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THE HARDER THEY FALL

Orbital Assault Trajectory, Telos IV Dieron Military District, Draconis Combine 13 August 3039

The rocking of the falling 'Mech made *Chu-i* James Fujimori feel queasy, the fifteen-meter ceramic ovoid continuing to oscillate after its drogue chute deployed and yanked it upright. Now high in the atmosphere, the temperature inside the pod began to fall and Fujimori no longer expected to be burned to a crisp.

"Hell of a way to gain my jump wings," he muttered as he fought nausea. He hadn't suffered space sickness on the transport and had refused the tablets offered by the medical orderly prior to the jump. Now he understood why the more experienced troops had sniggered at his bravado. His stomach heaved again as his inner ear reported wild oscillations while his eyes disagreed. Only another thirty seconds. Please, only another thirty seconds! He counted them down.

Almost perfectly on cue, his neurohelmeted head slammed forward, the sudden deceleration more than his scrawny neck muscles could support. The restraint fitted to his couch kept Fujimori from slamming headfirst into his command console, but didn't keep him from mashing his face against the inner facing of the fragile helmet. He tasted blood, either from biting his lip or from his injured nose. He'd have to wait until he was on the ground to check.

The deceleration faded, or at least his perception of it, and the cockpit instrumentation signaled a perfect deployment of the main chute. The pod was now sub-sonic, a far cry from the almost 20,000 kph it had been traveling when it punched into Telos' upper atmosphere. Fujimori counted a dozen seconds under his breath. He reached twenty-five and his stomach lurched again as the plummeting drop-pod passed 10km altitude and the back-shell disengaged from the cocoon, freeing the ceramic egg from its parachute harness. The floor seemed to fall away. Rather than being pressed down on the couch, he returned to freefall. This time Fujimori barely managed to lift the visor before he fouled his faceplate with vomit. The stomach spasms stopped, but now the stench assailed his sore nose. Something else to deal with on the ground.

The cocoon began to spin, propelled in part by the backshell release and accelerated by small pyrotechnic charges in anticipation of the final stage of separation. In carefully choreographed sequence, additional charges detonated throughout the ceramic casing, some in solid blocks and others in linear arrangements. The artificial eggshell splintered and cracked, sloughing off into the thickening air, thrown away from the valuable cargo by centrifugal force. No longer protected from the buffeting of the wind by its aerodynamic cocoon, the *Panther* began to shudder violently, its controlled spin threatening to turn into an uncontrolled tumble. Fujimori wrenched the humanoid body around into the traditional parachutist's pose and slowly drew its legs down so that the inbuilt jump jets could slow its descent. Without the jets, this last phase was going to be very swift and end messily. He needed to concentrate on the movement controls and the attitude indicators. One wrong move or ill-timed distraction could make the difference between life and death. He needed another twenty seconds, fifteen, ten ...

The proximity alert sounded. Fujimori's attention snapped to the small drop-radar. With the pilot no longer focusing on posture and attitude, the 'Mech began to tumble.

"Kuso," he swore, as much at his own incompetence as at the inbound fighter that lit up the Threat Warning Indicator. For a moment panic gripped him, followed by steely calm. All thoughts of the Dieron Regulars' assault landing at Triumph Spaceport left his mind. *The Way of the Samurai may be death but I'm not going to die here*, he thought.

A dot appeared on the horizon and then, almost faster than his eyes could register, closed the gap with the falling 'Mech. In his brief glimpse of the flying machine Fujimori recognized it as a *Sparrowhawk*, presumably one of the Avalon Hussars. Its speed carried it flashing past, spitting fire as it went. The jammers and noisemakers concealed in the cocoon shards drew some of its fire, but one laser beam struck the *Panther* high in the torso. The shot scored a long rent in the armor but failed to breach its protective layers. The impact accelerated the 'Mech's tumble.

The Threat Warning Indicator remained on. Fujimori knew what that meant. The falling *Panther* was still the Davion fighter's target, the Sparrowhawk's tracking radar maintaining a lock on the vulnerable descending 'Mech. Fujimori realized he'd been lucky. The pod shards had protected him from the brunt of the attack, but on a second pass they would be a lot farther from the *Panther* and the 'Mech would be much more vulnerable. He fought to maintain control of the falling machine, swearing at the sluggish controls while pulling, pushing and kicking with all his might. The tumbling machine slowed, but Fujimori winced as he caught sight of his attacker's contrails. At first they were heading away, but then they looped up and over before heading back toward him, an arrow pointed at his heart.

I'm dead, he thought. How do I get out of this?

He rolled the *Panther* on its side and pointed his particle cannon at the approaching streak. His bolt of man-made lightning missed the approaching fighter by dozens of meters. *Last chance*, he thought desperately as he aimed again. His finger tightened on the trigger as tracer fire lanced out across the *Sparrowhawk's* path. The Davion fighter pulled up and rolled, now more prey than hunter. A second fighter passed briefly

into Fujimori's field of vision, this time a sleek *Samurai* in Dieron Regulars colors. It pulled up sharply too, its contrails entwining with those of the Davion fighter.

Fujimori in his *Panther* continued to fall. He became suddenly, crashingly aware of the ground rushing up to meet him. Twisting desperately he aligned his 'Mech's body with its feet downward. Then he stamped hard on the jump pedals. The *Panther*'s jets roared to life, slowing the descent. The 'Mech continued to spin. From the corner of his eye he could see the spaceport complex and beyond it the city, some dozen kilometers distant, but he didn't have time to make a course correction. He would need every ounce of skill to survive the landing, let alone worry about *where* he came down.

He arched the 'Mech's body again, seeking to control the spin, all the while maintaining pressure on the jet triggers. Air speed bled off. An impact now would still be fatal, but at least he wouldn't leave a smear across the landscape. An alert sounded as his altimeter recognized 500 meters. Only seconds remained of the descent. Fujimori triggered the booster pack strapped to the *Panther*'s back. Solid rocket motors cut in, further slowing the plunging 'Mech. The altimeter warning rose in pitch to a scream. Fujimori began to pray.

Namu Amida Butsu. O Amida, I take refuge in you.

There was a bone-shaking blow as the thirty-five ton 'Mech touched down, its actuators struggling to absorb the impact. Artificial bones and muscles creaked ominously and sensors flashed for attention. Yet the 'Mech remained intact, legs bending to absorb the stress. One knee grazed the ground, tearing a jagged rent in the turf, and the *Panther* fell forward. Fujimori's right hand shot out. The sensor mesh built into his gloves recognized the action and produced a near-perfect mimicry with the *Panther*'s own right arm. The massive hand dug into the turf but the machine remained upright. Fujimori breathed heavily for what seemed like hours but was probably only half a minute, then triggered the command macro that stood the 'Mech upright once more. Dirt clung to the leg and hand that had braced the unsteady machine, but those were minor concerns now.

Pulling the *Panther* fully erect, Fujimori gave the 'Mech's throttle a shove and the humanoid machine took a step forward. He spun the massive war machine so that he could observe his immediate surroundings. Scorched grass marked his landing site, some of it still burning from the rocket booster strapped to his back. He reached up to the overhead console and armed a pair of switches before opening the cover over a third. He pressed it. Dull detonations sounded in his cockpit as small pyrotechnic charges detonated and separated the smoking rocket backpack from the 'Mech. He stepped forward again, clear of the straps and cables, and then turned toward his objective, now lost beyond the horizon but clearly identifiable by the rising plume of smoke.

Time to join this war, he thought, *and bring the Dragon's vengeance to his enemies*. Fujimori advanced the throttle and the 'Mech accelerated into a long-legged lope that would quickly eat up the kilometers.

The Davion teki won't know what hit them.

INTRODUCTION

Victor,

You may wish to circulate this treatise among your troops. I have not corrected any of General Caradoc Trevena's misconceptions about the participants or their motivations—I'm sure you can understand why—but even as it stands, it provides a comprehensive overview of the War of 3039 and certainly avoids the political bias of Misha Auburn. I have always liked Misha and her father, but neither of them has ever let go of their Steiner roots. Trevena has generally managed to balance his heritage with an unbiased view of events. He doesn't put your mother and father on a pedestal, nor does he paint Theodore as the bogeyman—a portrayal unfortunately prevalent in contemporary AFFS and LCAF accounts. He looks at the facts, not the image, and understands why the war happened the way it did and what we can learn from it.

Trevena used the DCMS, LCAF and AFFS archives to build his picture of the conflict, providing unparalleled insights into the actions on both sides. Where he errs is in the interpretation of material that remains classified, and also in seeking to examine the motivations of the participants. As regards the latter, he can do little more than make educated guesses, though his "wild stabs in the dark" are often more insightful than those of thirtyyear veterans in the Lyran military—in particular some of those buffoons now seeking to ingratiate themselves with young Peter.

One thing is worth noting. Trevena portrays your greataunt Nondi in a favorable light that is at odds with current perceptions of her. He depicts her as a strong and insightful leader, moody but competent—a far cry from the caricature put about during her regency. She and I never got on particularly well—childhood rivalries and all that—but I did respect her accomplishments and abilities. It is refreshing to see a report that does her justice and stands as a testament to a fine General of the Armies.

I commend the manuscript to your hands. Take it to Tharkad and the Star League conference and share it with Hohiro and his colleagues. I should see you there, but I admit my new garden here is most distracting. You should visit me soon and I will tell you tales of this place and its distinguished visitors that will prove valuable in your present role.

—Anastasius Focht, Mimir House, Fort Odin, Dromini IV, Lyran Alliance

INTRODUCTION

AUTHOR'S NOTES: BUILDING A WAR

Okay, so we're late. Writing the *Historical: War of 3039* turned into a mammoth undertaking for all concerned and forced a succession of overruns and delays, some because of outside factors but mainly caused by the sheer scale of the project. Originally planned as a compact 70,000-word book, this volume grew considerably to do the tale justice, finally coming in at around 125,000 words.

The War of 3039 has long been a specter of the *BattleTech* universe, a testament to Theodore Kurita's determination to save his realm and a demonstration of Hanse Davion's fallibility. That being said, despite how large the war loomed in the setting, surprisingly little information existed about it—a section in the 20 Year Update, several chapters in the novel Heir to the Dragon and a scattering of references in Field Manuals, scenario packs and sourcebooks that had to be systematically pieced together. On more than one occasion, the authors or fact checkers uncovered a buried reference that necessitated the rewriting of text and/or redrawing of maps.

Assembling this information was a formidable task requiring the writers to comb almost the entire range of BattleTech sourcebooks and novels in order to make the story we tell fit as closely as possible the established facts. That being said, undoubtedly some of the information presented here deviates from an existing source. In some cases this may be a genuine mistake (for which we will blame Caradoc Trevena), but often the authors were presented with contradictory information and had to either pick one option (or at least rationalize it) or attempt to synthesize a new allencompassing version. Have our endeavors succeeded? Only you, the readers, can judge. We have attempted to give you a comprehensive insight into the War of 3039, including its origins and after-effects, and we hope we've managed to set a solid benchmark for future Historical books.

Classic BattleTech Historical: War of 3039 is the first of a new range of products that explores the major—and so far little-detailed—conflicts in the past of the *BattleTech* universe. Each book of the *Historical* series is part sourcebook and part campaign pack, describing in detail the background and major events of the conflicts as well as providing tools relevant to players who wish to recreate battles of the historical era in question. The War of 3039 has two distinct sections, the sourcebook and the rules annex, each of which is subdivided into smaller sections.

The sourcebook opens with *How Things Came to Pass*, describing the war's background along with the plans and alliances made by the combatants prior to the outbreak of war. *Wave One* covers the conflict between April and mid-July of 3039, including major attacks by the LCAF and AFFS as well as counter-raids by the DCMS and exploitation attacks by the Free Worlds League. *Shadow Wars* examines the less well-known aspects of the conflict, involving Special Forces, the media and communications. *Wave Two and Counterattack* describes DCMS efforts to liberate worlds seized by the LCAF and AFFS, as well as Theodore Kurita's audacious counter-invasion of the Draconis March. *Aftermath* provides information on the war's conclusion and immediate aftereffects in each of the participating states, including the rapprochement between Takashi and Theodore Kurita in the Combine and the decision to merge the LCAF and AFFS into a single fighting force. The *Deployment Tables* show the initial positions of the major units involved in the conflict and their principal movements prior to and during the war.

The *Rules Annex* includes a diverse range of items designed to aid players who wish to recreate the War of 3039 in their own games. *Prototypes and Development Dead Ends* contains experimental technologies that first saw light in that conflict, and *Unit Assignment Tables* shows which units were fielded by each combatant. *Inner Sphere in Flames: War of 3039 Annex* provides the information required to replay the War of 3039 using the Inner Sphere in Flames strategic rules found in the *Combat Operations* sourcebook.

As a stylistic consideration, all named military operations in this volume appear in upper case. For example, the AFFC assault on the Capellan Confederation in 3028 appears as Operation RAT, while Operation GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG designates the LCAF attacks against the Draconis Combine in that same conflict. Operation's WINTERSCHNEE (Commonwealth Thrust), STURMHAMMER (Dieron Thrust), GAHERIS (Benjamin Thrust) and LAUNCELOT (Galedon Thrust) represent the allied offensives into the Combine in 3039 and Operation OROCHI indicates the DCMS counteroffensive.