

ERA DIGEST

AGE OF WAR

▽△ CREDITS

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STAR LEAGUE ERA



CLAN INVASION ERA



JIHAD ERA



SUCCESSION WARS ERA



CIVIL WAR ERA



DARK AGE ERA



JUST FOLLOWING ORDERS

**ON APPROACH TO TINTAVEL
CAPELLAN CONFEDERATION
23 FEBRUARY 2412**

"I don't like it," Sergeant Price said. "Sir, the definition of 'enemy combatant' is just too vague."

"You don't have to like it; you just have to do it. We have a war to win here."

"Yes, sir," Price said. "If you tell me that's what I'm supposed to do, well, that's what I'll do, but I can't take responsibility if something goes wrong."

The Lieutenant ran a hand over his face and smiled ruefully. "I understand, Sergeant. These are the orders I was given myself, and I'm passing them along to you. We've got a job to do. Let's get it done."

* * * *

**NEW MITLA, TINTAVEL
CAPELLAN CONFEDERATION
23 FEBRUARY 2412**

The insertion was only lightly contested, which was a blessing. Unloading tanks from a DropShip could be a trial at the best of times, but that only got worse under fire. Things moved quickly enough, though, and soon the armored column—a mix of massive Kestrel MBTs and lighter APCs, along with a train of supply trucks and their escorts—rolled through the suburbs and into the city itself.

Price was still concerned. There was just too much left to interpretation in his orders. On the surface, they were simple: "Engage and destroy all enemy combatants and targets of military significance." Unfortunately, that was *all* they said. The key terms—"enemy combatants," "targets," "military significance"—were left undefined. He'd tried to get some clarification from the officers above him, but to no avail. Now he just had to trust that they knew what they were doing.

"Contact left!" The cry came from his radio operator, on the other side of the tank's squat turret. Price squinted through his periscope-like sight. Yes, he could see a figure standing in a window, a rifle held low. A closer examination revealed civilian clothes, and the rifle an old bolt-action hunting model. *Just a worried citizen, then.* He was just about to tell his crew to ignore the contact when the radio crackled to life.

"Green Five, why haven't you engaged the enemy?" Price recognized the voice of his company commander. He touched the micro-switch on his helmet to open communications and spoke evenly and precisely.

"Black Six, this is Green Five. Target is a civilian with light weaponry and poses no danger to this force. Over."

"He has a gun, doesn't he? Shoot him!" The CO's voice was as dangerous as sharpened steel.

"Black Six, this is Green Five. Orders received. Will comply. Over."

Sergeant Price was sweating openly now. He cursed his orders. He cursed his commanders. He cursed the man with the rifle. But he swung the turret to the left, elevated towards the window, and threw a 68-kilogram packet of death into the building. He didn't even realize that he had his eyes closed when he pulled the trigger.

"Black Six, this is Green Five. Target obscured. Over."

"Excellent work, Sergeant. This goes for everybody: You see something you don't like; you shoot it. Understood?"

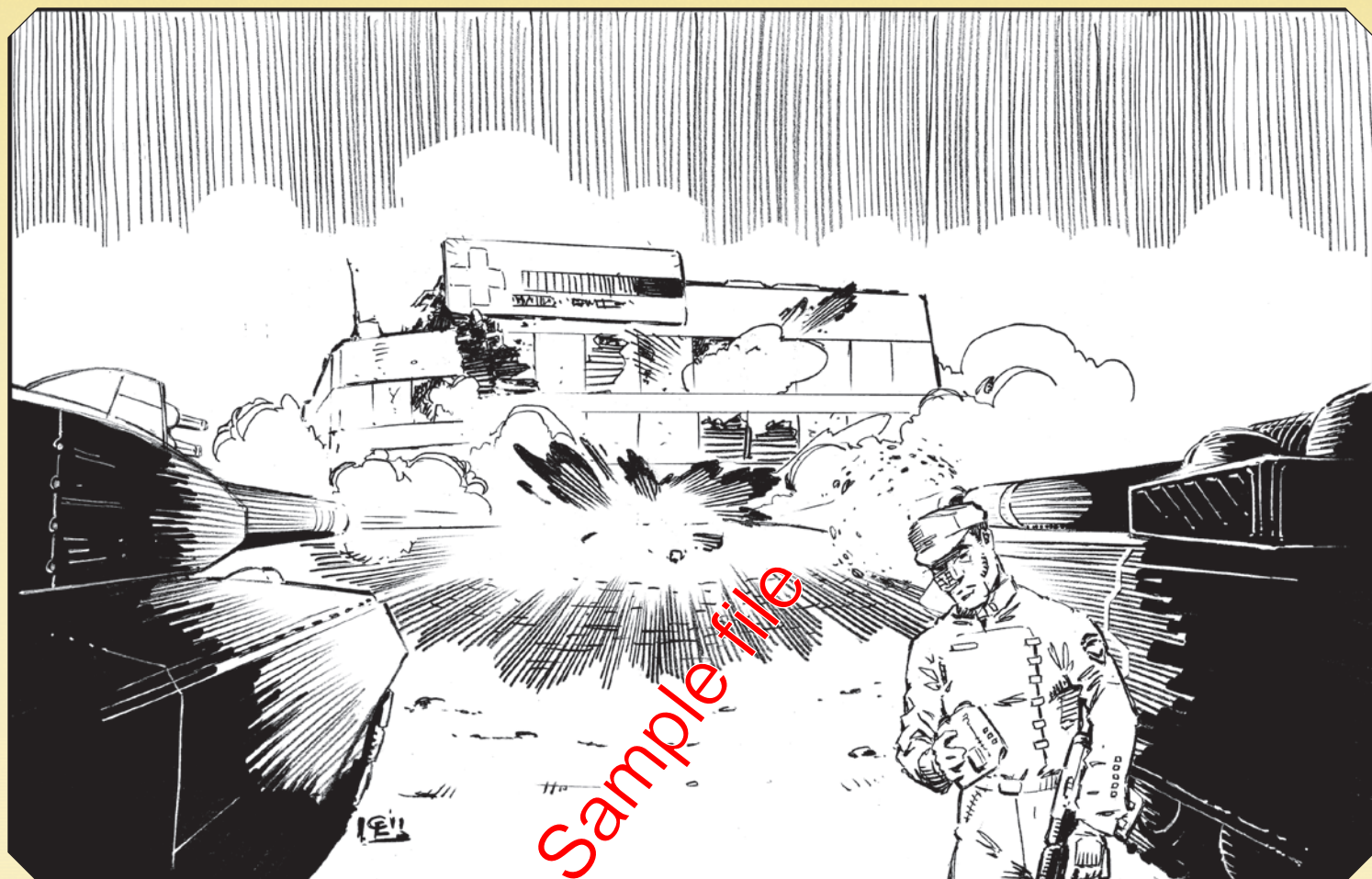
A ragged chorus of assents filtered through Price's earbuds, and he realized that the channel had been company-wide the entire time. He felt sick, but what could he do? He had his orders.

The column continued to roll down the street. It was perhaps eight more kilometers to the city proper, and its Cappie defenders, but the tanks fired on a regular basis now. Anything that could conceivably be a threat was met with fire: sometimes just a burst from an automatic rifle or machine gun, but more often with a deafening blast from the main guns. The once-pleasant avenue even became a war zone, with smoking rubble to either side. Armored vehicles broke formation to crush civilian cars beneath their broad tracks. Infantry fired from the top hatches of their APCs, mowing down anyone who broke from cover. Bodies littered the ground; none were in combat garb.

Sergeant Price was still grappling with his inner demons when the tank ahead of his exploded. Oddly, this calmed him. The horrors lay behind the unit, and now they could be soldiers again. He twisted his controls, seeking a proper target. It didn't take him long. The Capellan, a wedge-shaped Korvin, was rolling forward, the tip of its deadly laser muzzle still glowing. Price was calling his orders even as swung his own turret in line.

"Driver, action right!" The private responded instantly, but Price was already firing. The huge, rifled cannon on his Kestrel may have been obsolete compared to the Korvin's lightweight energy gun, but years of experience paid off. The 150-mm armor-piercing round found the enemy's turret rotation ring and cut through the lightly-armored area, exploding within. Hatches blew open and smoke poured out. Sergeant Price was hunting for another target and barely noticed his radio operator cutting down the surviving Capellans with his machine gun as they tried to evacuate the crippled wreck.

Now that battle was engaged, the entire force settled into a solid and impressive routine. The tanks blasted away their armored opponents, breached barricades, and provided overwatch for the infantry. The ground pounders, now on foot, shielded the tanks' vulnerable sides and cleared away Capellan infantry. The scale of the war just begun may have been epic, but the Free Worlds League Militia was built around armored cavalry and its centuries-old precepts. Even in the close quarters of a major city, they worked like a well-oiled machine.



Sample file

The force rolled on and on. Behind them lay dozens of shattered tanks and personnel carriers and before them the enemy was running. Collateral damage has lessened during the long engagement; the Cappies seemed more willing to abandon a threatened structure than to see it leveled around them. Sergeant Price didn't mind. He preferred a stand-up fight.

"Sergeant, we've got a problem." That was his radio operator again.

"Go ahead, Adams. What's up?"

"Sarge, I've got some Cappies running into that building on the left. About a dozen troopers carrying some stuff between them. Could be fleeing, could be setting up heavy weapons."

"Running *into* the building? I see the problem. I'm calling this one up; hold tight." Price switched over his comms to the company channel again.

"Black Six, this is Green Five. Come in, over."

"Green Five, this is Black Six. Go ahead, over."

"Black Six, we've got a potential ambush at my location. Please advise, over."

"Goddamn, Sergeant, do I have to hold your hand? If you've got any questions, *engage!*"

"Sir, I...yes, understood. Out." Sergeant Price shook his head and clicked back over to intercom. "Looks like the old man wants us to take it down. Adams, be ready on your fifty."

Price sighted on the building. Something in the back of his head was

screaming for attention, but he fought it down as he scanned the target's many large windows. There, a bit of movement, Capellan field dress. The sergeant fired the Kestrel's main gun and the window vanished a split-second before the round exploded, showering the street in fragments of glass and masonry. All around him, the other tanks of his company—even the infantry—swept the building with rounds.

This is it, Price thought. Nowhere else to go. Follow my orders. Do my job. Get it done. He fired again and again. A fire was raging inside the structure now, but he didn't—couldn't—stop. He shot his tank's ammo bins empty, flinching when a pull of the trigger didn't result in the familiar blast, flash, and recoil. He sat for a moment there, hearing the fire from his company slack off and stop. He breathed in deeply, let it out slowly, and leaned back. *It's over.*

"Sergeant...we have another problem. A big one," said Adams.

"Go ahead, Corporal."

"Sergeant, look to your left, by the driveway!" Adams sounded near tears. Price frowned, his unease returning in force, and swiveled the periscope around. He saw the sign quickly, but he just couldn't make sense of it. It took him another moment for the writing to come into focus. Suddenly he understood what the corporal had been talking about, and the realization left him whimpering and broken.

The sign, not ten meters from his tank's sponson and well within his field of vision, read, "New Mitla Community Health Network – Prenatal and Child Services Department."

Behind it, the rubble burned.

INTRODUCTION

To some, the Age of War seems almost trite compared to the wars that followed it. At the time, it was the largest, longest, most costly period of conflict in human history, but those superlatives have all long-since been eclipsed. Indeed, the “Second World War” of the mid-twentieth century killed even more people, though it was only one-tenth as long. Of course, one shouldn’t discount the losses in territory, technology, and population seen in the Reunification War, Amaris Civil War, the four Succession Wars, and the Jihad.

It was an oddly paradoxical period when compared to later conflicts. Planets changed hands on a daily basis, yet every state founded new colonies and pushed its borders outwards—and not always at the expense of its neighbors. The Ares Conventions transformed warfare into an intricate game of maneuver, yet weapons of mass destruction were used in many brutal engagements. Factories and spaceships were targeted as a matter of course, yet every state managed to expand its economy and implement new technologies—not the least of which were the giant war machines known as BattleMechs.

As the Inner Sphere rebuilds from the horrors of the Jihad, it would behoove us to remember the lessons of the past, so that—maybe, *this* time—we can learn how to avoid such devastation in the future.

—Demi-Precentor James Khauv
Historian, Archival Division
ComStar
28 May 3085

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Era Digest: Age of War is a stand-alone product that takes a deeper look at the glossed-over time when the proto-Successor and Periphery states formed their distinct cultures and philosophies. While this book is primarily a sourcebook about an era and setting often glossed over in *BattleTech* lore, it also contains rules both for playing within the Age of War and with early units in this pivotal point in history.

The first section, **The Age of War**, is a summary of the events of the Age of War and the changes that humanity experienced during that time. This section goes in depth about some of the turning points of the era, focusing on individual realms as well as the Inner Sphere as a whole.

The Ares Conventions takes a look at the titular documents that so transformed warfare during the period in greater detail than ever seen before, along with a comparison to the Clans’ system of *zellbrigen*.

A More Civilized Slaughter is a mixture of sourcebook material and guide for players and gamemasters who wish to incorporate the extremes of combat during the era – from barbaric to chivalrous – in their games.

Finally, the **Age of War Rules** section describes four units that were important or indicative of the Age of War, including an early BattleMech as well as some other notable units of that time. This section also includes Random Assignment Tables (RATs) to make it easy to quickly roll forces that fit well in that era, and role-playing information for players wishing to experiment with the pre-Star League development setting.

The book concludes with **Record Sheets**, a collection of record sheets for units found in this book.

One final note for wary players: Each sourcebook section reflects the bias and writing style of the author. This should be taken into consideration before declaring war on fellow players over interpretations of these sections.

THE AGE OF WAR

Students of history will find nothing surprising about the conflicts that sprang up among the first nations to inhabit what would become known as the Inner Sphere. While the Terran Alliance could afford to mount exploratory expeditions to scout for habitable worlds, the small proto-states left in the wake of the Alliance's eventual withdrawal from the interstellar community found it far more cost-effective to take what they needed from already-inhabited neighbors. Some realms grew through mutual defense pacts and trade treaties, while others swelled through brutal conquest.

Although the First Andurien War (2398) is generally seen as the start point for the Age of War, the truth is that open warfare on the interstellar scale had already begun with the Outer Reaches Rebellion of 2236. It continued, almost without pause, for the next three and a half centuries.

EXPANSION AND CONTRACTION

The roots of the Age of War stretch back to the very beginning of mankind's settlement of extrasolar planets. The first, New Earth (Tau Ceti IV), was founded in 2116. By 2235, the fourth Terran Alliance Grand Survey found humans living on more than 600 worlds. (Even today, it is said, the remains of an occasional lost Alliance-era colony may be discovered.) While the former superpowers of the Alliance quickly seized the closest and best of the new worlds, even the poorest of nations managed to support great numbers of their citizens to worlds beyond. Colonists found themselves freed from Terra's overcrowding and resource depletion, and the extrasolar population increased explosively.

As has ever been the pattern, the far-flung colonists chafed under the taxes and control of a distant, disinterested authority, especially as communications lagged over interstellar distances. Too many colonial governors, appointed by Terra, declared themselves absolute rulers, or were at least viewed as such by an increasingly disgruntled populace. It was only a matter of time before tensions erupted into open rebellion.

In 2236, the Terran Alliance deployed its Colonial Marines to suppress revolts in the outer reaches of human space, while simultaneously calling upon the still-loyal colonies to increase their shipments of food and materials to Terra. These actions served only to fan the flames of public dissent and more worlds rebelled.

Within eighteen months, the so-called Outer Reaches Rebellion had sent the marines packing, and sparked a wave of disillusionment on Terra that brought the isolationist Liberal Party into power. Almost immediately, the Alliance pulled its borders inward, constricting to a sphere of worlds within a mere thirty light years of Terra. Hundreds of colony worlds—many still loyal to the Alliance—were abandoned to their fates. Many failed, but others thrived. While the Terran Alliance fell apart within its closed borders, its now-independent children set out to improve their lot.

THE BIRTH OF THE GREAT HOUSES

Even those planets that had expected a fight for independence were caught off-guard by Terra's sudden isolationism. In the power vacuum, they scrambled to set up new governments. Most attempted to adhere

to the ideals rooted in Terran democracy, such as with the Covenant of New Avalon. However, except for what would become the Free Worlds League, the stress of moving from fledgling colonies to multi-world alliances forced most to institute stronger, more centralized administrations. The populace—often lacking the energy to expend on politics over the greater effort to survive in a post-Terra reality—left governing to those with money.

Even before the Alliance's withdrawal, several proto-states—notably the Tamar Pact (an eventual founding member of the Lyran Commonwealth)—had begun to form for purposes of trade and mutual defense. But after 2238, many more appeared: the Republic of Marik, Federation of Oriente, Tikonov Grand Union, St. Ives Mercantile Association, Sian Supremacy, Rim Worlds Republic, Taurian Concordat, Capellan Hegemony, Federation of Skye, Alliance of Galedon, and many more. Over the decades to come, these small states expanded and merged, until by 2366 the five massive nations that would dominate the Inner Sphere for the next seven hundred years had all formed.

There had already been border clashes between these states, especially between the Capellan Confederation and its neighbors, but matters came to a head in 2398.

NEO-FEUDALISM

The concept of neo-feudalism, first espoused by Edward Schedrin, is an attempt to balance the needs of massive, marginal working populations with those of their societies as a whole. Through economic incentives, people are encouraged to remain in one place, at one profession, for their entire lives. Initially it lacked a hereditary noble class, but this came about later, as powerful families established political dynasties. After all, it's a small step from the tradition of legal rights of succession to establishing that all of your rulers have had the same last name over a century or more.

Neo-feudalism also encouraged the growth of enormous corporations. These businesses became political powers in their own right. Indeed, it can be argued that they reintroduced the idea of fealty in the new societies. Signing a non-competition contract is not that different from swearing fealty to a liege lord.

A MATCH TO A POWDER KEG

The Capellan state (first called the Hegemony, then the Commonality, and finally the Confederation) had clashed with the Free Worlds League for decades. Even though the nation had been nearly destroyed by Federated Suns "peacekeepers"—an eventuality the Capellans escaped only after using orbital bombardment to destroy their own capital city—its attention remained focused on the steadily encroaching League. Finally, in 2398, the Confederation declared war on the Free Worlds to recover the Andurien systems, and everything went to hell.

Over the next few years, every other major state in the Inner Sphere went to war with its neighbors. The Draconis Combine assaulted the Lyran Commonwealth, even as the latter prepared for its own conflict against the Free Worlds League. The Federated Suns battled the Com-

bine. The reformed Terran Hegemony fought to reclaim the worlds its Alliance predecessors had once abandoned. The Capellans fought everyone around them.

Although it is true that not everyone was engaged in constant fighting against their neighbors during this era, between 2398 and until the mid-2500s there was always a major war underway along some interstellar border.

BARBARISM AND CHIVALRY

In 2412, the Free Worlds League launched an attack on the Capellan world of Tintavel. In one of the greatest tragedies of history, poorly worded orders and vague rules of engagement led to the death of thousands of civilians as battles tore through the planet's major cities. The conflict continued to escalate until both sides employed nuclear and chemical weapons to destroy one another. Over three hundred thousand people were killed or injured—most of them non-combatants. Even after the nations' leaders had personally called an end to the fighting, the damage was done. Tintavel was abandoned within a few years.

Aleisha Liao, the young Chancellor of the Capellan Confederation, was appalled by the destruction and loss of life. A few months later she sent out a personal call to the leaders of the other five major Inner Sphere states and the four largest Periphery nations. In the city of New Olympia, on the ironically chosen planet of Ares, she outlined her ideas to limit collateral damage in warfare. This agreement—which all six major powers, plus the Rim Worlds Republic and Kurita-dominated Principality of Rasalhague, signed—became known as the Ares Conventions.

Of course, the Conventions did not end warfare. Indeed, the fighting only spread further. Signatories to the Conventions could have their cake and eat it, too. As long as the "rules of war" were heeded, they could—and did—conduct audacious military campaigns with little risk. Combat became a contest of maneuver...at least, when it suited the combatants. With few ways to enforce these rules, a state that was truly serious about defeating its opponents could still use total war tactics without censure, often catching their opponents by surprise.

This set the tone for the remainder of the Age of War: long periods of near-bloodless conflict punctuated by horrific atrocities.

THE OTHER DELEGATIONS

It is well known that Aleisha Liao invited the leaders of the six Inner Sphere and four largest "minor" powers to the Ares talks. Most people, including earlier ComStar archivists, often assume that the Outworlds Alliance and Magistracy of Canopus were among those attendees. However, neither state existed at the time of the accords.

In truth, the last nations invited were the United Hindu Collective and Principality of Rasalhague. With his brother's blessing, Adam Kurita of the Principality signed the Conventions. The UHC demurred, not out of bloodlust, but rather because they feared that the treaty would "legitimize warfare". As the Collective had no interest in offensive operations and excellent relations with its neighbors, they politely refused to recognize the agreement.

WAR WITHOUT REASON

Thanks to the Ares Conventions, the major interstellar campaigns—many of which had begun to slow down—flared to life anew. Nearly every border shifted back and forth as states went to war over every slight, real or imagined.

The Capellan Confederation was the first to start a new conflict in 2418 when, under its new Chancellor Arden Baxter, it assaulted the Taurian Concordat. As the Concordat had refused to sign the Ares Conventions (ironically, out of distrust of the Capellans), Baxter showed the Periphery nation no mercy. Then, in 2423, he suddenly reversed direction and offered his support to the "Thousand Worlds Coalition", a defense pact aimed at isolating the Free Worlds League. While the Taurians rejected the treaty, relations did improve to wary neutrality.

For the Federated Suns, this was a time of political turmoil more than conflict, though they did lose several worlds to the expanding Terran Hegemony. Likewise, the Draconis Combine saw a total regime change as the Von Rohrs family came to power even as they continued their actions against the Lyran Commonwealth.

The Free Worlds League barely slowed in its own wars against the Lyran Commonwealth and Capellan Confederation. It also saw some political turmoil as its Parliament tried in vain to limit the growing power of the Captain-General.

Of all the major Inner Sphere states, it was the Terran Hegemony that was to make the greatest strides forward, though it was in technology rather than territorial gains.

THE NEW KNIGHTS

In 2439, the Terran Hegemony introduced the MSK-5S *Mackie*, the first BattleMech. While such giant walking machines had been used for nearly a century in industrial applications, the *Mackie* offered a level of rugged sophistication unimagined before it was developed. The Hegemony kept its new development under the strictest security, looking for the best time and place to reveal their existence. Meanwhile the state devoted incredible resources toward building more 'Mech factories and developing new models.

In 2443, the Hegemony fielded a lance of 'Mechs against a Kuritan armored company on Styx. The enormous *Mackies*, though primitive by modern standards, easily handled the heavy Combine tanks. News of the new war machines spread through the Inner Sphere like wildfire, and soon every state set its sights on developing their own BattleMechs.

In early 2455, a team of Lyran Commonwealth commandos raided the Hegemony factories on Hesperus. This action, called Operation PROMETHEUS, captured a great deal of technical data and schematics on BattleMechs, enabling the Lyrans to produce their own in short order. Commonwealth 'Mechs first saw action in 2459 on Loric, where one crushed Captain-General Geralk Marik underfoot.

Three of the other Great Houses received the secrets of BattleMechs from the Lyrans, though in vastly different fashions. The Federated Suns had discovered the success of Operation PROMETHEUS through their excellent intelligence network, and negotiated a massive payment to the Commonwealth in exchange for the technology. The Draconis Combine, meanwhile, simply assaulted the Lyrans' primary 'Mech factory on Coventry and seized what they needed. The Free Worlds League, desperate to field its own BattleMechs against the still-advancing Lyrans, conducted an intricate espionage campaign that convinced a Commonwealth scientist to defect...only to see the Capellan Confederation pull the same trick against them a few short years later.