

**The**



**Arrow**

**Book Ten**

*A Battletech* © Story Line

By Mark Mohr

Personal log, *IMS Stargazer*, 28 May 3066

These past three years have been difficult ones, as I expected. There were times when we were unsure we would have enough fuel to reach our next resupply point. Somehow, we made it, all the way to Galax, one jump from New Avalon.

Commander Danielle Tomlinson and I became quite close during this time. Kindred spirits, as it were, we developed what was more than a friendship. I finally proposed on 17 December 3065. She gladly accepted, and we exchanged a passionate kiss on the engineering deck, to the applause and cheers of the engineering crew. Two weeks later, Captain Sterling performed the ceremony on the bridge of the *Stargazer*, with the stars as a backdrop.

After Coventry, Captain Pritchard of the *CSS Forelight* had a HPG transceiver installed aboard the *Stargazer*. Our *Merchant* class jump signature would allow us to perform scout and recon missions, jumping ahead of the fleet. We would then report our findings back to the fleet. But we would not do this for the final jump to New Avalon, as we were fully aware of Archon Katherine's naval blockades at both the zenith and nadir jump points. Instead, we would hold at Galax until it was safe to jump to the north polar transient point.

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The assault on New Avalon came in the form of four groups. The first, led by Duke Tancred Sandoval, consisted of an enormous force of assault dropships, spearheaded by a dozen *Conquistadors* 'appropriated' from Galax. They simultaneously jumped in at both jump points, blasting through the naval blockades, making landfall on Rostock 30 June 3066.

The second group, led by Marshal Rand Davion, made landfall on Brunswick on the same day. But they sustained heavy losses during the burn-in.

The third group, led by Field Marshal Arden Sortek, made landfall on Rostock 7 July 3066. They would link up with Sandoval's forces on 10 July, with the combined forces tasked with the liberation of Rostock.

The fourth group, led by Prince Victor, arrived 8 November. It was a virtual armada that included five warships. An hour long warship battle in orbit over New Avalon ensued. We received word that it was safe to jump, as Prince Victor's group made landfall on Brunswick that very day.

" Battle stations, battle stations! This is NOT a drill. Prepare for jump in thirty seconds, mark" came Captain Sterling's voice over the intercoms.

The *Stargazer* came out of jump at the north polar transient point. I could see our orbital facilities, as well as the three *Bastion* SDSs.

Of the three *Bastions*, one had been destroyed, nothing more than a burnt-out hulk. The other two were heavily damaged and abandoned. The one loyalist warship not destroyed or surrendered, the Fox class *FCS Murmansk*, had escaped by way of the transient point. The germanium mill appeared undamaged, shut down. Yard One contained an almost completed *Mercury*, Yard Two a partially completed *Neptune* structure. But there was no time for a closer examination. Accompanied by our eight AF-16 Falcons, *Thor's Hammer* and *Valkyrie* immediately launched, making re-entry over Rostock.

In the weeks ahead, *Thor's Hammer* would carry out several surgical strikes on loyalist facilities, including communications centers, warehouses and power substations, dropping the 'mechs of Alpha Lance behind enemy lines and then recovering them afterward. She also flew numerous bombing missions.

*Valkyrie* flew many bombing missions, mostly carpet bombing runs. In a rare dive bombing run, to blunt a loyalist counterattack, I dropped four 500 pound bombs on a lance of *Atlas* assault 'mechs. While that destroyed the 'mechs, the *Valkyrie* took several PPC blasts from adjacent 'mechs. While the armor damage was not heavy, the electrical surge blew out an instrument panel on my right. I sustained second degree burns, and numerous lacerations, to the right side of my face. Commander Samantha Carter, my XO, took over while I applied a numbing agent and a bandage. I must have blinked at just the right moment, as my right eye was undamaged. But I was out of the action for the next three weeks.

With Rostock and Brunswick secured, the Allied forces made landfall on the southeastern tip of Albion 10 February 3067. The final assault on Avalon City was brutal, but eventually successful. On 28 March 3067, Archon Katherine's senior commander, Jackson Davion, stepped down. Finally, on 20 April, Katherine surrendered.

The war in the Federated Suns was over.

Meanwhile, a similar series of events played out on Tharkad, culminating in the death of Nondi Steiner in personal combat with Peter Steiner-Davion on 2 April 3067. Fighting continued until 5 April, and then came to an end. Tharkad was now in Allied hands.

The war in the Lyran Alliance was over.

With the end of hostilities, I turned my attention to locating my parents, sister and brother. *Thor's Hammer* and *Valkyrie* landed at the company airdrome. While repairs began, I drove my trike into Avalon City. The damage to the city was major, debris littering the streets. I made my way to Avalon General Hospital, where mama and Ilene both worked. There were three MASH trucks set up in the parking lot, with vehicles and VTOLs ferrying in wounded in a steady stream.

I found mama and Ilene in ER, up to their necks in casualties-both military and civilian. My face was still bandaged, but I pitched in with my Medtech skills. I also sent for every crewperson that could be spared, with Medtech skills, from all ships. They arrived two hours later, joining the ER staff.

Both mama and my sister were haggard and worn, cheeks sunken and dark circles under their eyes. I forced them both to take a break in the physicians' lounge, and sent for coffee and sandwiches.

" Oh, Johnnie! Thank god you're alright" said mama. We hugged.

" What about papa and Wilhelm?" I asked.

My sister answered the first one.

" Papa was badly wounded in the evacuation of the manufacturing facility. A demolition charge planted on one of the mainframe computers, to sever the connection to the remote data site, detonated prematurely. The infantry platoon with him brought him here. He's in the ICU, in a coma".

Bad news indeed. Mama answered the second question.

" We don't know if Wilhelm is still alive. I think he joined an Allied resistance cell, but we haven't heard from him in months".

I frowned. The coffee and sandwiches arrived. After a quick meal, mama and Ilene wanted to return to the ER. I wouldn't let them. The ER would function without them, now that the extra Medtechs had arrived. We took the elevator to the ICU. Normally a single room, there was a second bed. We gathered around papa. He was on a ventilator. While his breathing was regular, due to the machine, his heartbeat was erratic and brain activity minimal. I took his hand in mine. Some people believe that a comatose patient can hear words spoken to them.

" I'm here, papa. So are mama and Ilene. Please don't die on us".

After a few minutes, papa opened his eyes. He smiled weakly, and held up three fingers, pointing at the ceiling. Then he lapsed back into the coma. Less than thirty minutes later, his heart stopped.

That was too much for mama. She collapsed into my arms, and my sister and I got her into the second bed. Ilene administered a sedative, so she would finally sleep. Then Ilene returned to the ER. I stayed a while longer, then left, with instructions to the nursing staff to call me if there was any change. Papa's body was taken to the morgue, placed in refrigeration. Any funeral arrangements would have to wait a while.

I drove the trike back to the corporate headquarters building. There were a few broken windows, but the tower was intact. In the sub-basement, where the four mainframe computers were located, mainframe four was a wreck. That was the computer linking the complex to the remote data storage site. The other three were inert, with even the operating systems wiped. That meant that every computer, machine tool and robot, in both the ground and orbital facilities, were also inert.

I then drove to the remote site, in a secluded wooded area, fifty kilometers from the ground facilities. I found the access hatch with no trouble, and keyed in my access code.

The hatch popped, and I opened it. With a flashlight, I went to the pair of 300XL fusion engines that powered the site. I restarted them. The lights came on, as did mainframe five. Self diagnostics ran, revealing that the mainframe was intact and functioning normally. I downloaded the employee database to my laptop computer. I would have to locate as many employees as possible, to bring the facilities back online. Verifying that all the machine code and software were intact, I resealed the hatch and returned to the company airdrome.

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Personal Log, *IMS Valkyrie*, 9 August 3067

Papa's funeral was held on 22 July, at Avalon United Methodist Church. In my eulogy, I reminded everyone that the best way to remember papa would be to carry on as normally as possible. He would have wanted it that way. Mama was still a wreck, not yet coping with the loss, but she was calm. We laid papa to rest in the family plot at the cemetery. There were now five generations of Mohrs buried here.

I found myself in the unenviable position of CEO for both companies. The corporate bank accounts were in good shape, and I managed to locate nine of the twelve directors. To date, I have located nearly four thousand of the over nine thousand employees, and they are trickling back to the ground facilities. Word of another two thousand came from them, and they are also returning.

Danielle led an engineering team to reconnect the mainframes of the ground facilities to the remote site, and the software upload is under way. The complex's two fusion power plants have been restarted, and the complex will soon be operational, if not yet fully manned.

Wilhelm showed up at the family estate, alive and well. He had indeed joined an Allied resistance group. With his talents as an electrical engineer, he had spearheaded operations against Katherine's forces involving disruptions to the power grid and internet systems.

I was in papa's study one evening, trying to decipher papa's final message to me before he died. Three fingers, pointed at the ceiling. What did it mean?

Then the proverbial light bulb came on.

New Avalon has three moons. The outermost, smallest moon, Valiant, has minuscule gravity. If papa wanted to hide something, that was the place to do it. I immediately called all the *Valkyrie* and *Thor's Hammer* crews to the company airdrome. Both ships launched that night, burning out to the moon. Using the landing lights of both ships, we began a grid search of the surface. Around one in the morning, we found papa's stash.

There was an intact *Neptune-M* on a makeshift cradle of Carbonax beams. Next to it was the prototype *Odin* heavy assault aerodyne dropship. This design was still on the drawing boards when I left New Avalon the last time. They had completed it. It would take almost a week to assemble enough technicians for the recovery operation.

I 'borrowed' Captain Sterling and helmsman Kharkov from the *Stargazer*, as well as Danielle Tomlinson-Mohr and an engineering crew. The *Valkyrie's* XO would fly her. I would fly the *Odin*. Both ships were equipped with tug/tow adapters, and would be used to help lift the *Neptune* from the moon's surface. Papa and the design teams had made two changes to the *Neptune*-she mounted twice the number of maneuvering thrusters of the original design. The aero bay had been expanded to hold 36 aerospace fighters, a complete tactical wing.

The *Neptune* was powered up by mid-day. There were no plants in the hydroponics bay, so we used oxygen from the ship's supplemental tanks. With life support running, we were able to shed the environment suits once the temperature was warm enough. There were nearly two hundred tons of fuel in her tanks. With the fusion plant running again, the *Neptune* was ready to be lifted.

The *Odin* had over a hundred tons of fuel in her tanks. With the fusion plant restarted, she was ready. The two dropships attached the tug/tow cables to the bow and stern of the *Neptune* and carefully lifted on VTOL to take up the slack. With the *Neptune's* thrusters firing, we gently lifted the ship from the surface. Once she was safely in orbit, we detached the cables and docked to the *Neptune*. Using the station keeping drives, the ship began the burn to the north polar LaGrange point. A day later, she reached parking station. The grav deck was spun up, and the *IMS Neptune*, as I named her, was ready to receive her crew.

*IMS Odin's Wrath* was also ready for a crew. The test flight logs showed there had been a couple problems with the maglev catapults, but they were corrected before the ship was stashed. She was carrying twelve AF-16 Falcons, armed with the new laser cannons. The *Neptune* was carrying thirty six. I had my work cut out for me, finding crews and pilots for both ships.

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Personal Log, New Avalon, 12 February 3068

I'm going to have to do something about captains Sterling and Baker, as well as my wife, Danielle. They, and several others, had conspired to throw me a surprise birthday party in the mess hall of *IMS Neptune* on 17 December 3067. Ah, well. I admit I enjoyed it. They had fun doing it, which was a good thing. Papa would have wanted it this way.

Nearly seven thousand of the over nine thousand employees had returned to work at the ground and orbital facilities. The *Mercury-M* in Yard One was completed, and slipped moorings on 11 January. The *Neptune-M* in Yard Two has resumed construction, scheduled to launch in May.

With the militaries of the Federated Suns and Lyran Alliance decimated by the civil war, they were mere shadows of what they once were. Replacements for the dropships and fighters lost would be needed, and quickly. With nearly every civilian jumpship diverted to military service, interstellar trade had ground to a halt, causing extreme hardship on many worlds.

Two generations of warriors had given their lives in the war. Lost manufacturing capacity would take decades to recover from. As I expected, the toll on both realms had been severe. It might take a century to fully recover, if then.

Peter Steiner-Davion is faced with an uphill journey in that regard. Many Lyrans would prefer to see a 'pureblood' Steiner on the throne. Only time will tell how that plays out. Duchess Yvonne Steiner-Davion has been reinstated, though technically as regent. Katherine Steiner-Davion has been sentenced to a life of servitude in the Clan Wolf OZ. Personally, I would have sold her into slavery in either the Tortuga Dominion or Marion Hegemony. But the decision was not mine to make.

Speaking of Prince Victor Steiner-Davion, I received a summons to the palace. I went in AFFS dress uniform, with my sword at my side. I offered it in his service, but he declined to accept it, knowing that I would prefer to remain an independent mercenary. But he did promote me to the rank of Colonel, AFFS Reserve. As compensation for the services of Orion's Arrows, we were permitted to keep the HPG transceiver on the *Stargazer*. I would later have it transferred to *IMS Neptune*, which would become my flagship.

Mama, Danielle and I were in the study after dinner. *My study*, now. Mama was looking better, but was still saddened by papa's death. As we sipped Taurian brandy, the conversation shifted to future plans.

"Danielle, my dear, what would you say to being an instructor at NAIS? Your vast hands-on experience would serve you well at the College of Engineering".

She raised an eyebrow at that.

"I don't know. I'd have to think about it. And it would depend on what you choose to do. I will not be separated by light-years from you should you choose to resume being a mercenary unit commander".

I had to admit that I expected that response. Mama chimed in.

"I concur. I will not risk losing you as well. Stay here, with us, on New Avalon, son."

I also had to admit that I expected that response from mama.

"Hmm. The thought is an attractive one, I must admit. Perhaps we could both teach at NAIS. How would that be with you, my dear?" I asked my wife.

She smiled.

"That would be perfect. We'd be together. Mama?" she asked.

Mama cheered up at that.

"I would like that a lot. You two are going to have children, aren't you?"

Danielle blushed at that. I chuckled.

“ Mama, you were always direct. You’ll be pleased to know that we’re way ahead of you. We’re expecting our first child in July”.

Mama was positively ecstatic.

“ Congratulations! Both of you. Group hug!”

We did indeed hug.

“ I can’t wait to be grandma. You have no idea, Johnnie”.

Seeing mama happy again was great.

“ Then it’s settled. I’ll call Dean Morgan in the morning”.

And that’s exactly what happened. Danielle and I would both teach at NAIS, the College of Engineering, beginning next semester. Orion’s Arrows would become the aerospace branch of the First NAIS Training Cadre, lost in the civil war. A new generation of warriors would benefit from our knowledge and experience.

With that, our futures were set.