

Battle of Coventry

The most spectacular success the corporate spies generated during the Jihad occurred in September of 3071, as many of the corporations were “losing” BattleMechs that ended up in the hands of the Commonwealth armies. The Word of Blake traced several of the Commonwealth machines to Coventry and sent a fleet to deal with the issue, but several Nashan Diversified agents had managed to slip into the crews, despite the Word’s superior screening process. The flagship of the fleet, a *Farragut*-class battleship named the *Sword of Gabriel* that had played merry hell with what passed for the Lyrans fleet throughout the war, was the focus of no less than five agents and each other ship in the fleet had at least two agents on board. Their plan went into effect the moment the fleet jumped into Coventry space and began burning in towards the planet.

Months of minor tweaks to scores of systems had left a number of weaknesses in the WarShips’ safety systems, leaving them open to attack from the inside that no spacer could ever wish. Malfunctions in other systems were arranged and fixed, keeping the tech crews busy and the Word wondering about the advisability of using the WarShips found in the Ruins of Gabriel. Then an ancient *Riga* supporting the *Sword of Gabriel* suffered a full power failure resulting from an explosion in her main power room that shattered the fusion plant. The Word nudged it onto a course that would place it in a stable orbit around the local star and continued on in.

Further problems on the remaining five ships of the fleet continued to crop up and Word commander began to wonder if he had saboteurs on board. An exhaustive search failed to catch the Nashan operatives, but did result in the deaths of several marines due to failing airlocks. The Word crews began to worry that the ships were haunted, and everybody became skittish, jumping at the smallest sounds. The Nashan operatives made sure there were many sounds to make the crews jump, a tactic that left the crews tired and unable to work at their full capabilities. A *Lola*-class destroyer fell victim next, only not to the Nashan operatives. A fusion engineer, jumping and seeing enemies in the shadows after eight sleepless nights listening to the ship, accidentally reversed the flow on several important fuel lines. Not thinking clearly, he tried to fix it by rerouting back to the way it was supposed to be without venting the contaminated fuel. The resulting explosion destroyed the WarShip’s entire aft section and sent it spinning towards Coventry where it burned up in the atmosphere.

Technical difficulties continued to savage the last four ships of the fleet as they spent the last two days decelerating towards Coventry, trying to keep ahead of the sabotage that still didn’t look like sabotage. The Word commander was furious and demanded that the agents he knew had to be there were found, and began executing anyone who “couldn’t” find a problem and fix it. By the ninth day of flight in to Coventry, firefights between marines and crewmembers began to be reported as frightened engineers tried to keep from being made examples of. The fights were ridiculously one-sided of course, with what engineers resisted killed with minimal marine casualties. But marines did not good replacement engineers make and the problems on the ships continued to mount.

On the two *Vincent*s, the engineers fought smart and managed to trap the marines in sabotaged power armor before pushing them out into space and attempting to run for it. The *Sword of Gabriel* burned them out of the sky, the Word commander naming them traitors, and continued decelerating towards Coventry with a single *Kimagure* supporting it. They knew that only a single *Fox*-class corvette was in position to protect Coventry and that either of their ships could take it out before flattening the factories, so continued on with the Word commander ranting on about traitors to the Word as the witch hunt on the two ships continued.

Through sheer luck and the simple rules of mathematics and diminishing probabilities of survival, the *Gabriel's Wing* found the two Nashan agents and executed them, never realizing they weren't simply one of the many other "traitors" they'd found in their purge, but the agents left behind automated programs that would continue to start errors all the way in to Coventry. The most spectacular of them was the venting of three massive cargo bays, during the middle of a marine inspection, that cost the *Wing* three-quarters of her marines before they even met the *Fox* in battle.

The *Sword of Gabriel* was not so lucky. During final pre-orbital maneuvers as it prepared to change course to swat the *Fox* like a bug, the *Sword's* entire maneuvering system dropped out of the command loop and did exactly the opposite of what the bridge told it to do. Locked her engines at maximum power and drove her straight into Coventry's atmosphere. She might have actually been able to survive as her crew tried desperately to bring the engines back under control. They succeeded in fact, as the ship's armor began to burn off from the friction, and probably could have pulled back out in more or less one piece if the Nashan agents hadn't performed just one more act of sabotage. As the atmosphere howled around the *Sword*, angrily devouring its armor, both cargo bay doors and all six fighter bay doors opened up, letting the flaming hot gasses in to rip through the ship from the inside out. The Word commander died, burned to death as he screamed the curses of Blake on the traitors that had destroyed him.

The crew of the *Gabriel's Wing* was shocked by the death of their flagship, but over the last day they'd been slowly getting ahead of the sabotage and were reasonably confident they could fight now that they assumed their fighting a simple hacking job that could be found and taken out. They'd tested every system they would need to fight with a dozen times and everything was working, so they commenced maneuvers to bring the *Fox* down. Unable to run, it accelerated to meet them in battle, hoping for a lucky shot. The *Wing* rotated, bringing its port weapons bays to bear, locked target on the *Fox*, and pushed the button to fire all particle cannons on it.

And the final ghost program Nashan left behind activated. Nashan had for centuries maintained computers equal to Star League levels, and their engineers had learned to work with them well. One of their best had been on the *Wing*, and she had fallen in love with its computer, so similar to the ones she'd loved playing tricks on in school. The present she left behind before the marines killed her was deceptively simple, but ingenious. Before the battle, the crew had tested everything to make sure it worked. The sensors could see properly, the weapons could accept input properly, the sensors could

send targeting data to the weapons, and test firings of the weapons on numerous simulated targets had gone off without a hitch. Even the *Fox*. But the agent's last present had been programmed to ignore all of that and to wait. Wait until a real target was there and waiting. But not just any target. It had to be the *Fox* that was currently burning to meet it in battle.

The sensors saw the *Fox*, sent the target data through the computer to the weapons, and the ship's turrets shifted to lock it in. The program verified that the target was there through optical scans and came alive, sending commands throughout the ship that kicked off more programs that could *only* be activated by that master program. And in a matter seconds, breakers began to trip in a cascade of failure that spread throughout the ship until the very running lights turned off, leaving it dead in space, as it drifted towards the *Fox* on a course that would slingshot it away from Coventry. The backup power reserves refused to feed power into anything and the fusion power plant went into emergency shutdown as the remaining engineers watched in horror and fought to bring it back, but it was too late. It would take at least half an hour to bring it back online from a hard shutdown.

During that time, the Coventry defenses sent boarding shuttles full of marines to take the ship and the surviving Word marines were slaughtered. On the bridge, the commander tried desperately to erase the computers, but they had no power to tell it to start the process and nothing short of a nuclear grenade could break through the armor surrounding the computer core. In the end, Coventry captured the *Wing* in nearly pristine shape, for a three hundred year-old ship. They copied and cleansed its computer systems, thanks to Nasha computer engineers on planet, and captured the *Riga* as well, adding two powerful ships to their fleet. They gifted the *Wing* to the Archon and he used it throughout the rest of the war as his flagship, with a constant complement of Nashan computer engineers to keep the Word from doing to him what Nashan had done first.