched to a crawl.

The doors exploded inwards quickly, wrapping themselves around the nose of the metal slug and shedding themselves off just as quickly, disappearing into the wake of devastation left behind. Chip tried to make for the escape pod... too little, too late as the slug caught him in the midsection.

On the *Acheron*, cheers erupted from the bridge crew as a jet of debris suddenly shot out of the bridge deck of the unknown battleship. Already, one was down.

A lump of nickel-ferric metal, slightly tinged red on one end, spun lazily away into the void, surrounded by a cluster of escape pods and debris as the *Dreadnought's* carcass drifted along nearby

The *Inquisitor* darted back and forth, mimicking a sloppy attempt to slip its pursuers through evasive maneuvers as the rest of the fleet similarly imitated general panic.

Pyro chuckled to himself, sure that the enemy commander could almost taste his victory, and then turned to the holotank. "Commander *Knights' Own*, light up the sky."

The League warship suddenly assumed a steady course, and almost glowed as it suddenly released an energy ripple.

Barely eighty thousand kilometers ahead, space shimmered and twisted giving birth to many points of light that turned into a small fleet.

Pyro chuckled, imagining the enemy commander's face as he registered the corvettes and massive battleship from the Outland Alliance, and the *McKenna II*, 2 *Aegis IV's*, 2 *Naga III's*, and *Vincent Mk. 50* that made up the Exiled Star League in Exile's contribution to the task force suddenly materialized just behind the seemingly-retreating Irregulars.

The enemy ships broke their pursuit, quickly turning broadsides at the approaching Irregulars and moving to encircle. Clearly, they weren't going down without a fight.

Pyro turned to his officers. "I want that *Mjolnir*. Have all fighters target her engines. Prepare to launch boarding parties and have the Exiles send supporting elements."

They scrambled about their work as Pyro turned back to the holotank to watch the battle unfold.

ESLS Acheron

Captain Stewart stood on the bridge of the Acheron watching as the fighters screamed past the nose of the ship. Looking over at the helmsman Captain Stewart ordered him to steer to 12 degrees to starboard. Forward batteries prepare to fire, portside batteries stand by wait for command from the bridge to fire.

The Acheron started to heel over to starboard, forward gunners target that Luxor when she comes into range, portside fire on the turn, air for bridge and engines gentleman. The ship rumbled as the massive weapons fired and peeled away tons of armor.

Captain Stewart yelled to the communications officer Mr. Grant have all Acheron fighters target the engines of all enemy ships, take them down gentleman and good hunting.

Alarms ripped through the *Subtrahos* as a single jump point opened up near the ship, and a WarShip arrived, dropping into orbit around Hagar. Within seconds, her comm. systems lit up as the WarShip announced its arrival, and Medron nodded as the Marian commander moved to respond.

Medron glanced at the scanners and nodded with a pleased expression on his face. That old Riga hadn't left Hegemony space in years, and had been in the middle of renovations when this crisis started. It was good to see it back online and operational for another fight against the enemies of the Inner Sphere.

Medron nodded towards the Marian commander, received a nod in response, and left the bridge of the Marian WarShip. He had places to go.

"Very nice," Medron muttered as he looked at the new fighters on the deck.

"Zero Mark Tens," Ratboy responded proudly. "Same basic firepower and maneuvering packages as the originals, but we've spent a lot of time tweaking the little things. They move much smoother than the originals."

"Sweet," Medron whispered and turned back to Ratboy questioningly. "So what about the rest the ship?" he asked and Ratboy grimaced.

"She's moving," he muttered and Medron laughed at him.

"Come on. She's a good ship. It can't be that bad."

"She's an *old* ship," Ratboy returned in an annoyed tone. "You have *no* idea how hard it is keeping her running. Sometimes I wish we weren't bothering with the old hag," he finished and kicked a loose panel in the wall. Medron looked down at the panel, and then back up at Ratboy.

"That bad?"

"I wasn't around back when ComStar crewed this ship for you," Ratboy noted with a scowl. "But it's been years since any ComStar acolyte placed a sissy boot on her, and we've been putting a lot of resources into the *Subtrahos* project. Trust me. This old ship is nothing but problems."

"She's the most powerful ship in the Hegemony," Medron noted and Ratboy just stared at him for a few seconds.

"She's a glorified *carrier* that hasn't seen action in years," he responded. "Look, she's been a good ship for a long time. But we don't have the resources to keep her running, especially if the *Subtrahos* program continues. Without ComStar actively supporting us, we simply don't have the resources to do both."

"I understand," Medron sighed after a long silence. "When we get back home...well, we don't have time for that right now," he added with a shrug. "Let's give her another chance to show her stuff ok?" he asked and Ratboy nodded enthusiastically.

"Wouldn't have it any other way," he responded and they shook each other's hands with firm grips.

"Now, I want to look at these fighters," Medron added and began moving towards the line of fighters.

"This way," Ratboy interrupted and pulled him off to the side to look at a fighter in one of the side bays of the massive hanger deck. Like the others it was jet-black, but a stylization of the planet Marik adorned the fuselage under the canopy. Medron looked at it in confusion, and then turned to Ratboy with a questioning gaze.

"You lost yours. We brought a spare," Ratboy said with a smile. "Unless of course you want to stay with the lead foot," he added and Medron put one hand on the fighter's wing possessively.

"I'll take her," he noted firmly. "That was a good ride, for a lead foot, but I want to fly."

"You sound like Ben," Ratboy muttered and Medron winked at him.

"Ben may be crazy, but sometimes crazy works," Medron whispered simply. And, as

if on queue, that was when the alarms went off. They looked at each other questioningly, and then jumped for their fighters.

Medron was one of the first to get his fighter out of the old WarShip, and one of the first to see the enemy WarShips pouring out of the moon.

"That's no moon," he whispered as fighters, DropShips, and WarShips surrounding him prepared for the next stage of the war on Hagar. "Lock and load, people," he transmitted firmly. "Let's make these carp wish they'd never come up stream!"

"Um, it's salmon that go up stream," Ratboy transmitted from his fighter.

"Whatever."

ESLS Acheron

Captain Stewart watched as the nose of the Luxor gave way after the broadside from the Acheron, the fighters were swarming around her like bees from a disturbed hive.

Mr. Grant tell the fighters to cripple her engines, called Captain Stewart

Yes Sir, answered Mr. Grant

Suddenly klaxons sounded on the bridge, looking over at the damage panel showed that the portside hull had take more damage.

Scanning the holo projector Captain Stewart say that it was the Black Lion that had fired and hit the already damaged portside. Captain Stewart looked at his second in command Commander Daniels.

Commander Daniels we need a maneuvering roll to bring our starboard guns to bear.

Yes Sir, answered Commander Daniels

Lt. Jacobs raise the Inquisitor I need to talk to Pyro.

"CSS Inquisitor this is the ESLS Acheron over"

"ESLS Acheron this the CSS Inquisitor go ahead over"

Lt. Jacobs keyed Captain Stewart's headset, I have them on the line Sir.

CSS Inquisitor this is Captain Stewart patch me through to Pyro.

"Hold one moment Sir" came the voice on the line

Pyro keyed his headset "Captain Stewart go ahead came the reply"

Pyro the Acheron has sustained massive damage to her portside weapons and fighter bays. The Luxor is dead and adrift, but we have the Black Lion coming in fast. I am attempting to do a maneuvering roll to bring the undamaged starboard side to bear on the Black Lion but I will have no place for my fighters to land for refueling with the portside damaged. Where should I vector my fighters over?

Captain Stewart listened as the starboard side weapons opened fire on the Black Lion, and prayed that another of the incoming ships would get there before it was too late.

The head set crackles with static from all the energy of the ships guns.

Captain Stewart have your fighters head for the closest friendly ship I will advise all ships of the situation. "Pyro OUT"

Captain looked at the holo tank again and watches as rest of the fleet moves in to engage the enemy.

L5 Point
Hagar system

A burst of radiation at the L5 point heralded the arrival of the ODFs 1st Fleet. Admiral Oliver Hazard Perry gave silent thanks to the Merck corporation for the anti-nausea drug that allowed them to make jumps without getting ill enabling them to be ready for immediate combat after arriving at a jump point making it possible to blindsides enemy forces. Admiral Perry stood in the Command and control center of the new Battleship OLS Maine BB 01 as he surveyed the rest of the fleet the bird class sloop OLS Peregrine PS 01, the Archer class carrier CVE 01 carrying a full 64 plane aerospace wing, the Flower class corvettes OLS Iris PC 01, and OLS Sunflower PC 02 and finally the OLS Tobruk PC 09. rounding out the force were 6 Patrol Missile Craft 15,000 ton assault Dropships.

The Maine went after the McKenna class Blake's Sword both ships charging head on. The front mounted Batteries of Naval PPCs outranged the Naval Autocannon of the Blake's Sword inflicting heavy damage on the enemy battle ship before it was able to get within range of the Naval Auto Cannon. Both ships poured huge amounts of fire into each other melting away hundreds of tons of armour but with triple the armour and a heavier weapon load the larger ODF Battleship could take the punishment the Blake's Sword was left a drifting wreck. While the Maine was battered but intact and functional.

The Davion Class Destroyer was taken on by the OLS Peregrine along with the OLS Tobruk and the PMCs. the Peregrine charged the Davion Head on with the Tobruk trailing the PMCs meanwhile rushed around the flank of the warships hitting the destroyer from the rear. The Davion concentrated on the Peregrine ignoring the smaller vessels. The Peregrine and Tobruk raked the Davion from stem to stern while the PMCs poured salvo after salvo into the Destroyer, which was soon left drifting in space. The Peregrine was badly battered but still capable of moving under its own power.

The fighter battle was like a clash between two swarms of angry bees the ponderous Seversky heavy fighters pounding the enemy fighters with their Ultra autocannon while Ilyushins blast any craft that try to hit the Severskys from the rear while the tiny Messerschmitts rip through enemy formations at incredible speeds sowing confusion through enemy lines.

On the surface, as night falls over Hagar, Fred and Michael emerge from the underground complex, greeted by fresh air. The techs supplied by the rest of the Irregulars are running back and forth, unlocking the battlecarp's secrets.

Jimmy come running up to Fred

"Sir, we have recovered your 'mech.." the recovery vehicle drives by, the mech was a mess "...and the Naval units have engaged the Battlecarp fleet, I have the holotank set up if you wanna watch"

Fred lights the pipe Jimmy hands him, takes a few draws "aw, get me my wide angle telescope and tripod"

Fred lets out a little yelp of excitement as he watches the battle rage over head. He watches as the *Stallion* whips by, driving Heavy N-gauss slugs into enemy ships.

An old tech walks up to Fred. "It is a good view, *mon ami*"

"Your an ijit, Fred" Danny was Fred's personal tech when it came to his mechs. Danny's father, James, was Fred's father's, Remi, personal tech. Because of that, their friendship started when the 2 were very young, and both knew, by being taught by their fathers, that techs and mechwarriors were equals.

"What?" Danny raises his eyebrows, "You have seen the mech?"

Fred looks up from the scope, and looks back into it. "He took down Natalya..."
Danny groans, and walks away....

Hagar, Far Periphery
CSS Inquisitor

Pyro watched the datastreams rolling off the holotank, illuminated greenish by the glowing numbers hovering nearby as he tracked information.

The red wedge representing the *Black Lion* rolled as it dove toward the white wedge representing the *Acheron*. Pyro looked back to the holotank. "Range to *Yggdrasil*?"

The gunner shook his head. "She's heading out of our range again. All we can get on her is missiles."

Pyro pondered the situation, then turned back to the holotank. "Have the *Duluth* and *Rochester* intercept that *Riga* before it gets in our way. Contact *Grand Rapids* and have their fighter regiment swing by the *Yggdrasil* for a pass or two."

Pyro watched in the holotank as the two *Naga III* destroyers broke formation with the rest of the Exiles and dove at the *Riga* while the *Vincent Mk. 50* slowly disgorged an entire regiment of aerofighters from its bowels.

"Gunner, keep firing missiles at the Mjolnir."

"Helm, prepare to cut 110 degrees on my signal. Pitch minus twenty degrees, roll starboard until I say stop."

The ships continued in their formation.

"Ahead flank."

The *Inquisitor* suddenly surged ahead, apparently desperate to catch the *Mjolnir* as it sailed toward the *Ventura*.

"Now, helm."

The ship suddenly lurched into the tightest turn it could manage and cut downwards sharply, carrying it across the rear of the *Black Lion* as it went for the wounded *Acheron*, continually pummeling the beleaguered ship.

On the *Acheron*, things were grim. Captain Stewart looked over the battle damage display as the numbers totaled up. The KF drive was looking more like swiss cheese than a functional unit, and the port side batteries were savaged.

"Sir!", called Commander Daniels. "*Black Lion* is turning!"

Captain Stewart quickly turned and eye toward the holotank as the *Black Lion* began its turn too late to stop the *Inquisitor* and took a full broadside to the aft armor, sending dozens of tons of metal raining away into space.

"Commander, port fifty degrees right now. Prepare for full thrust. Give me everything you got."

"Aye."

The *Black Lion* finished her turn and fired a broadside on the *Inquisitor*, which was physically shoved sideways by the force of the impacts and fell into an end-over-end roll that was never sign of great health.

"Now!"

The *Acheron's* drive, miraculously undamaged from the repeated pounding, shot a massive jet of white fire behind the ship, utterly disintegrating the few aerospace fighters left from the *Black Lion* that had strayed there.

The ship surged forward, and the starboard batteries fired.

The *Black Lion*, having turned to vent her fury on the *Inquisitor*, had created an opening for the *Acheron*, which it fully exploited. Numerous fires broke out on the *Black Lion*, and small globes of aviation fuel spilled from her hull, miraculously not combusting. Her running lights blinked and fell silent, and the ship's drive flare sputtered out completely.

Pyro turned to the first officer. "Status?"

The first officer shook his head. "We're no longer battle worthy, Captain. I can't name a system that hasn't sustained damage. We have to withdraw."

Pyro nodded grimly. "Get us out of here. Launch all boarding craft... target the *Black Lion*. Engage nothing else. I'll be with the marines."

"Sir?", the confused officer said.

"I meant it. Now go."

Dropshuttle *Surprise*

Pyro watched out the window as the battered *Black Lion* grew in the viewports, still sitting silently in space. All around, the epic Second Battle of Hagar still raged. A flash of light lit up space as the *Quixote* blew to splinters, sundered by the *St. Paul* as it crept up on the *Knights' Own*.

The *Knights' Own* fighter wing continued strafing the *Potemkin* in successive passes, chipping nose armor from the ship before finally wearing it down and devastating the bridge with repeated hits to the sensors, life support unit, bridge, and so forth.

The *Potemkin* finally quit its pitiful resistance and belched streams of oxygen into space, and filled the surrounding space with a number of escape pods.

The *Maine*, *McKenna*II-class *Minneapolis*, and *Naga*III-class *Duluth* and *Rochester* finally cornered the *Yggdrasil* and laid into her. Though the *Duluth* was forced to withdraw with extreme damage, the *Yggdrasil* went down to the sheer volume of firepower that eroded the mighty ship's armor and crushed her reactor, silencing the powerful beast.

The *Avatar* headed for the *Knights' Own* at full power, but was intercepted by a trio of *Eagle* frigates that demonstrated that eggshells with sledgehammers DO work, especially in teams. The ancient *Avatar* was bisected from the volume of firepower poured into it and exploded.

The *Riga*, one of the last survivors of the enemy fleet was beaten by fighters from the *Grand Rapids* and *ComStar's Pryde*, as well as dropships from the *Subtrahos*, and finally surrendered after the swarm of fighters threatened to perforate her engineering section with small-arms fire.

Meanwhile, the *Ventura* and *Lake Superior*, both *Aegis IV* cruisers, sailed towards the Moonbase.

The *Ragnarok* deployed from the *Knights Own* and fired her main cannon, burning through one of the massive bay doors so that the shuttles from the Exile cruisers could infiltrate the base. However, the scientists on Roth had failed to mention that they'd only tested the weapon at half-power.

The full-power weapon sent the *Ragnarok* into reverse at blinding speeds, and caused it to collide with an enemy *Achilles*, annihilating both ships in a spectacular collision.

Pyro searched for the *Fox*, but never saw it, and had to turn his attention to the task at hand as the shuttle landed on the *Black Lion*.

L 5 Point
Hagar System

Commodore Nelson stood on the Bridge of the OLS Archer Monitoring the progress of the battle. The arrival of the Outlandish fleet had come not a moment too soon things had been looking pretty grim before they arrived he watched with satisfaction as the fighters of VF 1,2,6,8,17,23,29,and 43 dealt with the paltry fighter contingent of the enemy .His contemplation was broken when a claxon went off. The Murmansk a Fox class corvette was moving in on his ship. He started to pull back as the two Flower Class Corvettes that made up his screen closed to intercept. The NPPCs and Naval Lasers of the OLS Iris and OLS Sunflower started to burn away the armour of the Fox Class corvette. The murmansk replied with its NACs and handful of Naval Lasers. He watched as the three ships exchanged fire. The armour was chunking off all three ships but the Murmansk was losing the most. As the uneven battle continued cracks started to form in the hull of the Murmansk when suddenly there was a massive explosion as a Magazine was penetrated and the Murmansk split in two. With the explosion of its main magazine the Murmansk ceased firing. Commodore Nelson ordered the score of small craft that were carried on the Archer to be launched to pick up survivors

Hagar, Far Periphery
Moonbase Entrance

The Ventura and Lake Superior, moved into position as a swarm of Messerschmidt fighters maneuvered around them, the fighters accelerated through the opening that the Ragnarok just blasted in the massive bay doors.

A small fleet of shuttles exited the pair of cruisers and headed in behind the fighters. Colonel Jamerson and these troops knew that their job was critical to the success of the over all campaign.

Once inside the moonbase the Colonel started dispatching dropships to different sections of the station while his command shuttle stayed in position in the center of the cavernous bay.

The Combined Marine detachment from the cruisers began landing and fanning out. At first the radio traffic was routine, then suddenly excited chatter filled the radio waves.

Goliath this is raptor 7 we are taking heavy fire from sector 3, the Colonel looked at his display map and pinpointed the position and directed a pair of Messerschmidts to give covering fire on the end of a docking gantry.

Finally the Colonels shuttle started forward again heading for the control room area of the base, the fighting has been heavy and his casualty list more than he had expected.

Command Alpha this is Goliath "Moonbase is secured" repeat "Moonbase is secured".

Colonel Jamerson stepped off the docked shuttle and headed for the control room and to survey the damage.

Hagar
High Orbit

Medron, Fokker, and Hunter burned through space, supported by twenty-seven

Pryde Rock Hellcat IIIs and another twenty-seven Zero Mark Ten LAMs, towards the enemy *Riga*. Medron looked around at the three fighter and three LAM squadrons and nodded appreciatively. *Comstar's Pryde* might be having problems with her age, but the stuff she carried into battle was easily top-notch equipment.

Off to the side, he smiled as he noticed the Marian *Incidios* and their escorting fighters following him in. Turning to the left, he noted another force of fighters moving up to support them and frowned. Those were all Star League-style ships. More of these Exiles obviously. Then he shrugged and turned back to the approaching enemy *Riga*. He didn't really care where they came from, as long as they fired weapons at the bad guys. Beyond that, it just didn't matter right now.

"Lock and load, boys and girls," Medron transmitted and smiled as the responses came back. Everyone was ready. That was when he realized there were too many dots on his radar. He glanced at it again, looked towards the enemy *Riga*, and glanced back down at the radar. A *Riga* wasn't supposed to have that many fighters on her. Well, it did. And it was still launching. Wonderful.

He loved surprises. Not.

"Well, boys and girls," Medron added. "We've got more bad guys than we expected. Burn them all. Then we take on the *Riga*." A series of affirmatives came back and he looked over to the Marian force again, a thought coming to mind. "Marian force," he transmitted quickly. "Take up the center. We'll defend your right flank and let the Exiles defend your left flank."

"That's port and starboard, Med," Ben transmitted from his Hellcat III and Medron grumped back.

"Quiet there," he responded as the Marian and Pryde Rock forces began jockeying around each other as they approached the enemy fighter screen. "I don't think in spacer terms."

"Not everybody can be perfect," his cousin responded with a smile in his voice and Medron's eyes narrowed.

"Yeah, you should know."

"Ouch. That hurt," Ben returned and Medron smiled happily. It was good to one-up his cousin from time to time. He looked out to see the Third Knights strafing an enemy *Potemkin* and nodded. Good. They might be crazy drunk bastards, but they could fight well when it counted. Then he turned back as his radar started screeching to see the enemy fighters coming out to meet them.

The *Incidios* fired first, their extended range missile launchers salvoing swarms of missiles out towards the enemy. Half a dozen enemies exploded, and then they were in range of their other weapons. He pulled his trigger, letting loose with both of his particle cannons, as the Hellcat IIIs and Marian fighters joined in with their own particle cannons.

More enemy fighters fell, but they responded with fire of their own, and fireballs began to fill space on either side of the firing line. The enemy *Riga* opened up and Medron winced as he pulled around, avoiding a potentially dangerous experience as

the target of a capital weapon, as the Marian ships burned on in, closing the range on the WarShip. It fired on them, burning two of the *Incidios* with naval-grade autocannons and particle beams.

Medron salvoed another set of particle beams into an enemy fighter as the DropShips burned through the heart of the *Riga's* fighter defenses, weapons filling space before them with death and destruction. Behind them, the *Comstar's Pryde* and the *Grand Rapids* moved in closer as the fur ball of fighters corkscrewing around each other began to expand.

Neither fighter force could get the upper hand as they kept on moving, trying to flank the their enemies. But finally, the *Incidios* found the range and salvoed their rocket launchers into the enemy WarShip. Sliding into naval weapon range, the *Comstar's Pryde* and *Grand Rapids* sent their own salvos inbound and Medron winced as the WarShip shuddered under their assault.

Then he found himself, along with Fokker, Hunter, and several other LAMs, on the flank of the fighter battle. He looked over at the WarShip and frowned. He had an idea. He hesitated for a moment, knowing how dangerous his ideas could sometimes be, and then shrugged. It was worth a try. "Follow me," he ordered and pulled his LAM around, pushing the throttle to the firewall, and rocketed towards the WarShip at maximum speed.

In the distance he saw a flash of light as the *Eagles* protecting the *Knights' Own* smashed something into fish bait and winced. That had to hurt. Sometimes sledgehammers in eggshells worked though. The WarShip was getting closer and he nodded quickly before reaching up for the transformation handle. He pushed it all the way forward, felling his LAM transform from fighter to LAM to 'Mech mode and he hit his main jets as he close on the WarShip. His men followed, dodging the ship's limited secondary fire, and they all landed on it deftly.

"Attention, enemy WarShip," Medron transmitted simply. "Surrender now, or we *will* fill you full of holes. And you can't stop us."

A minute later, the *Riga* was out of the battle, along with the remnants of her fighter screen. Medron nodded as boarding shuttles began moving over from the *Subtrahos*, the *Comstar's Pryde*, and the *Grand Rapids*, and then scowled as he noticed another flare.

He looked up to see the *Ragnorak* disintegrating as it smashed into an enemy *Achilles*. Oops. There went another Redshirt. What was his name again? Medron couldn't remember, and then shrugged as he saw a number of shuttles moving into the base through the hole in its main door. Well, at least the Redshirt had been good for something.

He looked around, seeing the battle was finally coming to a close and nodded again. It was time to play. "Third Knights, let's rock and roll," he transmitted. "We've got a moon to secure!" he added and the Knights banked over, hooting and hollering as he barreled towards the doors. "Boys and girls," he added on the Pryde Rock and WOTD frequencies. "Let's back them up," he ordered and transformed into fighter mode for the flight over.

Within minutes, the base was swarming with a hundred LAMs in 'Mech mode

supporting the other ground troops in taking and holding it. He almost pitied the idiots that tried to fight them. Almost.

February 17th
DS Beast
BoM LZ, Hagar

Morning...And for once it is quiet. Motown checks the Messages from overnight. There was a huge Naval battle while he was sleeping, thanks to the arrival of the ODFs 1st Fleet and the navy of the Exiles they carried the day. It would appear that the fighting has ended. *'Now I can get to what I do best...SALVAGE!!!'* A message from Pyro indicates that this Facility and the one on/in the moon will become the primary base for the Dropship Irregulars. Tunnel Rat is still in the brig guess chainsaw is still P.O.ed at her. Motown checks the monitor; she is one very unhappy kid right now. He almost wants to let her out, but that is Chainsaws job. *'Besides now she is mad at me...and I am just not in the mood'* Motown think to himself. He goes to the mech bay, not a tech in sight ...they need a rest...badly. He looks at the damaged mechs. *'That was one hell of a fight .I am very glad this is over ...I am way to old for this .I am going to go home and have a nervous break down, I have worked hard for it. I have earned it. I deserve it. And NOBODY is going to deny me my Nervous break down.'*

Chapter 15

Dropship Irregulars' Encampment Hagar, Far Periphery

Having finally gotten *Big Bad Wolf* freed from the swamp muck, Teemo stood playing a hose over the surface of his 'Mech, trying to wash off as much goo as possible before bringing him aboard a Kilted DropShip for repairs. True to form, his mind was only partly on the job in front of him.

First thing, we gotta decide whether to see this out or head for home and try to forget that any of this ever happened. On the other hand, I've seen too much weird stuff to walk away now. Soon as I finish this, I'm going to call home and request that 2nd and 3rd Companies join us, along with some more vehicles and infantry. Once they get here, I'm going to insist to the other commanders that we do some mixed-force training together. If this mission is going to succeed, we're going to have to learn how our respective commands work, so we can compliment each other better. Ed's still going over the files we recovered from the facility, hopefully that stuff will give us more answers than questions.

Turning to shut off the water, he was startled to see Natsuko standing there. "Lost in thought again, eh?" "Yeah. In a couple of days, after we've all had a chance to catch up on our sleep, remind me I want to talk to the other unit commanders about what we're going to do next. Something weird's going on here, and I don't like it." Moving to board his 'Mech, he snorted bemusedly. *When we left Alpheratz, it would never have occurred to me to think that a 3 year-old MechWarrior and monkeys in battle armor might be the least weird thing I'd see. How can I **not** stick around to see what happens next?*

DS Beast
BoM LZ
Hagar

Almost noon and Chainsaw finally comes out of his quarters He still is moving slightly gingerly, she must have really nailed him. He goes to the brig they are in there a long time they finally come out. She salutes him and he returns it and leaves...Motown cannot remember the last time anybody saluted him. She comes over to him.

"I sowwy I did not mean to hurt him"

"I know but you did and I had no choice to lock you up"

"I know I sowwy"

"I know"

"He said that he was going to let me off easy because he can understand why I was mad"

"True but you still understand why I did what I did"

"Yes sir"

A hover car arrived MercChick and Discord have arrived to retrieve their daughter.

"Can I go now ?"

"Yes you are dismissed"

She stands at attention and salutes Motown. Motown returns it and she turns and sprints toward the arriving Hovercar.

"MOMMY MOMMY MOMMY !!!!!"

Motown can tell that she is chattering away about what happened they come over to me MercChick speaks

"I bet you will be glad to see this one go"

She points to TR who scowls a bit.

"She did drive me nuts a lot but she provided some light moments too...But you are right she belongs with you so she and her mech are officially being transferred to Team Bonsai."

"My mech?"

"Yup the Stealth is officially your mech...You earned it"

"YIPPIEEE !!!!!!"

She goes sprinting over to the mech cubical that holds it and it looks like she is talking to it. Discord and MercChick give me this look

"Well she did "

"Right thanks a lot"

Motown chuckles, *that will make a nice payback HEHEHE*

"O.K Kid time to get your gear together you are being transferred to Team Bonsai"

She runs back and goes with her parents to get her gear from her quarters...30 minutes later, Motown watches as her mech and the hover car head back to the Team Bonsai LZ ...*'She was a pain in the keister at times but ...I still miss her.'*

Medron leaned back in his chair, looking around at his cabin on the *ComStar's Pryde*. He hadn't spent much time on the old WarShip lately, but she was an old friend that he would never forget. At least she would see one more run before he sent her to the Wayland shipyards for a full overall. After that, along with the other *Riga*, she would escort the ancient *Monsoon*-class *Mjölnir*. That old bird was going to be seeing a major refit as well, and the three ships were going to be one powerful squadron for the Warriors of the Dropship when they were ready. But that would take years, and right now he only had weeks.

He glanced down at the map of the system again and smiled approvingly as he pulled out a pencil and started circling regions for extra attention. They looked just about right for growing rice. Uncle Medron's Minute Rice had a ring to it. Almost as much of a ring as his old arm and leg had. He flexed his left hand slowly, smiling at the feel of it. After over three decades, he'd nearly forgotten what it felt like to have a real flesh-and-blood hand there. He liked it. He smiled again, thinking of someone else who would probably like it.

Then he frowned as his gaze went to another map, this one of the Inner Sphere. His gaze settled on Atreus and he nodded firmly. He had to go back there. As soon as the Third Knights' WarShips and the *ComStar's Pryde* were ready. It would be one last time for her to show her metal to the Inner Sphere. He had a runt to take care of.

His head shifted to the side as an idea came to him and he smiled nastily. He was going to have to ask Pyro for one of those fish tanks of his. He wanted information from that little runt. Who sent him? Who controlled him? Where was he from? And a fish tank would double as a *perfect* way to...convince...him to sing like a bird.

Oh yes.

Medron had plans. He looked back at the calendar and nodded slowly. It would be

another two weeks before they could leave, based on the latest estimates given him by the engineers. Every ship had damage that needed taking care of before jumping back, and it would take time to safely recharge the engines and their batteries. Everything would take time. But when the time was ready, that little runt would wish he'd never been born. Or cloned. Or wherever he'd come from.

Medron hadn't been this worked up over something since Tommy Marik helped Sunny and Kattie-dear destroy the Federated Commonwealth. And this time he had the power to *do* something about it. Oh, that runt was *so* going to get it.

Medron yawned, looked up at the time, and winced as he realized how late it was. He needed sleep. Badly. He walked over to his bed, lay down, and was out like a light within minutes. His head was filled with sweet dreams for the rest of the night.

February 23rd
Hagar System, Far Periphery
Hadak, Wayland Yards

Pyro sat back in his chair, looking out the window as the surrounding space continued to buzz with activity. The Scrappers were busily wreaking their brand of demolition on the *Dreadnought*, stripping her to the mostly-intact skeleton and trying to squeeze every ounce of use out of the rubbish that now consisted of the inside of the ship.

Somewhere below, Warriors were getting bright ideas of their own. The planet was rife with economic opportunity. Medron had apparently figured on converting at least some of the swamp area into a Rice Paddy. Heh. Uncle Medron's Minute Rice. What a silly idea.

Pyro had schemes of his own, mostly pertaining to repurposing the research complex. The microwave pinged, and another piping-hot batch of what might eventually become known as Captain Pyro's Fish Sticks were ready to eat.

Pyro sat at his desk, rubbing his eyes as the lack of sleep threatened to catch up with him. Fleet Admiral! The universe had truly gone mad.

Several days of negotiations and horse-trading had landed the Dropship Irregulars several ships, in exchange for rights to use the Wayland Yards facility.

Even if they knew where the mastermind of the fish plot **WAS**, there was no way they'd be in any shape to track her down. Only the Outlands, Exile, and League forces were in any shape to move on, and were in the yards being refitted. Scrolling through the listing of ships again, Pyro shook his head and sighed.

Inquisitor, Congress-class, Critical Structural Damage
Mjolnir, Monsoon-class, Structural and Armor Damage
ComStar's Pryde, Riga-class, Due for Overhaul
Streaking Mist, Black Lion-class, Intersystem Drive Destroyed
Osis' Pride, Potemkin-class, Life Support Offline
Yggdrasil, Mjolnir-class, Reactor Damaged
John Davion, Davion-class, Critical Structural Damage
Tunguska, Riga-class, Armor Damage Only
Osiris, Luxor-class, Bridge Destroyed

Acheron, Avalon-class, KF Destroyed, Structural Damage
St. Paul, Aegis IV-class, KF Destroyed, Structural Damage

The damage would take at least a year to repair, even with the remarkable Wayland Yards complex, and even then crews were a problem. And ships would have to be renamed, Fishtanks installed, payrolls kept up... And all Pyro had to do was sit and watch the paper trail cross his desk. *Fleet Admiral indeed, more like Prime Naval Bureaucrat.*

Oh well, Pyro thought, at least I have this. He smiled as he pressed a red button that caused the contents of his inbox to burst into flames and watched them burn satisfyingly. *I'm so glad they invented these things...*

Sourly, Pyro walked down the corridor, clocked out, and went back to his quarters to see Amy.

TBDS Wanderer
Hagar, Far Periphery

Calis looks up from the computer screen, He has posted the movement orders to all the members of Team Bansai after talking with Rick.

The Majority of TB would be leaving With Rick in just a few days and heading back to New Avalon, Calis was staying behind along with the a mech lance and 2 security companies, also staying would be a battalion of technicians that volunteered.

Calis had talked it over with Rick, Discord and Merc Chick and they agreed that the Wanderer should stay behind too, seeing Discord and Merc Chick would mean that Tunnel Rat was finally going to be heading home.

Calis hails the communication room and asks for a conference link to be established with Pyro, Medron and Motown.

While waiting for the link up Calis goes over all the reports that Pyro has sent him.

The reports coming from the Inner Sphere are starting to look as if something is in the interstellar winds.

Between getting everyone back to their respective homeworlds and see what is really going on is going to end up placing members of the Dropship Irregulars back on the frontlines it seems.

30 February
L5 Point
Hagar system

Motown is loaned one of the Potemkins to carry all the junk back to Motown. He has several leased dropships attached to carry almost a third of a million tons of junk home...It will take decades to go through it all...and Motown is looking forward to it. *Leave this universe saving to the young kids I am going back to playing with my junk.*

He bids adieu to the Hagar system and the jump drives activate. *I am going Home...FINALLY!!!!*

Over Hagar
Wormhole opening

A Jumpship appears over Hagar, a broadband message is sent out

"This is Lewis of the GuildHouse(tm), here to assist in the recovery of downed vessels, Fred, where you at"

Fred, on the bridge of the Stallion, responds "Lewis, how's it goin?"
"Good, we will require a bit of this salvage as well. I am disbanding the GuildHouse(tm) and setting up a naval force. I am approaching you 'cause I wish to join the Irregulars, you guys are one of the few groups with old tech, and with the downgrading of the Inner Sphere, my stuff sticks out like a sore thumb."

"Ya no kidding, will you still be based out of Solaris?"
"Halla no, that would invite to much query, like 'Hey Lewis, why do you have a Naval shipyard in orbit whaddaya up to?'. Don't want to deal with it. Could you get Motown on the line?"

Fred looks over at the Com officer who simply nods. Motown appears on the screen, looking like he is about to scream, yet smiling.

"Motown here" "I believe Lewis wishes to speak to you"

"Ahem, yes, we met briefly on Motown in the OLA. I am requesting to set up a naval shipyard in orbit, less conspicuous than over Solaris, quiaff?"
Lewis sometimes liked to use Clan terms when addressing a Clansman

"Aff, It will not be an issue by me, as long as I can use some of the facilities as well"

Fred jumps in "It won't be a problem *mon ami*, Lewis is forming a naval force under the 204th banner.." Fred thinks for a while...."..The 315th Gilded Navy..How's that sound" Lewis simply smiles, Motown agrees "I think it will be interesting, it is good to see your forces grow so quickly Frederick, the Dropship Irregulars will benefit nicely from this"

With that Lewis dispatches a small group of shuttles to examine some of the wreckage, Fred returns to his quarters to spend some time with Natalya, and Motown goes off to blither incoherently.

Esme and Ed start uncovering some of the intel from the Hagar base. Esme's eyes widen "Esme to Fred, the base we took is somewhere in the middle of the totem pole, it ain't over yet"