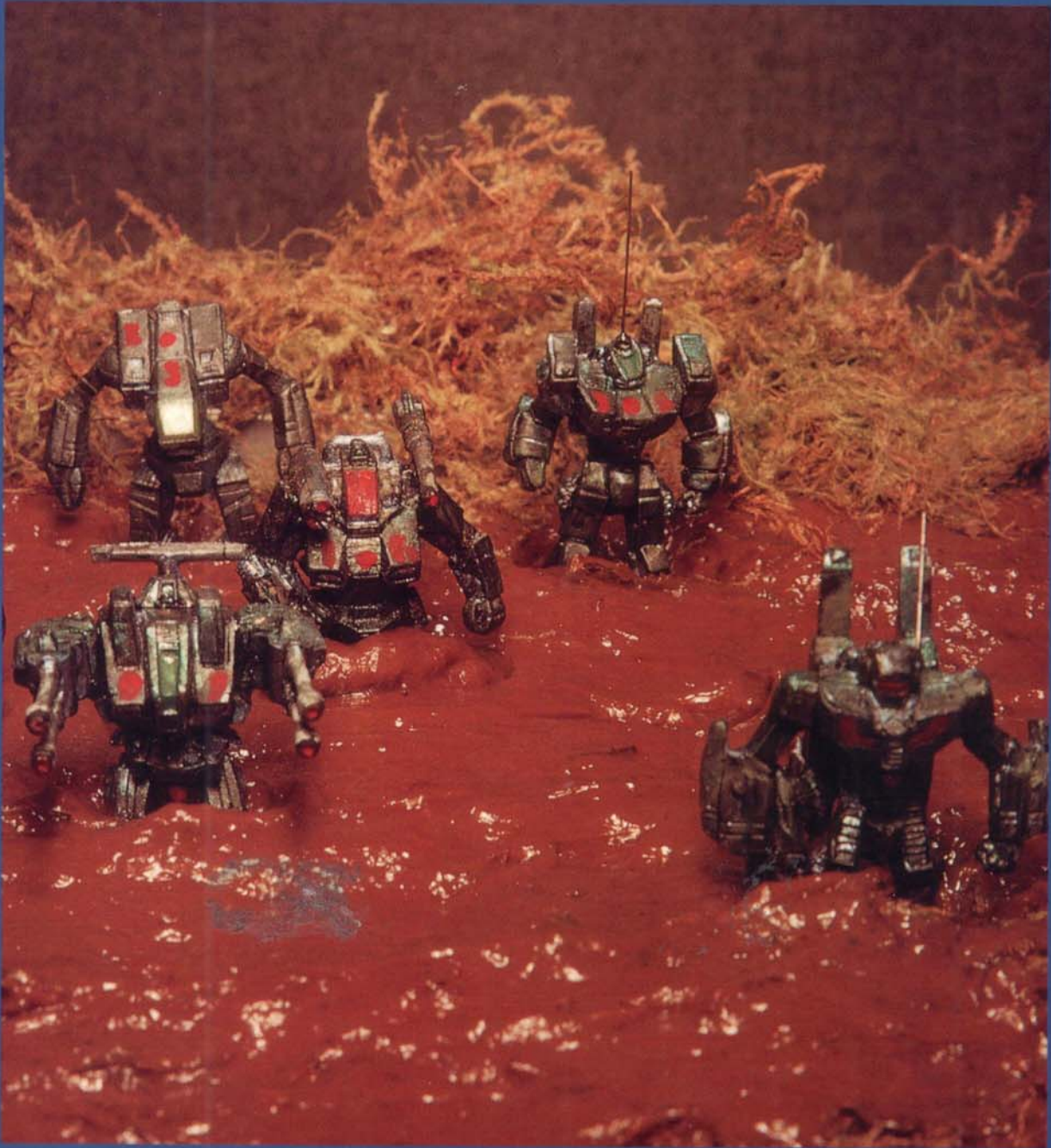# BattleTechnology

THE MAGAZINE OF COMBAT IN THE THIRTY·FIRST CENTURY

UP TO OUR NECKS!

A Mucky Time
Optional Rules:
Quicksand

Quicksand occurs when dirt or sand, held in one place by rock or an earth-rock mixture of firmer ground, is constantly being moistened from the bottom or lower part of the side. This usually occurs when the quicksand connects with a spring or underground aquifer. It has occasionally happened when a disused aqueduct pipe breaks below ground and leaks at a constant rate.

The appearance may vary widely. A quicksand may support a light layer of vegetation on top, or give an appearance of a mudhole. It may be surrounded by slippery mud, or by bushes and scrub. It may support nothing heavier than a rabbit, or may hold the weight of a light human comfortably.

The most important pre-BattleMech encounter between weighty vehicles and quicksand occurred in the twelfth century CE in England. King John was transporting the treasury of England in a series of wooden-axle carts across a quicksand area complicated by a tidal wash in an area on the English island called 'The Wash'. Although a walking man could pick his way across the sands, the wagons bogged and began to sink. This delayed them past the time when safe passage was allowed by the tide. The wagons which had not already bogged or sunk were drowned beneath the waves. Each of these wagons weighed less than a Locust, but the principle was the same*.

An individual human being who falls into quicksand can tread water in it, or spread bodily mass out in a float position while rescue is organized. A person who falls into quicksand while alone has a very good chance of slowly making his way out of it as long as he does not panic and begin thrashing. Movement should be slow, swimming motions, while body weight should be spread out as far as possible. The heavier the crossing party, the more likely it is to sink.

Infantry can pick its way across a quicksand hex, but safe movement is reduced to half walking movement when going through quicksand. Hovercraft do not sink, as long as they keep moving. Tracked and wheeled vehicles, if traveling at 5 hexes per turn or more, have a chance of continuing on over a single hex of quicksand. If they travel slower than that, or if they must cross more than one hex of quicksand, sinking is automatic. Tracked vehicles have this chance of survival because they spread weight to gain traction; wheeled vehicles have a skid factor that can get them across isolated patches of quicksand.

If a wheeled vehicle sinks into quicksand, it will need a winch in non-combat conditions, or a tow of some kind while not under fire, to be gotten out. A tracked vehicle or hovercraft has a chance to drive itself out during the first turn only, on a driving roll with a +4 modifier. If any of these vehicles sink and are recovered, they will not be able to proceed, far less to shoot, until they have been given a thorough going-over in a repair facility.

BattleMechs *will* definitely sink if they get into a quicksand hex.

If a 'Mech steps into quicksand, it will sink at the rate of one level per turn. Once each turn, after the turn it steps in, it has a chance to make a piloting roll from level one to pull itself out. This pullout takes six movement points. You will automatically wind up facing the opposite direction to the one you were facing when you stepped in. Quicksand hexes can be level 1, level 2, or level 3. To pull yourself up a level requires 3 movement points. To change facing while in quicksand requires 3 movement points per hex facing.

If a 'Mech falls into a quicksand hex, see page 19 of the *BattleTech Compendium*, for how he is lying in the quicksand, on left side, right side, prone (on his front), or supine (on his back). To stand up requires a piloting roll and 3 movement points if you are lying on left or right side, a piloting roll and 6 movement points if you are lying prone or supine, due to the greater surface area for displacement.

Tactical suggestion: If you have a fighter which can do twenty points of damage, and your opponent is standing next to a quicksand hex, attack him from the opposite side to the quicksand hex. If you inflict 20 points of damage, and he fails his piloting roll, there is a good chance he will fall into the quicksand hex. If this happens to an assault 'Mech, you don't have to worry about it for the rest of the scenario.

If a 'Mech has fallen and is lying prone in quicksand, do we have to tell you to stroll up and fire point blank into his back? Didn't think we did.

Now it gets nasty. While your 'Mech or vehicle is sunk in the muck, what do you think is happening to its weapons, its sensors, its vents? Right you are, quicksand is flowing into them. Jump jets require air intakes as well as exhaust vents. Quicksand will eagerly flow into both of those. This stuff when wet has the consistency of thick mud. When it dries, it has the consistency of adobe or limestone. And it dries

*Coastal quicksands are a special type. Thy are usually caused when a sand beach which has rock beneath it has a hole in that rock leading to another beach where the waves come in at an angle to the waves of the quicksand beach. The force of the stronger waves in the angled beach drives water in under the sands and sucks some of it back out, though water is always present. Coastal quicksands may be as deep as level 5, because you are being sucked laterally. It can take forever to climb out of one of these babies, because you are actually crawling up a sloping slippery underwater tunnel.

very quickly around the barrel of a hot autocannon, or a jump jet. If you have accumulated any non-movement heat during a combat, the area used is hot enough to bake quicksand. *The one exception is when you have been unlucky enough to be immersed for five turns or more; heat is then likely to have been dissipated by the liquid. The mud will still have to be cleared, but all results involving explosions are to be rerolled. Only if an explosion result is rolled twice will undried quicksand have an explosive result.*

On the turn that you escape from quicksand, if you can immerse yourself in level 2 water and move around, or if a hard rain is falling, you can clear lasers, PPCs, sensor intakes, and laser control systems. You will not clear jump jets, autocannons, or missile racks. Otherwise the mud begins to dry. If quicksand is not removed by the sixth turn past immersion, it begins to harden in joints like quick-dry concrete, slowing down movement by one MP per turn and making torso twists impossible. A 'Mech immersed in water will *not* be hidden as it is giving off a cloud of mud.

Let's take the simplest cases first, starting with **jump jets**. It's wiser not to use your jump jets after immersion in quicksand. You have only one chance in six, a roll of 11 + on 2D6, to clear the jump jets by making a jump. (see table).

Artemis fire control systems and Streak SRMs use **laser control systems**; they will be out of service until cleaned. **Sensor screens** will be out of service for one turn; most 'Mech designs include some sort of cleaning mechanism for these systems. The *only* input for that one turn will be radio.

And now to weapons. When weapons have been immersed in quicksand, they must be cleared before they may be fired with any accuracy. This clearing *must* be done before quicksand dries, or you will in effect be firing a weapon full of concrete, which is not recommended under any circumstances short of final strike suicide. If quicksand

has dried, wait until you return to a repair facility to clear the weapon.Emergency Field Clearing requires that a shot be fired. If you try to aim a shot while you're clearing the weapon, the shot is at +6, in addition to the other problems of clearing. Roll separately, first the to-clear roll, then the to-hit roll.

Lasers are the simplest to clear. The first shot through the laser's system has a 50% chance to clear the weapon. (Roll 7+ on 2 D6 to clear). The second shot is automatic. Failure does not have a damaging result.

How does a 'Mech avoid falling into quicksand? The only safe ways to cross quicksand terrain are to have infantry go ahead and scout each hex in front of the advancing vehicles (which slows them down considerably while the enemy is standing outside the quicksand targeting them), or, for handed 'Mechs only, to carry and use a 'probe pole'.

A 'probe pole' may be acquired from nature, by pulling up a small tree, for example. It may be acquired from the debris of a battlefield such as a metal fencepost, electric pole, or piece of building structure. It's length must be 2/3 the height of the 'Mech using it. A walking 'Mech may use the 'probe pole' while it walks at its normal rate as a sort of walking stick. It then has a 2 in 3 chance of discovering whether the hex in front of it in the line of its movement is quicksand or not. The usual limitations about using arm or hand-mounted weapons on the arm holding the probe pole appliy, just as if it were a hand-held weapon. Or the 'Mech may choose to go at 2/3 of its normal walking rate and be considered to be probing carefully into the three forward facing hexes. Logically, it then takes two moves to change direction. Only walking 'Mechs can use this device.

Flamers will bake the mud hard if the roll fails to clear. On the first roll of 2 D6, a 7+ result clears the weapon. If weapon does not clear, the next time it is fired, it will explode, doing 1 crit and 1D6 points of damage to the location of the weapon.

PPCs experience electromagnetic feedback when clogged. You only have a 50% chance to clear them without having trouble. To attempt to clear a PPC, roll 2D6. On a roll of 7+, this shot clears the PPC. On a roll of 4-6, the barrel is clogged and must be fixed by a master Tech. On a roll of 2-3, the weapon explodes, doing 1 crit and 2D6 points of damage to the location of the weapon. You must also check for an electronmagnetic pulse backlash as per the BattleTech Compendium's rules for being hit by two PPCs.

Autocannons fire slugs, not explosive rounds. The result of a misfire is the damage caused by the propulsive explosion contained in an area too small for it rather than being released out one end of the tube to propel the slug. There is a lengthy tube to become clogged, and the tube is quite likely to have been hot when it was immersed. Chances are not favorable to clearing the autocannon on the battlefield.

Missile Racks, both LRMs and SRMs fire explosive rounds. It is not recommended that you clear them on the battlefield. It takes two turns of firing to clear them. If mud not dry yet, ie, if you fire immediately upon escaping from the muck, there is only a one in six chance that missiles will explode in rack, doing 2 crits and 1 D6 to location for each

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To Clear Jump Jets

Roll	Result
11+	Jump Jet Cleared, no further problem
9-10	Jump Jet Clogged, may be cleaned in repair facility
7-8	Jump Jet disabled, must be replaced
5-6	Jump Jet collapse, take 1 crit in location
2-4	Jump Jet explodes take 2 critical hits in location

May only be tried with wet muck.

missile fired. If mud has dried, there is a 3 in six chance.

A few high-tech planets which have quicksand problems modify their autocannons and missile racks by coating the bore with teflon or a silicone-based dry lubicant so that muck will not stick. This adds a +2 modifier to the result rolls. Frequency of these modifications is extremely rare.

Clogged Weapons and Systems

Clogged Item	Result	How to Fix
Laser Control System	O/S	clean
Sensor Screens	O/S 1 turn	will clean self
Jump Jets	O/S	see separate table
Lasers	Must be Cleared	50% first shot, automatic second shot**
Flamers	"	50% first shot, or cannot be cleared **
PPCs	"	first shot 25% chance to explode**
Autocannons	"	see separate table
LRMs and SRMs	"	see separate table

** See Text

Autocannons and Missile Racks

Weapon	Condition	Roll	Result
autocannon	wet muck	9+	Clears
"	"	6-8	partial explosion, weapon ruined
"	"	4-5	hang fire, weapon will *** discharge at random, 1D6 turns
"	"	2-3	round explodes in barrel 2 crits to self per missile fired
autocannon	dry muck	12	Clears
"	"	8-11	partial explosion, weapon ruined
"	"	7	hang fire, weapon will *** discharge at random, 1D6 turns
"	"	2-6	round explodes in barrel 2 crits to self per missile fired
LRM or SRM	wet muck	9+	clears if rolled for 2 turns
"	"	5-8	round explodes in rack, weapon ruined
"	"	2-4	round explodes in rack, setting off other rounds 2 crits to self per missile fired
LRM or SRM	dry muck	10-12	weapon not cleared, but not damaged
"	"	9	round explodes in rack, weapon ruined
"	"	2-8	round explodes in rack, setting off other rounds 2 crits to self per missile fired

*** Weapon will be ruined after discharge. Roll 1 D6 to see in which direction slug will fire. Roll to-hit to nearest 'Mech in that direction without gunnery modifiers.

URGENT ANNOUNCEMENT

One Man, One Death

Optional Alternate Rules
for Infantry/'Mech Combat

Chu-i B. Adams swore softly as he reviewed the tactical situation. Tapping the sensor screen absentmindedly, he ordered the Pursuit Lance to flank the last known position of Tai-i Kuwayama. It might be only a break in communications — he hoped. Certainly the Tai-i's Battlemaster and Manabe's Marauder had enough heavy firepower between them to slag the light lance that Tac-Int had placed in the city, and they had been nowhere near the command bunker with its Scorpion tank lances when communication had been lost. Something was bothering him, though (dam, but he hated city fights). What was it?

Suddenly Bryan's Thunderbolt lurched as multiple impacts fragmented his rear torso armor. Reacting instinctively, he spun around and unleashed his lasers at the point where the missile contrails originated. Nothing the city's defenders had could withstand the volley of a heavy and three medium lasers. He looked again at his sensors and cursed louder. Nothing that is, except what he now faced. Bryan remembered now exactly why he didn't like cities.

INFANTRY!

BattleTech is after all a game about giant war machines, the BattleMechs, with tanks included to a lesser degree. Infantry are dealt with very simply; the way they take damage is simplified. Unfortunately, infantry do not take damage quite the same way that several centimeters of armor plating does. Weapons that are designed to penetrate heavy armor will certainly kill any individual, but such point effect weapons lack the area effect that destroys infantry units. This article is an alternative method of calculating infantry casualties, as opposed to the simple 'one infantryman for one point of weapon damage' in the standard rules.

Referees who use infantry are warned that while this system will not make infantry any deadlier, they will last longer against 'Mechs, thus inflicting more damage upon them (and annoying them for longer). It still takes a brave individual to stand up against a huge fighting machine with enough firepower to destroy a city block. 'Mechs still rule the battlefield, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future of the Inner Sphere.

Weapon Systems

Lasers and PPCs (Extended Range and normal)

Dependent on a single beam or bolt to inflict damage on the target by concentrating the weapons discharge so as to gain the maximum in armor penetration, these weapons are overkill on any individual so unfortunate as to be directly hit by one. Rarely will more than torn remnants of a body be found, if that. The damage is highly localized. It is rare for these weapons to kill more than a single infantryman or weapons team although there is a limited capacity to 'sweep' the beam so as to cover more of an area.

Pulse Lasers

Firing a burst of bolts, these weapons have an increased area of effect when swept through an infantry unit. With any individual pulse capable of incapacitating a non-armored person, these weapons have more success against infantry — the small pulse laser's rate of fire in particular being close to as effective as a machine gun, the larger models relying on fewer (although more powerful) pulses.

Flamers

Not much can be said about these weapons. Designed to spread flame over an area, to lap around obstacles and to inflict collateral damage, they not only hurt infantry units — they scare them!

Gauss Rifles

Very effective against 'Mechs and vehicles, this weapon epitomizes the problem that armor piercing weapons have against infantry. Capable of killing any single individual, rarely will it inflict more than one casualty. Any MechWarrior using this weapon against infantry is really only wasting its limited ammunition.

Autocannon (Ultra and Standard)

Generally firing a ten-shot burst of shaped charge warheads or kinetic energy penetrators, these weapons with collateral fragmentation and shrapnel side effects enjoy an increased kill ratio. The larger calibers in particular are quite effective, although at the cost of their generally limited ammunition supply. Ultra autocannons with an even higher rate of fire (the double shot ability), are even more dangerous to infantry.

Autocannons (LB)

When firing standard ammunition, these weapons have the effect of the normal autocannon they are derived from. Cluster rounds, with the ability to saturate an area with up to one hundred separate sub-munitions (ten-shot burst times ten sub-munitions per warhead), are capable of causing massive casualties to an infantry unit, although this is one of the few weapons that is not a guaranteed kill on an individual infantryman.

Machine Guns

While it is capable of only minor damage to a BattleMech or even to an Elemental, the machine gun is difficult to surpass in killing infantry. Firing a hundred or one-fifty found burst of explosive or armor-piercing ammo (usually 13 to 15mm diameter), machine guns scythe through entire squads.

Missile Weapons (Long and Short Range)

With their effectiveness primarily dependant on the number of warheads in the volley (Short-range missiles have heavier warheads, although they are generally as-

sumed to be shaped charge as opposed to non-directional explosives), missile launchers can cover a larger area that most other 'Mech weapon systems, and thus can cause more casualties to an infantry unit.

Artillery Weapons

Historically the cause of the majority of infantry casualties (barring disease), artillery is the most effective weapon against infantry. It is also the most inaccurate weapon as any artillery unit in a position to direct fire on an infantry unit is in a great deal of trouble. The Arrow IV missile artillery system when used in conjunction with a properly equipped designator unit has no accuracy problem, although it loses some effectiveness against infantry when used in that mode, as the homing warhead is semi-directional.

Anti-Personnel Pods

A Clan invention, A-Pods are only moderately effective against infantry units in cover, although their extremely short range limits their usefulness. Should an infantry unit use close assault tactics, A-Pods can decimate units when they close for the attack.

BattleMech Physical Attacks

There are two types, the kick and the thrash. The kick is one of the few ways that a BattleMech can damage infantry in the same hex, if also covers stomping on the infantry and landing on them from a jump. The kick is only slightly effective, depending on size, but it is demoralizing to the receiving unit. Thrashing is a sign of desperation often as damaging to the unit employing it as to the target unit, but it can be quite effective.

Elemental's Weapons

Carrying up to three separate weapon systems each, Elementals can be the worst thing to hit a conventional infantry unit, as they can not only shoot them, but tear them limb from limb in physical combat. The separate weapon systems Elementals carry are SRMs, treated exactly as 'Mech SRMs except that where there are more than six in a volley, an additional roll must be employed to account for the rest of the missiles. For example: five Elementals launch a total of ten missiles at an infantry unit. Treat this as an SRM-6 volley and an SRM-4 volley). Other possible weapon systems are small lasers (Treat as conventional small lasers), flamers, and machine guns. These last two weapon systems are not quite as effective as the 'Mech based equivalents, although their numbers tend to make up for this.

Damage to Infantry

Step One: Roll to hit appropriate hex with weapons, a -1 bonus is applied instead of the standard -4 bonus. It is assumed that the MechWarrior shooting is aiming for concentrations of infantry. Range, movement, and *intervening* terrain (do *not* count the terrain of the hex the infantry unit is on) also modify the to hit roll as standard.

Step Two: Roll 2D6, modifying as per Cover Modifier (the terrain of the occupied hex). Cross-index this total with the

Cover Modifiers

Open	+4
Rubble	-2
City	0*
Rough	0
Light Woods	0

weapon being fired to get the number of casualties to the infantry unit.

*City: While a city does not give any cover modifiers to infantry, if the infantry is within a building, use the Infantry Damage in Building table (page 45 of the *BattleTech Compendium*)

Infantry Variations

Infantry Formations: Close, Normal, or Dispersed

Close: Two infantry platoons per hex — normally only used when marching from point A to point B, within infantry strongpoints, or when surprised in camp. Benefits to infantry unit are concentration of firepower and ease of control. The big disadvantage is that when fired upon, the unit will take extreme casualties. *Game Effects:* The roll to hit infantry within the hex is at a -2 bonus (supplants the standard -1 bonus) and roll twice for casualties, applying both results. This applies until the number of infantry in the hex is brought to below 30.

Normal: One infantry platoon per hex. No modifiers.

Dispersed: The infantry platoon counter is taken as the center of the troop, elements of which are scattered in surrounding hexes. Benefits are decreased vulnerability to weapons fire; disadvantages are less concentrated firepower and decrease in command ability. *Game Effects:* The roll to hit within the hex is at a +0 bonus (supplants the standard -1 bonus), and the amount of casualties caused is halved (round to player's benefit). This can also be used for infantry units at a current strength of 8 or fewer (the last few can be the hardest to kill). Units in dispersed formation (but not units at low strength) also suffer a modifier of multiplication by 0.75 to the damage they inflict (round fractions down). With the decrease in command, some individuals will not expose themselves to fire when commanded to. Also, due to the dispersal some troops will be out of weapons range.

Infantry Class: Green, Experienced, Veteran, Elite

Green: Ill-trained, sometimes ill-equipped and often suffering inferior leadership. These troops are all too common (unfortunately).

Experienced: Well-trained, motivated and competently led. The standard trooper. *Game Effects:* Rarely has anti-'Mech training (perhaps one in twelve platoons), standard morale and no to hit penalties. May aim for specific locations; if so, is at a +4 penalty to hit.

Veteran: Rare troops, these people are well-equipped, very well-trained and experienced, and can be relied upon to stand their ground in most cases. Few infantry units ever reach this degree of competence. They are mostly found guarding important location or personnel.

Elite: Rare except where attached to Elite House Regiments or in company-sized elements as household guard to House leaders, superior in every respect, can be expected to have the best in equipment, support, and leadership. Game Effects: Always have anti-'Mech and anti-vehicle training. Excellent morale. Have a -2 bonus to hit (+2 penalty to aim for specific location), suffer no fire reduction due to dispersal. Casualties are modified by -2 on the Casualty Table due to their superior armor and better training.

A Green infantry regiment (common) would have 36 line platoons, approximately 24 green, 11 to 12 regular, and

Adjusted Dice Roll

Weapon System	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Standard and ER																	
Large Laser			1	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	5	5
Medium Laser				1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4
Small Laser					1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	3
PPC			1	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5
Pulse																	
Large Laser			1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4	5	5	5	6	6	7	7
Medium Laser			1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4	5	5	5	6	6	7	7
Small Laser		1	2	2	3	4	4	5	5	6	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Flamer			1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6	6	7	8
Ballistic																	
Gauss Rifle			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4
AC/2				1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4
AC/5				1	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4	5	6	7	7
AC/10			1	1	2	2	3	3	4	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	14
AC/20		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	12	13	14	15	16	18	20
Cluster AC/2**			1	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5	6	6
Cluster AC/5**		1	1	1	2	2	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	8	9	10	10
Cluster AC/10**		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	12	12	13	14	15	16
Cluster AC/20**	1	2	3	5	7	9	11	12	13	15	16	18	19	20	22	23	24
Machine Gun		1	2	3	4	5	6	6	7	7	8	9	10	12	12	14	16
Missile Weapons																	
LRM-5				1	1	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6
LRM-10			1	1	1	2	2	3	4	6	7	8	8	9	9	10	10
LRM-15			1	1	2	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
LRM-20		1	1	2	3	5	7	8	10	11	12	13	14	16	18	19	20
SRM-2				1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4
SRM-4			1	1	2	2	2	3	4	6	7	7	7	8	8	8	8
SRM-6			1	2	3	4	4	5	6	7	8	9	9	10	11	12	12
SRM-2 Inferno			1	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	55	6
Artillery Systems																	
Arrow IV		3	4	5	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	21	22	23	24	25
Arrow IV, adj			2	3	4	6	8	9	10	11	12	13	13	14	14	15	15
Arrow IV, Tagged				1	2	2	3	3	4	5	6	7	7	8	8	9	10
Long Tom		3	4	5	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	21	22	23	24	25
Sniper/Long Tom adj *			2	3	4	6	8	9	10	11	12	13	13	14	14	15	15
Thumper/Sniper adj *				1	2	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	8	9	9	10	10
Thumper adj					1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5
Other																	
Kicks					1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6	6
Thrashing			1	2	2	3	3	4	5	5	6	6	7	7	7	8	8
AP Pods				1	2	2	3	3	4	4	5	5	6	6	7	8	8
AP Pods, inf closing		1	2	2	3	3	5	5	6	7	8	9	10	10	11	12	12
Elemental Weapons																	
Machine Gun		1	1	1	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5	5	6	7	8	9
Flamer				1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5	5
Hand to Hand and MG		1	1	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	5	5	6	7	8	9	10
HTH & Flamer			1	1	1	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	6	6

* The 'a/b adj' designation denotes casualties for weapon 'a' and casualties in hexes adjacent to a hit from weapon 'b'.
** Clans only.

perhaps one veteran platoon.

A Regular infantry regiment (very common) would have 36 line platoon, approximately 9 to 12 of them green, 22 to 26 regular and one or at most two veteran platoons.

A Veteran infantry regiment (quite rare) would have 36 line platoons, approximately 6 of them green, 20 to 26 regular, 6 to 9 veteran and one, perhaps two elite platoons.

Elite infantry regiments: don't exist as whole regiments.

Aiming at locations: (Modified slightly from Solaris VII Gameworld boxed supplement)

By taking a penalty to hit, infantry platoons can aim at specific locations on 'Mechs. Possible locations are Aiming High (punch hit location table), Aiming Low (kick hit table), Aiming Left (possible only if in front/rear arc of target, roll on Left Side hit table), and Aiming Right (as with Aim Left, but use Right Side hit table). Aiming High or Low can be combined with Aiming Left/Right, but the unit firing is at an additional +3 penalty to hit.

Additional Infantry Types: *Assault Rifle, SMG*

Assault Rifle: The Rifle infantry in the standard rules is assumed to be heavy (gyro) rifles with some heavy weapons teams and individual LAW and VLAWs for additional firepower. An Assault Rifle platoon is almost as effective *against infantry,* but is a great deal cheaper to equip. Quite common in militia and green units, the effect of an Assault Rifle platoon is that against armored vehicles they do only one half the damage a Rifle platoon does (round damage up, split damage into two rough even groups, and then roll for location on target).

SMG: Optimized for city combat versus other infantry, an SMG platoon is even less effective against armored vehicles than an Assault Rifle Platoon. Treat as a Rifle platoon, except treat them as firing at 1 hex further range than we actually are (yes, this means a one hex maximum range), and damage is only one third (round fractions up) that of a standard Rifle unit. These modifiers take effect against any armored target (like Elementals).

Other Modifiers

Ultra Autocannons

When using the double shot ability, an ultar-autocannon has the effect of an LB-class autocannon of the same caliber firing cluster munitions.

Kicks and Thrashing

Use standard rules to determine a hit. Units jumping into a hex with infantry count as attempting a kick on the unit (for the purpose of invlicting casualties on the unit). Casualties are inflicted as normal; a ruoll of 2D6 with modifiers for cover giving the base casualties.

'Mech Type

Light 'Mechs hava a casualty multiplier of 1, Medium 'Mechs a multiplier of 2, Heavy 'Mechs a multiplier of 2.5, and Assault 'Mechs a multiplier of 3.

Morale: (recommended for use) (see Table Next Page)

Very rarely does a unit fight to the last soldier; usually at some point, individuals decide that whatever it is that they are fighting for, it isn't worth dying for. At that point, the platoon breaks and effectively ceases to exist as a unit, individuals breaking off in every direction (away from the enemy). Sometimes leaders can rally the troops, but this takes vital time, and the troops may have in their haste left a valuable position untended.

Whenever an Infantry unit suffers casualties that leave it at a break point (Ior lower), it makes a morale check on 2D6, the modifiers applying to the target number, not the dice roll. If the unit equals or exceeds its Base Morale target, then it can continue fighting. Should it fail, however, then the platoon will break and scatter. Scattering effectively removes the platoon from play; it is as if the platoon were destroyed as personnel head off in every direction.

When a platoon has broken, the only way it can reenter play is by rallying. This takes time. Count out hexes to a reasonable rally point (nearest cover, behind a hill, etc). Figure the time taken at one turn per hex puls one. If a rally roll (platoon's Base Morale target plus the rally modifier) is made on 2D6, then the unit is reformed at that point, having lost an additional 1D6 personnel. (If this is part of a campaign, it is referee's decision whether the personnel survive the combat. In any case, they will not reenter this action.

Bryan breathed a sigh of relief. Two of the platoons had broken and run as he opened fire on them with his machine guns. The third had persisted until he turned the building they were sheltering in into rubble, but meanwhile they had chewed his armor up in a couple of locations. As he warned the rest of his command about the infantry, he started thinking about the Tai-i. While Manabe's Marauder could have fallen to a determined infantry assault, Tai-i Kuwayama's Battlemaster had the anti-infantry weapons to deal with them. That could mean one of several possibilities, none of them pleasant.

A dull rumble intruded on his thinking; a nearby building was vibrating. This was not uncommon when a heavy 'Mech pounded by, but his Thunderbolt wasn't moving! Bryan walked backward to open up the range. Whatever it was coming around the corner he wanted to be some distance away from it. Come to think of it, he sincerely hoped it was the Tai-i's Battlemaster.

No such luck. A low, broad expanse of dull grey metal ground its way slowly around the corner, its armor showing several molten gouges in its surface. As twin large barrels mounted in the tank's turret swiveled his way and multiple missile racks opened up, Bryan mentally composed his report to Regimental Command. Assuming that he survived, heading the list would be "Tac-Int: its culpable failure in estimating enemy forces within the city." His T-bolt rocked backwards as his monitors showed a disturbing lack of protection in several locations. Sweating, he unloaded everything he had at the metal behemoth in front of him. As the temperature rose in the cockpit, he reconsidered his report to Regimental HQ. Perhaps a more physical remonstration with Tac-Int would serve as a better explanation. Perhaps he'd save some machine gun ammo for the purpose.

Morale Modifiers

Infantry Units Class	Base Morale	Break Points (non-jump)	Break Points (jump)
Green Infantry	8+	23,17,12,6	—
Regular Infantry	6+	21,14,7	15,10,5
Veteran Infantry	5+	19,12,5	14,9,4
Elite Infantry	4+	17,10,4	13,7

Modifiers:

Compact Formation	+0	Facing a BattleMech	+0
Normal Formation	+0	Facing an Assault 'Mech	+1
Dispersed Formation	+1	Facing Multiple 'Mechs	+2
In Open	+2	Facing a Vehicle	-1
In Rough/Light and		Facing Multiple Vehicles	+0
Heavy Woods/Rubble	+0	'Mech doing physical attack	+1
In Building/		Facing Flamers or Infernos	+1
Prepared Position	-1	Surrounded	+1
Rallying by Commander	+2	Facing Elementals	+1

Random Inclinations for NPCs

for MechWarrior II and BattleTech

BattleTechnology sometimes receives suggestions from the preparedness groups who play the simulator games of BattleTech aand Mechwarrior, suggestions to make the games more accurate, more true-to-life. These rules may be included in your campaign as they are written, used in whole or in part, or modified as appropriate to your campaign. These house rules come to us from reader Drew South, based in Hamilton, New Zealand on the original planet of Terra.

Occasionally there comes a time when a referee for MechWarrior or BattleTech wonders what a non-player character would do when ordered to charge that Hunchback when the NPC is in a light 'Mech, while the players stand off and shoot the Hunchback. While this is not a problem when every 'Mech in the unit is run by a player, in a large campaign there is bound to be a NPC MechWarrior or two. The following is a rough collection of guidelines to determine characteristics of those anonymous people who the players will doubtlessly attempt to order around.

There are three characteristics, which can be either chosen by the referee or randomly rolled.

Courage: A rough indication of how brave the individual is.

Care: A measure of how careful the individual is, and the degrees to which he or she takes notice of surrounding.

Aggression: How capable the NPC is of violence in the course of carrying out duty.

The die roll is on 2D6, with modifiers added to the number rolled. In the event of rolling a natural 2, roll a second time. If the second roll, including modifiers, totals 5 or less, then use the 2* result. If the second roll totals 6 or greater, use the 2-4 category.

Courage

Die Roll	Result
2*	Yellow
2-4	Chicken
5-6	Cautious
7-0	Brave/Bold
10-11	True Grit
12	Gung Ho
13+	Suicidally Brave

Modifiers:		
	Kuritan	+1
	Fanatic	+1
	Elite	+/-1

(modify in thier favor as applicable)

Care

Die Roll	Result
2*	Incompetent
2-5	Careless/Clumsy
6-8	Careful/Standard
9-10	Very Careful
11-12	Extremely Careful
13+	Paranoid

Modifiers:		
	Veteran	+1
	Elite	+2
	Gung Ho	-1
	Suicidally Brave	-2

Aggression

Die Roll	Result
2*	A Saint
2-4	Low/Soft
5-7	Average/Ruthless
8-9	Mean/Brutal
10-11	Remorseless/Vicious
12+	Psychotic

Modifiers:		
	Kuritan	+1
	Liao	+1
	Fanatic	+1

Leadership
or, just hold that Marauder back for a while, will you?

When a player gives NPCs an order, if the referee thinks it appropriate, he may have the player make a leadership roll. Piloting and gunnery aren't the only skills of use on the battlefield!

Modifiers to Target Number	Modifier
On Edge of Combat Loss Grouping	+1
Orders Opposite to Inclination	+1
Orders 180° Contrary to Inclination	+2
Considers Order really Stupid	+1 to +2
Generally bad day	+1
Very bad day	+2
Strongly friendly to leader	-1
Fanatically devoted to leader	-2
Previously prepared position/ambush	-1
Disobeying would endanger buddies	-1
Everything so far has gone right (confidence in leader)	-1

Leadership Roll Results

Margin of Success Roll: (for MechWarrior II)	Result	Leadership Roll Made by: For MechWarrrior I and BattleTech)
4+	Total obedience, -2 to target number for all following orders until a failure occurs	5+
2-3	Follows Order	3-4
0-1	Follows Order, keeps own safety in mind	1-2
-1	Supports in own style	0
-2 to -3	"Brzzt, brzzt, we seem to be having comm problems" (+1 to target numbers until a success is rolled)	-1 to -2
-4 to -5	Out of control do their own thing (+2 to leadership target numbers until a success is rolled)	-3 or less
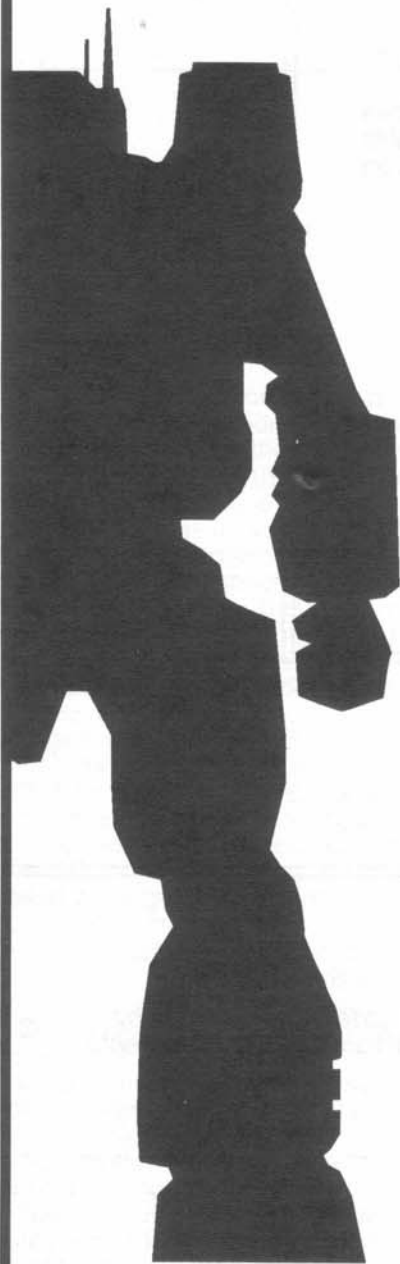
WHAT NOW, MECHWARRIOR?

ANALYSIS OF BATTLEFIELD

TACTICS AND STRATAGY.

New Command

Lesson: Tactics, and the Tao of Tact

Stated Objectives

"What Now, MechWarrior? is a wargame prepared as a set of training exercises by order of Archon Melissa Steiner Davion as part of an ongoing effort to merge the military doctrines of the former Federated Suns with those of the Lyran Commonwealth. The Archon has requested that *BattleTechnology* reprint selected scenarios from ever-expanding lists of cases so that other allies in the fight against the Clans may benefit from the experiences of the past. The scenarios presented are versions of historical battles along with the decisions of the unit commanders. The scenarios are intended to be used to prompt discussions. Each of the participants offers their recommended actions at each of the decision points, then the group discusses the relative strengths and weaknesses of the offered solutions. In *BattleTechnology's* test of the workability of this method, we discovered that such discussion are apt to become quite heated, so we recommended that they be conducted in a relaxed, informal atmosphere conducive to the free exchange of opinions. (We also recommend that qualified medical staff be located nearby.)

It is worth noting that there are no 'right ' or 'wrong' answers to the problems presented. The historical information simply shows how one commander handled the situation problem. Someone may well come up with a better solution. The information contained within these scenarios is not classified or considered militarily sensitive.

BattleTechnology magazine wishes to thank Captain Roquan of the New Avalon Military Information Center for his help in providing the information presented in this article. Copies of standard simulator programs are available for 100 C-bills from your BattleTechnology software distributor. Please include the scenario name and programming language you want when ordering.

You are a Major in the service of a Successor State. You have been reassigned to a guard unit on a periphery world that is often beset by bandit raids and, less frequently, by raids from a neighboring House. While in transit, you review the planetary data.

The place you are going has a gravity of 98% earth-normal and a breathable, if somewhat dry, atmosphere. The planet is a major food producer, despite the arid climate, and utilizes irrigation water produced by a massive desalinization plant north of the capital city. An old-tech fusion reactor on an island west of the desalinization plant produces most of the planet's electricity. Addtionally, there is a mining installation northeast of the city in a mountain range. Trace metals used in the production of semiconductors are mined from the mountains and extracted at the mining center. Three food collection centers are also located near the capital city. (See the table for approximate distances to each site.)

Contemplating the problems of guarding multiple sites, you turn to the listing of combat resources. The planetary garrison consists of four veteran BattleMech lances; two scout, a fire, and an assault. All the BattleMechs are based in the capital city. Each of the cities has a company sized unit of infantry with light armor and artillery. No aerospace units are currently on-planet, but there are four wings of atmospheric fighter aircraft based at the starport. All of the other installation have only light security personnel.

Your ship grounds on the planet at 1930, local time, and you are met by the garrison's executive officer. The XO seems somewhat distracted as he drives you to your HQ. When you see your office, you learn why.

The last CO was a less than exacting record keeper who left things in a state of disarray. Your office is awash in a sea of papers that have probably never seen the interior of a file cabinet. Interspersed with the mounds of paper are data disks, numerous magazines, and coffee cups now filled with new life forms. You're sure that somewhere there is a desk under all that. The XO mumbles an apology and says that the unit is ready for a general inspection and that the officers have arranged a welcome party and mixer. What now, MechWarrior?

(Recommended discussion items: General approaches to personnel when taking over an existing command, priorities in data retrieval, possible problems in stepping over existing Chain-of-Command personnel.)

Historical: The CO postponed the inspection until 0830 two days in the future and sent his apologies to the officers of the mess. He and the XO spent all night sorting the stacks of papers to find data on unit fighting strength as well as historical records of all past raids.

You suppress the desire to hit the office with an inferno rocket and start from scratch. Instead, you and the XO spend the night drinking bad coffee and sorting through the wreckage left by the last CO. You discover that despite the bad impression given by the offices, all the fighting units seem to be up to strength and combat ready.

The historical information paints and interesting picture. The bandits come about twice a year, and seldom arrive with more than a lance or two of substandard 'Mechs. Food reserves are regularly hit; the mining center is hit less frequently. The urban areas are generally avoided (presumably because the bandits lack expertise in close 'Mech-to-'Mech combat). The starport, power plant, and water purification facilities are infrequently targeted. The last CO's doctrine was to keep his units in the capitol city near the starport until the bandits arrived. Once the attacker committed to an objective, he would commit his forces to drive away the attacker. Accounts of past battles show the bandits generally withdrawing before significant combat occurred. However, some looting normally occurred before the units arrived. The lack of heavy air transport (ie, DropShips) prevents a rapid response to outlying areas, hindering troop deployment.

As dawn breaks, you sit back to consider your predecessor's strategy. Perhaps you can do better.

(Recommended discussion items: Relative importance of the objectives. Bandit objectives and how the objective affects their fighting style. The problems of long term troop deployment with respect to local populations and troop morale.)

Historical: The commander considered setting a rotation 'Mech lances between possible bandit objectives, but decided to hold off making any decisions until after he had interviewed the Battle Group leaders.

Mulling over possibilities, you prepare to leave your much-cleaner office. The emergency com-link shrills just as you reach the door You race back and find tactical on line. They report that four DropShips are burning towards the planet. They will hit dirtside in five hours. As best they can tell, the JumpShip came in while the planetary moons disrupted observation of the zenith Jump Point. That, coupled with heavy solar flare activity, have given the attackers the element of surprise. Looks like you are about to test your new command. What now, MechWarrior?

(Recommended discussion items: Probable targets for the bandits. Ways to improve the off-planet sensors. Problems in directing unfamiliar troops. Minimizing collateral damage while on the defense.)

Historical: The commander ordered a civilian curfew starting in two hours and alerted the civil defense authorities. He put all units on alert and considered his options. He decided that the space port and the capital city were unlikely targets. Since the mining center had been hit within the year, he decided that it too was an unlikely target. He decided to assume that food was the probable objective although he had to cover the power and water plants as well. He readied all air wings to scramble after the DropShips when they entered the atmosphere. He sent the assault and one recon lance north to wait near the northern food repository, and had sea transport wait at the coast should the power plant prove to be the objective. The fire lance was sent towards the southern food repository, and the other recon lance toward the eastern food repository. He then sat back to wait.

Wondering if you've chosen correctly, you wait for the DropShips to arrive. Reports trickle in: your units have reached their objectives; the civil defense forces are out enforcing the curfew; the mining center is shutting down. On your computer screen, you watch the incoming DropShips vectoring towards you. Far too soon, they enter orbit. One of the incoming ships starts in and the computer projects it will land northwest of you, either at the mining center or the food collection center. The other three remain in orbit. What

now, MechWarrior?

(Recommended discussion items: Problems in shifting troops during an action. Possibilities of a feint. The bandit objectives in this sort of raid.)

Historical: The commander decided that the lone ship was a feint to draw off his troops from the real objective. He ordered the air wings to intercept the invader once it hit ground and report back. All other units remained at their assigned positions.

Your fighters scramble towards the incoming ship. They report that it isn't decelerating though drag chutes are controlling its descent. To you, it looks like a decoy. Moments before the first ship lands, the other three start down from orbit. Computer projections predict a northern orbit. What now, MechWarrior?

(Recommended discussion items: Problems in shifting troops during an action. Possibilities of a feint. The bandit objectives in this sort of raid.)

Historical: The commander ordered all units not on the northern location to move north at full speed. Still assuming that the northern food stockpile was the target, he readied the two lances of 'Mechs for combat, alerting them of the projected landing site. He ordered the air wings not to engage the DropShips but to assault any land troops in conjunction with a ground-unit attack.

The single ship impacts and observers report it was a decoy, a heat resistant shell designed to look like an Overlord. All of your combat units are converging on the northen sites, though by your calculations, only the two 'Mech lances in place and the air support will be the only units able to engage.

Reconnaissance reports two Leopard Class DropShips and one Union class. At least three BattleMech lances are on the ground though no air support has been observed. Two lances are heading towards the Water purification plant and one is heading north, presumably towards the food reserves. You expect at least one other lance to be present, most likely to guard the ships. Your two lances of BattleMechs are between the raiders and the water plant and your air support can hit at your discretion. What now, MechWarrior?

Recommended discussion items: Defense of multiple objectives. Possible effects of reserves, both bandit and your own. Orders of engagement for the combat units. Estimated makeup and charter of the opposing troops.

Historical: The commander ordered the two BattleMech lances to engage the enemy in route to the water plant with air support to arrive once the battle started. Five minutes after that battle began, the scout lance was to disengage and proceed to engage the single lance heading for the granaries, calling on air support as needed. The assault lance was to assure no enemy units reached the water plant,

then to proceed to engage the DropShips if possible. All reinforcements were to proceed towards the DropShips.

You have ordered your troops in the above listed configuration and wait in your command center for battle reports. The first reports come in. Your assault lance and recon lance encounter the enemy approximately two kilometers from the water purification plant. The attacking units are ten light to medium weight 'Mechs, apparently bandits. With aircraft support, your units rip into the enemy 'Mechs. After a few minutes of battle, three of the raiders are down and the rest seem to be in full retreat. None of your 'Mechs have received serious damage, though two air craft have been shot down. The raiders which were heading for the food stockpiles are still unaccounted for. What now, MechWarrior?

Recommended discussion items: Pursuit of a fleeing enemy. Possibilities of a trap. The unknown force to the north, probable makeup and objectives. Overall strategy.

Historical: The commander ordered his air units and recon lance to swing wide and intercept the northern raiders while the assault lance pursued the retreating force toward the DropShips. The recon lance encountered a force of six 'Mechs returning from a brief raid of the granaries and fought a short, hard action, disabling one enemy 'Mech and losing one of their own 'Mechs and three more air craft. The assault lance destroyed two of the retreating 'Mechs and was forced to stand off from the DropShip guns and defending forces (three more 'Mechs and a company of light infantry). When the northern raiders reached the ship, the bandits immediately retreated off-planet. Damage to the granaries was rated as slight.

Distance to Possible Attack Sites

Site	Distance from Capital in Kilometers
Space Port	2.0 by road
Fusion Reactor	24.0 by sea
Water Purification Plant	20.3 by road
Mining Center	46.2 by road
Southern City	22.1 by road
Northern Granaries	21.0 by road
Western Granaries	28.4 by road
Southern Granaries	10.2 by road
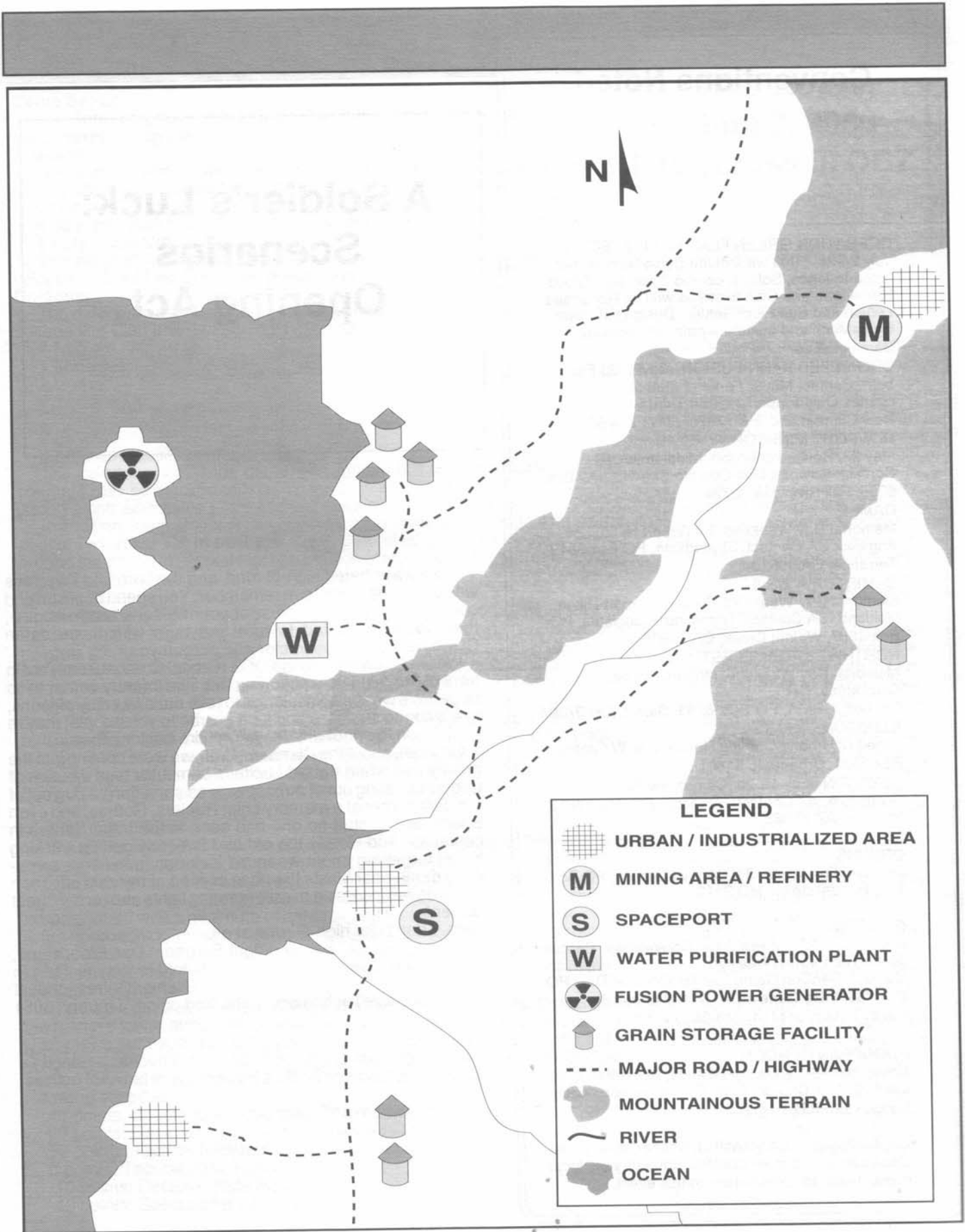
LEGEND

▦ URBAN / INDUSTRIALIZED AREA

Ⓜ MINING AREA / REFINERY

Ⓢ SPACEPORT

W WATER PURIFICATION PLANT

☢ FUSION POWER GENERATOR

🏠 GRAIN STORAGE FACILITY

- - - MAJOR ROAD / HIGHWAY

MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN

RIVER

OCEAN

Conventions Noted

A Soldier's Luck: Scenarios Opening Act

The Run In

I've always hated high-G runs, and the burn into Twycross was one of the worst I can remember. You spend hours on end being crushed by the thrust of your fighter's fusion engine, then you're expected to turn and burn with those damn Clanners that can outvector and outgun you.

We were coming into the OCZ (Orbital Combat Zone) out in front of the main fleet escorting this little infantry carrier to its target. We were also assigned to take out a few clay pigeons, that's comm satellites and stuff in orbit to you people; they're a lot of fun to shoot and they don't fire back neither...

Oh yeah, about the Clanners. Well, we were coming into the gravity well when my old Lucifer's computer tags a bunch of targets boosting out of atmosphere as something it dug out of the dark corner of a memory chip: Rapiers, Gothas, and even Spads, all old stuff no one had seen in the Inner Sphere in centuries. And just as the old bird is barely getting tracking locks, forgetting about weapons lock-ons, mind you; something damn near blasts the nose section of my ship off! Then I get a dozen incoming missile warning lights all over my threat screen!

No, I don't like high-G runs at all.

Flight Sergeant Dan Bloodstone,
as told to Wayne Tse-Lin
Senior Correspondent
of BattleTechnology's Tharkad office, January, 3051

Game Set-up
The AeroTech mapboard is used. The moon depicted and its gravitational effect hexes are ignored.

Attacker
The attacker represents the first strike unit of the AFFC's invasion air group:
6 Lucifers (2nd Squadron, 10th Lyran Guards)
2 Corsairs (A Flight, 3rd Squadron, 9th Federated Commonwealth)
4 Sparrow Hawks (B & C Flights, 3rd Squad, 9th Federated Commonwealth)
1 Fury Class DropShip

The attacker sets up forces along the right edge of the mapsheet, starting velocity of 3. All Fed Com skills are assumed to be Piloting:3, Gunnery: 3.

Defender
The defenders are two stars of old Star-League aerospace fighters from the second line Clan unit garrisoning Twycross:
2 Rapiers
1 Ironsides
2 Gothas
1 Tomahawk
2 Spads
2 Seydlitz
4 artificial satellite counters

The defender begins the game with fighters still at high altitude, thus the counters may be stacked only within the high altitude hexes of the map. The Jade Falcon aerospace pilots all have skills of Piloting: 2, Gunnery: 3.

In addition, there are four Clan surveillance/communication satellites in orbit above Twycross. For simplicity's sake, they should just be spaced evenly around the planet in the first hex ring outside of high altitude. Each satellite can take 15 points of damage before being destroyed.

Special Rules
Once the F-C fighters have completed their objectives, they may move off the same map edge they began on. Also, as long as it has any Structural Integrity points remaining, any craft which exits the correct edge is treated as having escaped (it was later recovered by a friendly troopship). Craft that leave the board in any other direction are treated as a kill for the defender's side.

While the fighters the Clan player is using are ancient designs, they have been fitted with modern weapons. To reflect this, the player should feel free to refit his fighters with Clan weapons similar to that which is replaced (ie, trading a large laser for an extended range weapon with a coaxial medium laser as well). As long as the new configuration weighs the same as the old weapons carried, anything is possible.

Victory Conditions
The attacker has two missions to accomplish in this scenario. The first, and primary, mission is to escort the Fury safely to Twycross' atmosphere. The second is to eliminate the satellites so as to hamper enemy efforts at coordinating their defenses and intelligence gathering. Both of these objectives must be accomplished with a minimum of damage and losses; they then have to return to the approaching invasion fleet to rearm and refuel for the main landings. The Jade Falcons know that they can not prevent the destruction of their spy satellites, but they may be able to disrupt the invasion by destroying a disproportionate number of enemy craft.

The Fed Com player receives 30 victory points for getting the DropShip to the planet's lower atmosphere, and 5 points for each satellite destroyed. The Clan player subtracts 10 victory points from the other player's total for each F-C fighter destroyed, or if the DropShip is shot down. (See the Special Rules section for what is considered a kill.) The victor is determined according to the following schedule:

40 points: Spectacular Federated Commonwealth victory
20 points: Decisive Federated Commonwealth victory
10 points: Tactical Federated Commonwealth victory
0 points: Tactical Jade Falcon victory
-10 points: Decisive Jade Falcon victory
-40 points: Spectacular Jade Falcon victory

In the first combat of the second battle for Twycross, two squadrons of Federated Commonwealth Aerospace fighters specially equipped with long range reaction mass drop tanks escorted a DropShip carrying accompany of Pathfinder infantry for insertion into Twycross ahead of the main body of the invasion force. This goal was quite easily accomplished given that the Jade Falcon defenders all but ignored the ship, concentrating their efforts on dueling with the escorting fighters. The escorts ran into trouble, however, as they slung around the planet. The F-C pilots had been given specific orders to avoid dog-fighting with the enemy. The Jade Falcons' superior technology would extract a heavy toll on craft that would be needed for the main invasion. Try as they might, the fighter pilots could not avoid the Clan fighters; evasion only seemed to provoke them further.

After losing a number of fighters, the squadron commander ordered his heavy fighter into mutual defence formation to protect each other, particularly the lightly armored Sparrow Hawks. While this slowed the attackers withdrawal from the area, it allowed them to reduce the damage inflicted upon their craft and disable a few of the Clan fighters in the balance.

While Federated Commonwealth losses were higher than expected, they were not serious enough to threaten the outcome of the invasion.

King of the Hill

Game Set Up

Three BattleTroops or ClanTroops mapsheets should be laid out with their long sides touching. It is advised that fairly clear maps be used as all the printed terrain and features are ignored. Instead, draw out an oval that is 9 north-south dots long, and 10 east-west dots wide. This represents the hilltop where the F-C platoon is dug in. At the next set of dots around that oval, draw another two contour lines. Clear plastic film can be used to avoid permanently marking the paper map.

Attacker

The attackers are a star of second line Jade Falcon Elementals:

Command Point (5 Elementals)
Point leader: Star Commander Robert
Leadership skill rating: 3 Experience level: Veteran
Equipment: Small laser, SMG, no SRMs

Points 2 thru 5 (5 Elementals each)
Leadership skill rating: 2, Experience level: Regular
Equipment: Small laser, SMG (points 2&3), MG (point 4), Flamer (point 5) no Elementals are carrying SRM packs

The Attacker may begin the battle anywhere on the North edge of the maps.

Defender

The defenders are Charlie platoon, A Company, 1022th Pathfinder Battalion and one BattleMech from the 10th Lyran Guards:

First Squad (7 men)
Squad Leader: Leftenant Andrea Fuller
Leadership Skill Rating: 3, Experience level: Elite
Equipment: 4 laser rifles, 1 blazer rifle, 1 auto grenade launcher, 4 LAWs, 3 laser pistols, 2 Vibroblades

Second and Third Squads (7 men each)
Leadership Skill Rating: 3, Experience level: Veteran
Equipment for Each Squad: 2 laser rifles, 2 blazer rifles, 2 autogrenade launcers, 1 heavy SRM launder, 4 LAWs

Fourth Squad (7 men)
Leadership skill rating: 3, Experience level: Veteran
Equipment: 2 M-PPCs, 3 laser rifles, 1 blazer rifle, 1 auto grenade launcher, 3 LAWs, 2 laser pistols, 2 vibroblades

MechWarrior Gary Miller, *Griffin* Piloting: 2, Gunnery: 3

All defenders are equipped with flak vests. The squads are set up within the top contour line of the hill. See the Special Rules section for the Griffin's entry, and how the hilltop fortifications modify combat.

Victory Conditions

N
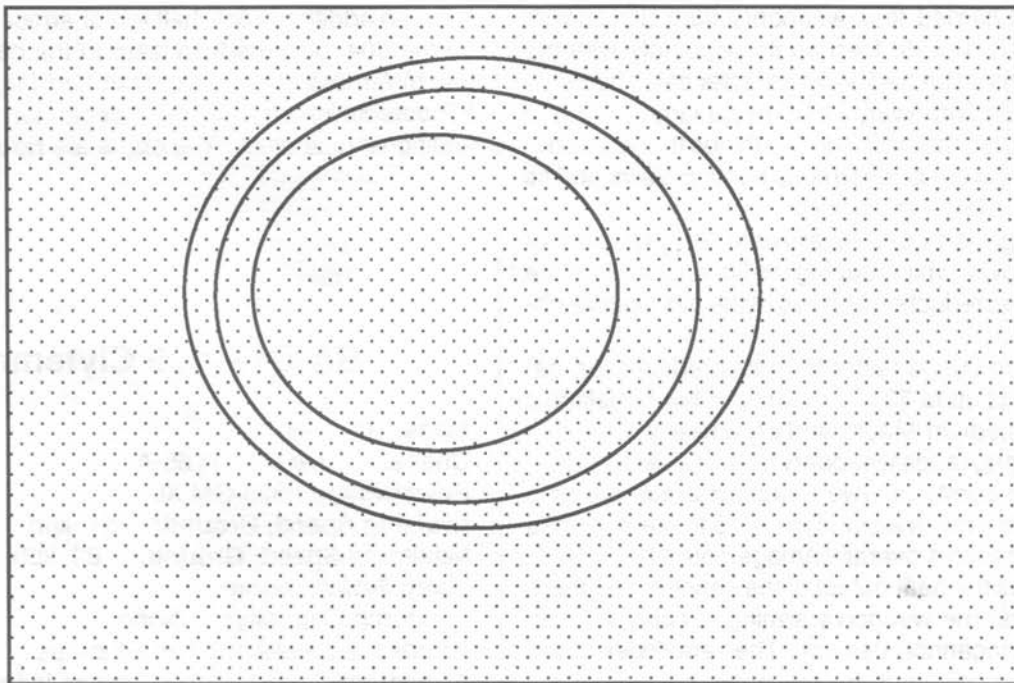
The attacker was sent over the Wind Break Mountains to investigate a possible enemy landing, and to eliminate any landed troops before any reinforcements can arrive. The Jade Falcon player gets 5 victory points for each Elemental destroyed and 5 victory points for each soldier alive (conscious or unconscious) when the players agree to end the game.

Special Rules
Historically the Clan Elemental commander won the bid to attack the hill with his and one other Point. After they discovered that the enemy force on the hill was stronger than expected, the rest of the Star attacked the position. Players can play the scenario this way, or use an alternate method to determine the winning bid. Roll 1D6 (reroll 6s) to see how many Points take part in the first charge.

To determine when the Lyran Guard 'Mech unit will arrive in the valley, start with a target number of 0 for turn 1, add one to the total for each turn of the game. Then roll 2D6 at the beginning of the turn to see if the reinforcements arrive. Thus it will be impossible for the 'Mech to arrive on the first or second turn (to-hit number of 0 and 1). Once the roll is successful, the game can be ended there, or with the Griffin placed anywhere on the board at the Defender's discretion, the battle can continue until one side is completely destroyed.

The platoon had plenty of time to dig hilltop fortifications before the Clan Elementals arrived. To reflect this, all of the dots within the top contour line are treated as partial cover, and any soldier that spends no MP for movement that turn automatically gets the prone bonus. The defender also has two bunkers to place anywhere on the top of the hill.

CTP-005 Clytemnestra

Overview: The Clytemnestra has operated on the Solaris gaming circuit for forty years. In its original configuration it was slower and carried less weaponry than the current version, the SA-CTP-005. Despite its popularity with the public, the Clytemnestra had only lackluster sales because of its rather limited firepower; it had only a large laser and an inadequate autocannon 5. The two things that worked in the design's favor were its enormous fighting claws and its ability to dissipate large amounts of heat.

The new design is hoped to alleviate the problems of inadequate firepower while keeping the fighting ability of the claws and the heat reduction abilities of the old 'Double-oh-Four'.

Capabilities: The 005 is faster than its predecessor, capable of moving at up to 83 kilometers per hour, making it as fast as many medium 'Mechs and a few heavy ones. The Clytemnestra's long range weaponry is the Kallon Ultra AC/5 which can fire bursts of two standard armor piercing rounds in the time it takes a standard AC/5 to fire one. This increases the weapon's overall damage potential by 50%, but it also doubles the heat output of the cannon, and there is the chance that the weapon's arming circuitry will fail, rendering the autocannon useless. The remainder of the Clytemnestra's weaponry is for the gritty, close-quarters fighting of the arena. The 'Mech mounts the reliable Holly SRM-6, on its right torso, but in a tuba-like mount that compresses the launch tubes closer together. While the weapon itself is not prone to frequent breakdowns, the start up of the system may make repairs that much more difficult. Martell has recently introduced a new line of pulse lasers to the Inner Sphere, and Solaris Arms is its first customer to incorporate the company's flagship pulse laser. The Martell large laser is mounted in a special housing on the right arm, clearing the huge claw.

The thing about the Clytemnestra that draws the crowds to its matches is its huge, tri-fingered claws, capable of slashing away close to a ton of armor in a single swipe. More than one overconfident MechWarrior has met his doom when his assault 'Mech was ripped to shreds by a Clytemnestra.

Variants: The only other version that is produced by Solaris Arms is the 004, and it is being phased out. The 004 has a standard weight 260 Fusion power plan, regular armor, and seventeen regular heat sinks. It also has a large laser, anautocannon-5, and the BattleClaws. Owners may opt to have an additional one half ton of armor and a small laser on the 004, or a medium laser in the center torso. Some MechWarriors replace the standard large laser with and ER-version or replace the autocannon with a PPC and additional heat sinks. The claws are rarely removed.

SA-CTP-005 Clytemnestra

Mass: 65 tons
Chassis: Solaris Arms 65 A
Power Plant: 325 GM XL
Cruising Speed, Ground: 51 kph
Maximum Speed, Ground: 83 kph
Jump Jets: None
   Jump Capacity: None
Armor: Solaris Arms Ferro-Fibrous
Armament: 1 Kallon Weapons Industries Ultra AC/5
                  1 Holly SRM-6
                  1 Martell Large Pulse Laser
                  2 Solaris Arms Mk 4 BattleClaws
Manufacturer: Solaris Arms
   Primary Factory: Solaris VII
Communications System: GM Delco Intertalk 25 with Voice/DAata Encoder/Decoder
Targeting and Tracking System: SA-05TT

Type: AS-CTP-005   Clytemnestra
Tonnage: 65.0

Equipment		Mass
Internal Structure:		6.5
Engine:	325 XL	11.75
Walking MP:	5	
Running MP:	8	
Jumping MP:	0	
Heat Sinks:	11(22)	1.0
Gyro:		3.0
Cockpit:		3.0
Armor Factor:	170	9.5

	Internal Structure	Armor Value
Head	3	9
Center Torso	18	29
Center Torso (rear)		6
Right/Left Torso	14	20
Right/Left Torso (rear)		6
Right/Left Arm	10	16
Right/Left Leg	14	21

Weapons and Ammo	Loc.	CS	Mass
Ultra AC/5	LT	5	9.0
Ammo (AC/5)	LT	1	1.0
SRM-6	RT	2	3.0
Ammo (SRM)	RT	1	1.0
Large Pulse Laser	RA	2	7.0
Claw*	LA	4	4.0
Claw*	RA	4	4.0

* Claws do the same damage as a club. Claws replace a 'Mech's hand actuators and weight one ton for every fifteen tons the Battlemech weighs. Claws occupy one critical hit space for every ton they weigh. (See Solaris VII boxed set)

BattleField Salvage

Frankenstein's Monster

Editorial Note: These events took place during the 3039 War. The mercenary unit involved has given permission for the interview to be used, but asks that they not be identified. So many of our Battlefield Salvage submissions discuss ideal 'Mechs formed from salvage. 'Frankie' is an example of what many MechWarriors get; the best that can be assembled under the circumstances. The fact that she wound up with a usable 'Mech shows as much credit to the MechWarrior as to the Tech.

After the patrol was completed, the recon lance returned to the laager site. First to arrive was a battleworn Locust-E closely followed by a pair of brand new Wasps. Last to come in was the recon lance commander's 'Mech. Like the Locust, the commander's 'Mech showed the scars of battle on its hide. However, while the other three 'Mechs of the lance were essentially identical to their factory configuration, the commander's 'Mech appeared to have been put together including the parts from at least three different types of 'Mechs. The torso and legs were from a Wasp, but the right arm appeared to be from a Stinger and the 'Mech's head and left arm were from a Commando. In addition, the torso had been modified with additional storage space while the head and torso had been fitted with supplemental armor.

After the last 'Mech ground to a halt, its pilot climbed down and walked to the operations center carrying her neurohelmet.

She gave her company commander a report on enemy activity in the area. "No indications of any Snakes in our sector, but I have a feeling that Theodore has got some of his troops out there somewhere."

After the company commander left the area, I asked the lance commander about her 'Mech.

"Your 'Mech has got to be one of the most unusual machines that I have ever seen. How did you ever end up with such a unique 'Mech?"

"Well, about eight months ago, I was piloting a standard Wasp in another company in the employ of the Free Worlds League on the Lyran border during the final battles of the Fourth Succession War. Our unit was caught in the middle of a Lyran attack. My lance was finally cornered by a Lyran fire lance, fighting for our lives. My wingman's Stinger suffered a catastrophic explosion which left his 'Mech's right arm as the only salvageable part remaining. One after another, 'Mechs on both sides were either blown up or bashed into pieces. My 'Mech had suffered extremely, heavy damage to both arms and its head while I myself was wounded by shrapnel.

Finally, there were only two 'Mechs remaining; mine and a heavily damaged Lyran Commando. His 'Mech had already run out of ammunition for its chest-mounted SRM-6 and much of the armor on its legs and right torso had been blown away. All I had left was my SRM-2 which I fired repeatedly as the Commando limped towards me.

Luckily, I was able to hit the Commando's remaining missile storage. While he only had one or two salvos remaining, the resulting explosion destroyed the Commando's right arm and torso while knocking the 'Mech down on its back where it lay motionless.

I dismounted my 'Mech and ran toward the Commando. I then pried open the pilot's hatch and looked in. The MechWarrior was still in his command chair, but with his head twisted in an unnatural angle. Apparently, his neck was broken when his 'Mech fell.

I went back to my 'Mech and contacted my lance's chief Tech. He came by with a 'Mech transporter which he loaded up with all of the salvageable 'Mech parts including the remains of the Commando. When we were able to link back up with the unit repair facility, we were shocked to find out that a Lyran air strike had destroyed all of the parts needed to repair the damage to my Wasp. Even from the battlefield salvage, there were no Wasp parts available, due to the destructive ferocity of the battle.

Fortunately, my Tech was very good at modifying parts from one type of 'Mech for use in another model. He had worked for several years in TekTeam, which is a sort of roving 'Mech repair company for hire. TekTeam is headquartered in a modified Mule class DropShip which is used as a mobile 'Mech repair facility.

He attached the right arm from my unfortunate lancemate's Stinger to my 'Mech along with the left arm from the Commando that I fought against. He also utilized the Commando's head assembly because my Wasp's head was literally a junk pile.

My Wasp's power plant was simply not powerful enough to move my 'Mech at its previous speed with its increased mass. My Tech came up with a unique solution. He modified the right and center torso of my Wasp to accept the fusion power plant from the Commando and also to provide about one-half ton of machine gun ammunition for the right arm machine gun. My Tech also added additional armor to my 'Mech's head and torso for a total of four tons of armor plating.

Overall, my 'Mech went from 20 tons to 25 tons and ended up with an armament of two medium lasers, an SRM-2 launcher, and single machine gun. Much to my delight, my 'Mech was just as mobile as before.

Of the dozen 'Mechs of the company, only my Wasp and the Locust you saw earlier survived. The few survivors found passage off world. We made our way to Galatea where we signed on with another mercenary company.

Ironically, our new unit signed a contract with the Lyran Commonwealth.

Incidentally, prior to my 'Mech becoming a sort of mix and match patchwork, I called it 'Blood Sucker'. Afterward, I referred to it as 'Frankie', which is short for 'Frankenstein's Monster'. You see, I've always been fond of old Terran horror stories.

Now, my lance always seems to be sent into combat in urban battlegrounds because of the unique qualities of my 'Mech. Nevertheless, I've managed to score two more kills including one on an UrbanMech at point-blank range Sometimes, I get the critical edge because it seems that my opponents didn't know what to expect from my 'Mech."

One of the Techs came running up as a siren began wailing loudly somewhere in the distance.

The Tech yelled, "Kurita 'Mechs approaching the perimeter. It looks like a company strength attack. All of them are carrying the Vegan rat on their legs."

Already, LRMs were beginning to impact around the MechWarriors as they ran towards their 'Mechs.

Within a couple of minutes, the entire recon lance was en route to engage the Kuritan forces with the remainder of the company following behind with the majority of the unit's firepower.

With the Kuritan forward units being led by both a Panther and a Jenner. 'Frankie' and the rest of her lance were going to be in for a hard time. They simply hoped they could hold on until they could get some help from the heavies.

Until then, they had a fight for their lives.

"Let's kill some Snakes!"

Mass:	25 tons
Chassis	1A Type 3 (Modified)
Power Plant:	Omni 150
Cruising Speed:	66.5 kph
Maximum Speed:	95.1 kph
Jump Jets:	Rawlings 52
Jump Capacity:	180 m
Armor:	Durallex Light

Armament:
    1 Omicron 300o Medium Laser
    1 Hesperus-EGM Medium Laser
    1 Bical SRM Twin Pack
    1 LFN Linblad Machine Gun

Manufacturer: General Mechanics, Inc (Mod)
Communications Systems: TharHes Crystal Flower RG-2
Targeting/Tracking System: Thar Hes StarShark

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The Inner Sphere has never been a stable environment for communication. BattleTechnology, as a medium for information, has always labored to report the facts as fairly and as completely as possible. In that task, the magazine's staff has been opposed by politicians seeking to control the truth, by soldiers wanting to prevent the spread of information with possible military usage, and by the disruption and violence of war itself.

Professor Donald L. Harrison and Professor John Merriken Preston, who had previously collaborated to discover a cache of de-circulated copies of BattleTechnology, have combined their efforts once again. And — again — they have been successful. This time, they have accessed a number of copies of BattleTechnology issues which were, for various reasons, not fully-circulated. These magazines are virtually unknown in some parts of the Inner Sphere.

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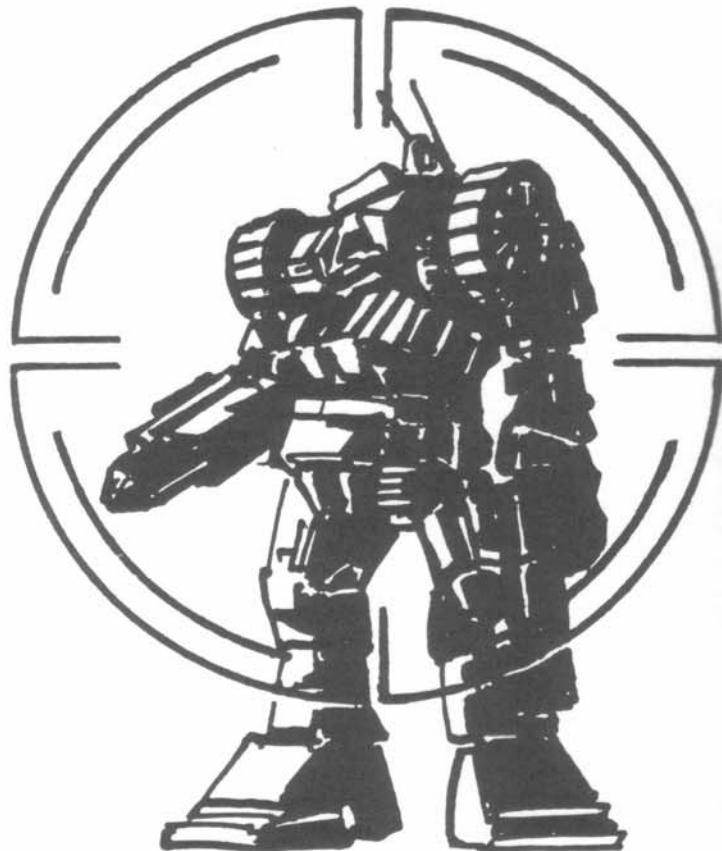
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by Aaron Froke
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by William H Keith Jr
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by Gerald Hall
A Soldier's Luck & Scenarios
by James Greeson
Clytemnestra
by Michael Taylor
Solaris Match Schedule
by Michael Gilbert
Infantry, and NPC Random Inclinations
by Drew South
All Other Writing
By Hilary Ayer

About the Cover: Nelson Snook shows just how much trouble it can be for a 'Mech to go wading through quicksand. See Optional Rules for quicksand, p 32.

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Opening Shots

You Guys Did Good

I've been rereading our editorials during the Clans Invasion, and I now feel we owe an apology to the House Regulars of The Federated Commonwealth, the Draconis Combine, and the Free Republic of Rasalhague. In our efforts to keep heart for our mercenary readers, many of whom found themselves on the frontlines, poorly paid and worse equipped, facing frontline Clans troops, I didn't give you men and women enough credit.

I do not retract one iota of what I said then about their bravery and inventiveness. I didn't say enough about you folks. It'spartly because your own military press agencies were not allowing us to see much of your work. They were afraid that if we saw just how bad things were, we'd tell the Inner Sphere and the war effort would lose the backing of the people at home. The mercs sent us what intel we could get; most of that was based on what they'd seen and done themselves. When we attempted to find out a little more than the Federated Commonwealth felt we should, we got ourselves thrown off of Sudeten, and hampered in our coverage of the retaking of Twycross. Since the truce, we've received more cooperation. We've been shown footage of Woolcott, Twycross, Trellwan, Radstadt, Tamar, and so many other fronts.

It's possible to weep with pride as well as with pain, watching this fighting. From the Tenth Lyran Guard to the First Radstadt Militia, YOU GUYS WERE SO GOOD! Again and again, you had everything you owned beaten out of you, regrouped, rethought your strategy, and went in to fight again. You saved civilians, stood off Clans troops, formed into new units when half your officers were gone, and made the Clans pay dearly for every klick they took. We might mention the Blackjack Academy Cadets, who continued fire until they were literally under the feet of the Clans' 'Mechs, the Fremen Drakon pilots who took out the II Khan's flagship by sacrificing their lives, the First Sword of Light Assault Company that challenged a Clan Galaxy to one-at-a-time 'Mech duels to prove to the Draconis Combine that its troops had not lost their spirit...and the lone Patton pilot on Bone Norman who continued his advance long after his unit had surrendered, driving on into a lance of OmniMechs until he was blown to pieces.

You served gallantly and with honor, all of you who shivered on the Clans borders, never knowing when you would be hit, knowing only that it would be a desperate battle. I raise a glass, here in the privacy of my office, to each and all of you. From a citizen of the Inner Sphere, my deepest thanks!

—— Hilary Ayer, Terra, June 15, 3053

In this issue we present an alternate way of reckoning damage to infantry in the BattleTech simulator game which shows the difficulties a commander of combined arms faces with integrating infantry. We offer a way to simulate the misery of quicksand terrain, and a couple of unusual 'Mechs. We hope you'll enjoy them.

The Count-Down: As of June 15, 3053, the Inner Sphere has thirteen years and eleven months to prepare for the next wave of the Clans Invasion. Remember that they will be learning from us during that period, though probably not as eagerly as we should be learning from them! Keep preparing! And never forget they're coming for us!
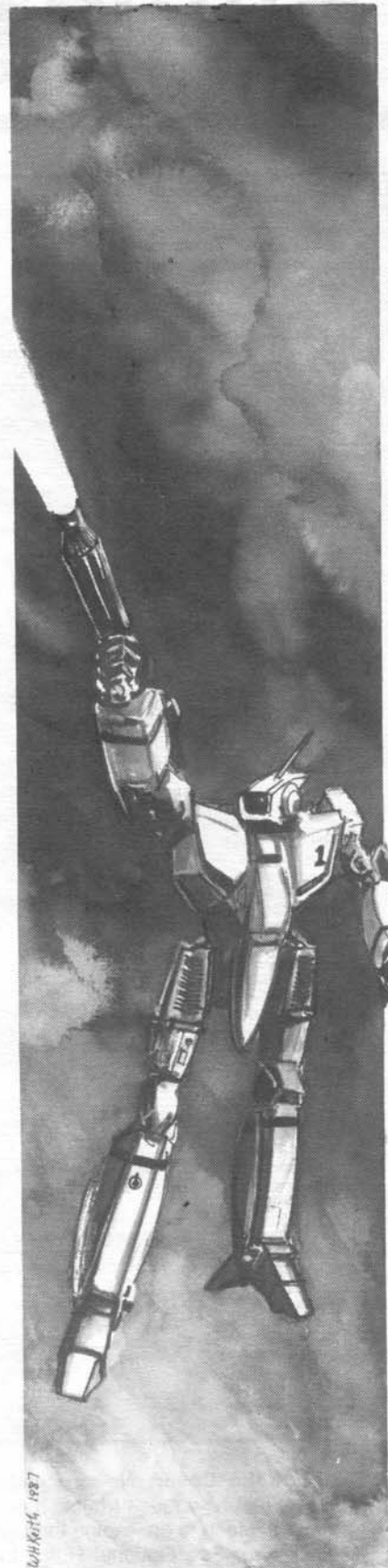
BattleTechnology News

In order to understand the events of ComStar's 'Peace Summit' this spring, we need to consider what the differences are between the two factions in what used to be ComStar, and the relationships and level of trust which each one of the Successor Houses has with each of the two factions.

ComStar Betrays Truce With Clans

May, 3052

On Clans-occupied planets across the Inner Sphere, Com Guard forces attacked the Clan garrisons at the same time as the treaty-controlled battle for Tukayyid began. In many cases, planetary militia garrisons sided with the Clans against ComStar's 'Operation Scorpion'. On Alyina, remnants of the defeated Tenth Lyran Guard came out of hiding to fight with Jade Falcon troops.

ComStar attempted an Interdict on the Federated Commonwealth, the St Ives Compact, the Capellan Confederation, and the Draconis Combine simultaneous with the strike. 'Alternate forms of communication' are cited as the reasons ComStar failed to silence the two major Houses on the Clans front. The Capellans took a simpler course; armed military intervention was resorted to as ComStar facilities on key worlds were occupied by Capellan Armed Services troops.

ComStar's business is communications, but their internal communications seem not to be working. BattleTechnology reporters were allowed to use the 'pony express' command circuit, courtesy of a very High Ranking Personage in the Davion family, to interview Precentor Martial Anastasius Focht, with his Com Guard troops on Tukayyid. When he was questioned about Operation Scorpion, Focht's famous 'cool' deserted him. He questioned our reporters closely, then abruptly dismissed them. They'd be willing to take oath in a court of law that he *hadn't known!*

Shakeup in ComStar

June, 3052

Following ComStar Primus Myndo Waterly's resignation on the grounds of 'poor health', all of the members of the First Circuit, ComStar's ruling council, were held in protective custody for a period of three weeks. During this period ComStar's new Primus, Sharilar Mori, got full control of the reins of ComStar's huge organization. Within 72 hours of Primus Mori's elevation, all HPGs within the Inner Sphere had been reac-

tivated. The Interdict was formally revoked

As of June 28, Precentors Tharkhad, Rasalhague, and New Avalon have been attending to their duties in public once again. All have spoken of their faith in Primus Mori, and in Precentor Martial Focht.

Meanwhile, several units of the ComGuard are not returning to assigned stations, but seem to be setting a course toward the Free Worlds League. Speculation is growing that Thomas Marik, formerly a ComStar Precentor, has offered asylum to the Waterly faction of ComStar.

A faction of ComStar holds that the old way, with ComStar as the instrument of Jerome Blake's vision, is their sacred duty to preserve. That faction chose to relocate. Mori and Focht chose to let them go peaceably. The 'Word of Blake' faction may well cause trouble, and armed trouble at that, in the future. If we reread these words in the future, bitterly, because a war has taken place, it would be well to consider just what havoc a ComStar system-wide war across the Terran System and all the Successor Houses would have caused. The less honorable minority factions among the Clans would have been happy to pick up the pieces. Anastasius Focht, as Precentor Martial, had a tough choice to make. In BattleTechnology's opinion, he made the best choice he could.

BattleTechnology News

ComStar Splits
'No New War' Says Mori

July 3052

Speculation was confirmed as Precentor Atreus Demona Aziz accepted Captain General Thomas Marik's invitation to establish a base for ComStar in the Principality of Gibson. A peaceful schism is occurring as HPG personnel, ComGuards, ComStar Educators, etc, packed for the long voyage into the center of House Marik territory.

"No action will be taken against our unenlightened brothers," said a spokesman for Primus Sharilar Mori. "They are acting according to their consciences, and as they were trained to believe. Some of us have managed to free our minds sufficiently to examine the evidence; these are the people who fear independent thought, preferring dogma to the pain of reexamination. They are at least being honest; we have little fear of spies remaining behind.

"At all cost, we must avoid a new war in the Inner Sphere. We have less than fifteen years now before the Clans come at us again. We cannot afford to be weakened when they do."

Kurita Limits
ComStar Agreement

Luthien, October, 3052

After three weeks of intense negotiations, ComStar and the Draconis Combine have made public a new agreement. A ten-year service contract has been signed for the maintenance of the HPG stations, Com Guard presence has been limited to one lance of 'Mechs OR equivalent in armored troops per HPG facility. This barely represents enough troops for an honor guard, not the two companies ComStar used to consider a bare minimum. A full listing of ComGuard troops is to be provided to the DCMS. ComGuard troops are committed specifically to defending the systems they occupy against any action by any Clans forces.

The Precentor Martial, Anastasius Focht, personally travelled to Luthien to take part in these negotiations.
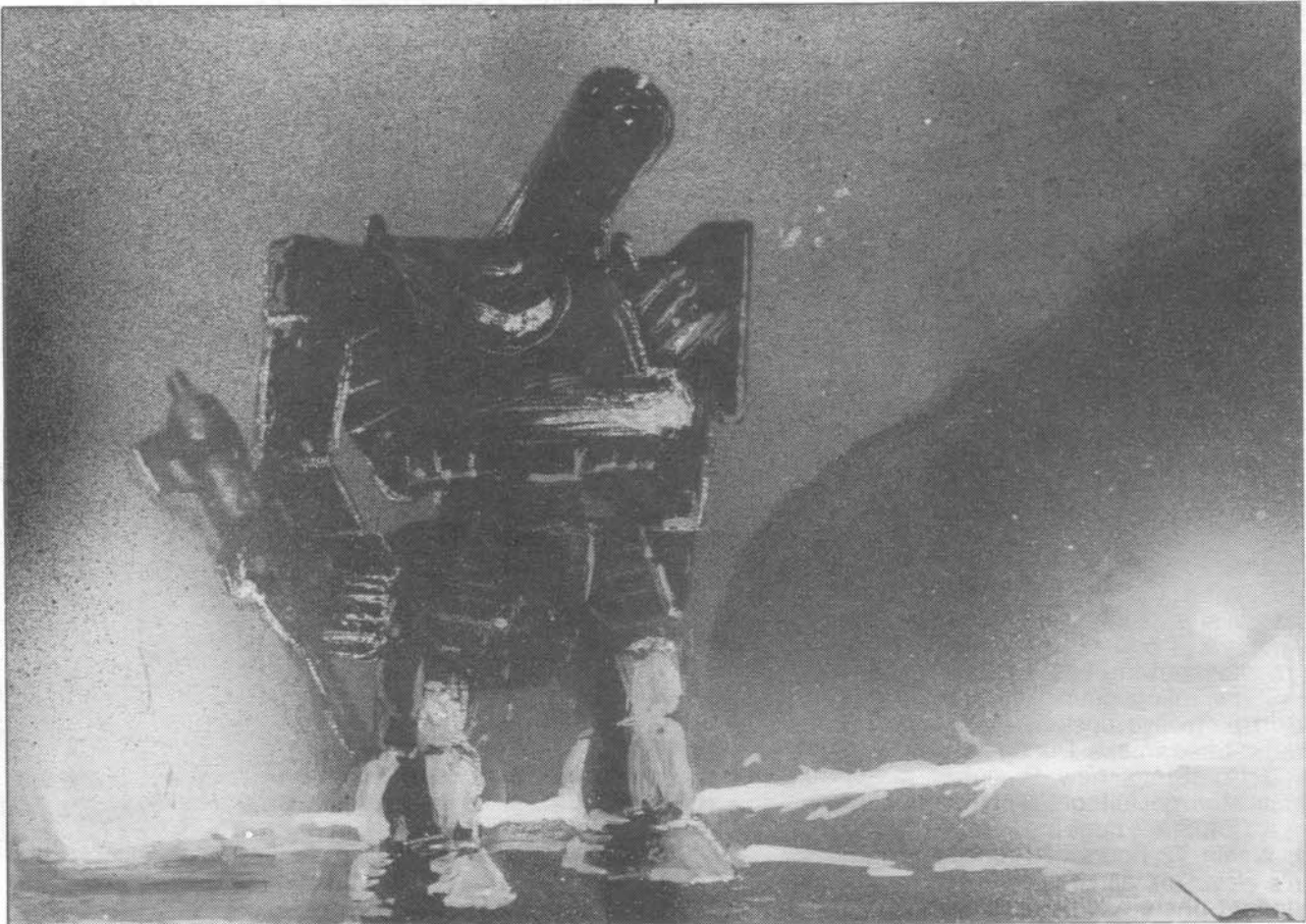
BattleTechnology News

Federated Commonwealth Signs for Fifteen Years

New Avalon, December, 3052

Press Secretary Marta Jones Y Talavera today announced that the Federated Commonwealth has signed a fifteen year contract with ComStar. Features of the contract include full troop movement disclosure and the agreement to defend the systems where HPG stations and ComGuard forces are located in case of Clans action.

The Precentor Martial, Anastasius Focht, personally travelled to New Avalon to take part in these negotiations. A similar agreement was signed with the St Ives Compact.

ComStar to Remain in Rasalhague

New Avalon, December, 3052

Com Guard troops which are losing their stations elsewhere on the Clans front are invited to the seven remaining planets of the Free Rasalhague Republic, a spokesman for Elected Prince Magnusson announced today. The new twenty year contract allows an unlimited number of Com Guards forces to build up garrisons on the Rasalhague planets of Orestes, Al Hillah, Grumium, Karbala, Ueda, Dehgolan, and Tukayyid to supplement the four regiments which remain of Rasalhague's Kungsarmee. The Com Guards will defend against any invaders, not only Clans, but any and all invading forces.

Tukayyid itself, scene of the epic battle between Com Guards and Clans forces last May, still remains abandoned by most of its civilian population.

Com Guard regiments here, as elsewhere in the Inner Sphere, have begun renaming themselves after episodes in the Battle of Tukayyid where the units distinguished themselves. This replacement of religious 'code names' is reassuring to the populace of the Rasalhague worlds. There is still a distrust of ComStar because it waited so long to enter the fight against the Clans. ComStar is in the position of being 'The devil we know' which is still better than the Clans, 'the devil we don't know'.

The Precentor Martial, Anastasius Focht, personally travelled to New Avalon to take part in these negotiations. The Elected Prince has been in New Avalon to confer with First Prince Victor Steiner Davion and Archon Melissa about mutual defense. All parties involved deny any rumors that the Federated Commonwealth or the Draconis Combine have any intentions of invading Rasalhague to secure the rest of its territory.

ComStar Seeks Accord With Capellans

Capella, February, 3053

Palace spokesman Maurice Chong Ravel today announced that the Capellan Confederation has granted a contract to ComStar, a contract which limits Com Guard presence to worlds agreed upon by both the Capellans and the Com Guard. It's odd that those worlds all border the St Ives Compact, the Federated Suns, and the Periphery States. ComStar inserted a clause limiting these troops to action against units of the Clans, with strict neutrality against troops from, say, the Inner Sphere or Periphery States.

The Precentor Martial, Anastasius Focht, personally travelled to Capella to take part in these negotiations.

Com Guard personnel captured during Operation Scorpion are still being held as 'prisoners of the state' despite protests from Primus Mori and Precentor Martial Focht. The agreement includes service of the HPG facilities on all Capellan worlds, and is only until 3056. Four years should expire at about the time Chancellor Sun Tsu Liao marries Isis Marik, heiress apparent of the Free Worlds League.

Marik Refuses to Meet with Focht

Berenson, March, 3053

Captain General Thomas Marik is the one of the Inner Sphere leaders who has refused to meet with Precentor Martial Focht as Focht attempted to use his personal prestige to convince the Successor Houses that ComStar's split did not affect them.

Low-ranking Marik diplomats held inconclusive meetings with the Precentor Martial while Thomas Marik visited Precentor Demona Aziz of the Word of Blake faction to conclude an agreement wherein the Word of Blake services the HPG facilities in the Free Worlds League. No time limit was mentioned for the agreement. The most that the Precentor Martial could win was a one-year service contract, with a provision guaranteeing withdrawal of his faction's personnel after the conclusion of that year.

Mori Invites Leaders to 'Peace Summit'

Terra, March 3053

ComStar Primus Sharilar Mori sent a priority message today inviting Inner Sphere leaders to a Peace Summit to begin at the end of this month. After suitable honorifics, the text of all these messages was the same.

"In these trying times, enemies will take advantage of any split between us. Perhaps there are disagreements; perhaps there are distrusts. Com Star has made its mistakes. ComStar has also given of its dearest and best, shed gallant blood to save you.

We deserve the right of discussion with you. We feel that you deserve the courtesy of knowing our plans. Accommodation will be provided for you and any number of staff you wish to bring."

It is rumored that ComStar intends to open their files of Inner Sphere history for the benefits of Inner Sphere leaders. It is also rumored that the dates of these files, but NOT their contents, accompanied these invitations.

The Word of Blake faction believes passionately what ComStar has always held in private; Jerome Blake was divinely inspired to make technology , and communications

technology in particular, a 'trade secret'. Blake's chosen instrument was to keep the secrets until the inevitable collapse of the Inner Sphere. At that time, ComStar was to come forward to take its appointed place as ruler. They believe that Primus Waterly was killed by Anastasius Focht, and that Primus Mori is his puppet.

The majority faction, 4/5 of ComStar as it was, believes just as passionately in the true vision of Jerome Blake. Not 'the Blessed Blake', but Jerome Blake the complex and committed man. Recent documents, especially HPG Technology Readout 102-B: Hyperpulse Principles and Applications, written by Blake during the years he was founding and consolidating ComStar, make it clear to them that Jerome Blake wanted an organization that would keep technology alive, an organization that was strong enough to ensure its own survival, but an organization which remained politically neutral.

Political theory says that an organization becomes a self-perpetuating organism, that it comes to place its own survival above the purpose for which it was created. It can come to directly violate that purpose in order to ensure its own survival, while still claiming to serve that purpose. The creation of ROM, the secret espionage wing of ComStar, was originally meant to preserve ComStar. Instead, ROM seems to have subverted ComStar. Often, the heads of ROM have taken action which is directly contrary to the Primus' will. On one occasion, ROM is said to have replaced the entirety of the First Circuit! Certainly ROM's spearheading of Operation Scorpion , breaking treaties as it did, is the action of an enemy to the governments of the Inner Sphere.

So on the one hand, ComStar did maintain communications for the Known Sphere, and monitor mercenary contracts, and regulate the value of our money. And on the other hand, covertly, it started the Second and Third Succession Wars and assassinated several House leaders. More importantly, ComStar helped the Clans against the Inner Sphere until the invaders targeted their own territory. Remember how hard it was to get military information from the Clans front? Communications between battle leaders and house leaders were disrupted as part of a deliberated plot by ComStar. ComStar's neutrality wasn't just compromised, it was destroyed!

Yet, to be blunt, ComStar still has the communications equipment that links the far-flung systems of the Known Sphere, and nobody else can do the job.

The Word of Blake is trusted only by Thomas Marik. ComStar is trusted by the Federated Commonwealth, the Draconis Combine, and the remnants of Rasalhague — to a limited extent. 90% of ROM went with the Word of Blake. That may be the only thing that keeps anyone in the Inner Sphere trusting the majority faction. That and the personal reputation of Anastasius Focht.

For what it's worth, BattleTechnology feels that Focht and Mori mean to keep their word, to make most of the past information available to the Inner Sphere, not to take over the Inner Sphere, and to serve us as a bulwark against the Clans. If the Clans didn't exist, we'd have much stronger reservations about trusting ComStar, ever again. Remember that tendency of an organization to put survival above all else?

But the Clans do exist. And ComStar is committed to fighting them. So most of the Successor Houses will come to an understanding with ComStar to fight the Clans.

BattleTechnology News

ComStar's 'Peace Summit' A Failure?

April 30, 3053 Hilton Head Compound, Terra

On the surface, new Primus Sharilar Mori's ambitious 'Peace Summit' is a disaster. Seven leaders of the Inner Sphere were invited to take part in the meeting; she offered military intel from the Battle of Tukayyid to the attendees. Everyone sent envoys; even Rasalhague's Prince Haakon Magnuson chose not to attend in person.

The worst moment for Mori must have been the challenge from Tai-sho Henry Sobrioff, Ambassador from the Draconis Combine. The Combine no longer recognized ComStar as an impartial arbitrator for mercenary contracts. As other Successor Houses rose to join in the condemnation, Precentor Martial Anastasius Focht, newly arrived from his trip around the Inner Sphere, turned condemnation into guidance. He suggested a new impartial Mercenary Review and Bonding Commission, to be made up of representatives from each government. The Federated Commonwealth won the point of location: the Commission's new home is to be Wolf's Dragoons' world of Outreach, already the premier mercenary hiring hall.

But ComStar won a seat on the board of the Commission. ComStar will continue to have a voice in mercenary affairs. Remember that mercenaries are the 'swing factor' in deciding disputes between Inner Sphere territories! And at a special 'preparedness meeting' held just before the ambassadors took ship for home, a resolution was introduced reminding the Houses of the Inner Sphere that the Clans were the enemy of each of them, and that working together against them was essential.

war was over, new information cleared most of them up. This was one which had never been explained.

It turns out that the NAIS raid was made by a disguised ROM team. The purpose was to recover the Grey Death Legion memory core which was being studied there. It will be remembered that only the research wing was targeted; production was left alone. It seems that if the raid had been successful, agents in place in the Draconis Combine would have stolen their version; an 'unfortunate accident' would have occurred to the Grey Death's facilities, and ComStar would again have been the only keepers of Star League technological data.

Another shocking revelation concerns the several times when ComStar knew of an assassination or kidnap attempt on a head of state — and did nothing. The 3029 attempt upon Katrina Steiner's life was known by ROM; primary source documents suggest that ROM may have encouraged the assassins. Whatever the truth about that, it is definite that no attempt was made to stop that.

As of April 15, 3053, ComStar opened a new office at their Hilton Head Compound on Terra. The 'Retroactive Information Office' opens ComStar historical files to House historians and archivists. Suites of rooms are reserved in the compound for each House's nominees to study the files in depth. Study parties are arriving weekly; even the Free Worlds League is sending a party. The Federated Commonwealth has nominated two investigative groups of scholars, one from NAIS, and an independent group headed by Countess Mischa Auburn Redburn, Court Historian to the court at Tharkad. Access to scientific or technological files is on a case-by-case basis.

A reliable source close to BattleTechnology has given us a few tidbits of recent history. For example: toward the close of the Fourth Succession War, Duke Morgan Hasek-Davion had a dramatic confrontation with a certain Warrior House unit of the Capellan Confederation on Kathil. A day later, that same unit took part in a raid on NAIS on New Avalon. This is the famous raid which was beaten off by Prince Hanse Davion in his BattleMaster and MechWarriors from Team Banzai fighting on foot. In wartime, contradictory information comes in sometimes. at BattleTechnology, we print the news as we receive it, so we did. We trusted that later information would make clear which units had actually been where. The two locations are two Jumps apart, three Jumps if you stayed within Liao territory; it was simply impossible that the same unit could have been in both places. There were many similar contradictions; after the

One of the most extreme examples of do-nothing appears in the biography of Hanse Davion elsewhere in this issue. The Capellan Confederation kidnapped him and held him prisoner for a year's time while they... but read the article. ComStar possible involvement is limited to feeding the suspicions of Chancellor Maximilian Liao after Prince Hanse Davion made it clear upon his accession that he was eager to discuss a lasting peace with Archon Katrina Steiner. The alliance which eventually became the Federated Commonwealth was frowned upon by the Word of Blake faction which holds that Blake forecast the Inner Sphere would not unify, but would war until it fragmented into tiny factions. Then the True Believers would step in to unify the Inner Sphere under ComStar's rule. If Hanse Davion's intentions could be derailed by a little judicious hinting, ComStar would be happy to provide those hints.

It's hard in telling these sordid old stories to distinguish between the covert, our-ends-justify-any-means politics of the old ComStar, and the ComStar faction now headed by Anastasius Focht and Sharilar Mori. This reporter feels that their good intentions are genuine, but suspects both their ability to 'clean up' the ComStar system, and the purity of their intentions once they have rubbed up against real politics in the changed world of the mid-Century.

Hanse Davion Remembered

Hanse Davion died one year ago this month. For most of us in the Known Sphere, he was for half a century the model of what a MechWarrior and a leader of men should be. All about us in the Inner Sphere, we still see the results of his legacy of statesmanship and courageous leadership. Even his enemies admitted that he made them work for their gains, that combatting him forced them to their best efforts. His friends found him generous in victory and dogged against defeat. From his patronage of NAIS, to his sponsorship of Vagabond Academies, his reorganization of the AFFC, and his dynamic alliance with Melissa Arthur Steiner, his political influence across the Inner Sphere transformed it during his lifetime. It is not saying too much to say that without his example, his maneuvering, and his direct efforts, the Inner Sphere would not have been ready to withstand the Clans for the three years before Tukayyid. We at BattleTechnology couldn't let the year's anniversary go by without a chance to say one last farewell to the man who defined our times. Rest in Peace, Hanse Davion. Thank you for all you have done.

Hanse's Last Words

This was found among the papers on First Prince Hanse Davion's desk after his death.

Citizens of the Federated Commonwealth! There has been a great victory over the Clans forces on Tukayyid. Your vid services have shown you what is surely ComStar's finest hour, as they won victory over those same Clans who have reft kin and territory from your lives.

Some of you may feel a pang that you could not take part in the fight, that the AFFC, which has given so much, was not permitted a part in the decisive battle. Let me remind you that not even the Free Republic of Rasalhague's own forces were permitted to be part of it. This was ComStar's battle for the system of Terra, the first time ComStar risked its own against the Clans. Com Star entered the fight late, but well. Whatever the reason they delayed so long, they have offered to supply us with new intelligence now.

The communications blackout that some of you experienced in the early days of May seems to have been caused by a misunderstanding. A fanatical group within ComStar took matters into its own hands; that group has been dealt with. But enough of ComStar.

Let us talk of our own people, of your long fight against the Jade Falcons, the Steel Vipers, and the Wolf Clan. In the past years you suffered a stunning shock as the Clans hit without warning. You faced overwhelming odds in the face of their genetic engineering and superior weaponry. You continued the gallant fight from system to system, never allowing yourselves to consider defeat. Our forces of the AFFC gave lives to gain crucial information; our ally Colonel Jaime Wolf gave time and personal anguish to preparing us for the Clans' methods of war.

We will face the Clans again when the fifteen year truce is ended. Nothing could be surer. You have my pledge that the resources of the Federated Commonwealth are committed to preparing us to face that clash when it comes. Yet, just for the moment, let us rejoice. The Inner Sphere has had to work together to repel the invader of our homes. You have lost much; take a moment to enjoy your gains.

A Day of Thanksgiving is declared...

Here the proclamation breaks off. The First Prince must have put it aside, meaning to finish it later on. Only for him there was to be no later on.

Hanse Davion's Peculiar Aggression

"Hanse is as good a MechWarrior as his brother — and a much better tactician! The old tight-shorts in the Armed Forces of the Federated Suns better hold on to their drawers when his reforms start coming through! I look forward to a revitalized AFFS, and a Federated Suns which is a confident leader of the Inner Sphere!"

Field Marshal
Yvonne Davion,
mentor to
Prince Hanse Davion
Former Military Commander
of the Capellan March
CO, Analysis and
Speculation Dept, MIIO
at his coronation

"Hanse Davion married for politics, but it was clear that the marriage became a love match. As Melissa Steiner Davion matured, the two clashed often, but always with mutual respect. Eventually the older Hanse learned to value Melissa's ability to identify the system or unit that was being harmed by one of his schemes, to find ways to include that unit in whatever grand purpose Hanse was planning. Melissa's political gifts complemented Hanse's strategical sense. They made a whole greater than the sum of its parts. And they did it by listening to each other even when they were most opposed. That's all it takes."

Dr Sue Maybecker
'Advice from the Doc' vid show
during the week of
Hanse Davion's funeral

Hanse Davion was born a spare part. Many second children feel that way, but for royalty it's the truth. The oldest child gets everything, while other children wait in the wings in case anything happens to number one. (The oldest *legitimate* child, that is. There was an older half-sister who was not in the line of succession, the Marie Davion who married Michael Hasek, mother of the Marshal of the Armies.)

As Hanse was growing up, the contemporaries he saw most of were his brother, Prince Ian, Ian's best friend Michael Hasek, both of whom were four years older, and Arden Sortek, ten years younger. Throughout his life, Field Marshal Sortek was Prince Hanse's closest friend, the one with whom he could let down all pretenses. His tutor, Professor Sharon Bryan, remained a friend long after Prince Hanse had left her guidance for the Albion Military Academy. The education of a Prince of House Davion tends to be excellent, but conservative. Bryan with her "Question, question, question!" and her reminders that assumptions are not data, influenced Hanse in acquiring the patience and trickery of the Fox. Both of the Davion sons were given educations befitting statesmen, leaders, and military men, with a broad base in history. Professor Bryan and Hanse were aware that the Succession Wars cost more than they could ever win. She had him analyze the Davion Claim to the throne of the Star League, and the odds that yet another war would not unify the Inner Sphere. She taught this general-to-be the difference between military and political solutions. Little did she know that she had also taught him to look for ways to change the odds.

Hanse and Hasek loathed each other. Prince Ian, who was a charismatic and hearty man, seemed to befriend first one and then the other. He was probably aware of the useful potential in each of these men; eventually Prince Ian made Hasek head of the Bureau of Investigations of the MIIO, while Prince Hanse became Military Governor of New Aragon. Ian Davion was a fine strategist, yet he never learned to value political solutions; he distrusted human emotions. Then in 3013, First Prince Ian Davion died on the battlefield on Mallory's World, and Hanse's world turned upside down. As he returned to New Avalon for his brother's funeral, Prince Hanse barely fought off an assassination attempt. Rightly or wrongly, he blamed Michael Hasek, now Duke Michael Hasek-Davion. One of Prince Hanse's first acts was to relegate Duke Michael to his home base in the Capellan marches of the Federated Suns. Another was to send for Sortek to see him through the time of transition.

Prince Hanse's public persona was hearty, jolly, hiding the keen cold observation beneath. And the uncertainty. He felt that he had to prove himself to his people as successor to the popular Prince Ian. Not long after he succeeded there came a time when he literally had to prove himself. Recent information released from ComStar archives reveals that Prince Hanse was kidnapped and replaced for more than a year by a double, a mind-imprinted man from the Capellan Confederation. It was upon his restoration (aided by Arden Sortek) that First Prince Hanse Davion ceased to be divided in himself. He was the Prince; he would do the job to the absolute best of his ability as politician and strategist. Chancellor Liao's attack had taught him that the Succession Wars were not wars of honor, but wars in which the honorable were endangered. He knew that he could not make a sizable gain toward unification unless he could change the odds.

Archon Katrina Steiner's peace proposals had not received any response from Inner Sphere leaders until Prince Hanse began negotiations with her. It must have been hard to win her consent to a war of conquest, unless Prince Hanse let her in on the secret of the Liao subterfuge,. Then came the formulation of Operation Goliath's wargames which turned to reality, and the strategem of the Wedding that Made War.

The rest of Prince Hanse's life shows his determination to unify the Inner Sphere under the Davion-Steiner rule — until the advent of the Clans. Then Hanse's real motivation to protect the Inner Sphere at all costs came to the fore. House Kurita was the traditional enemy of his House, yet Hanse unilaterally withdrew his troops along their borders to spearhead the defense of the Lyran Commonwealth. Theodore Kurita, just as wisely, trusted the signs and withdrew his troops to the Clans front. Hanse went further when he paid mercenaries to defend the Kurita homeworld of Luthien. He urged, cajoled, blackmailed, and bribed other Inner Sphere leaders into helping the fight against the Clans. He literally wore himself to death in fighting them, dying of a heart attack just after the Battle of Tukayyid.
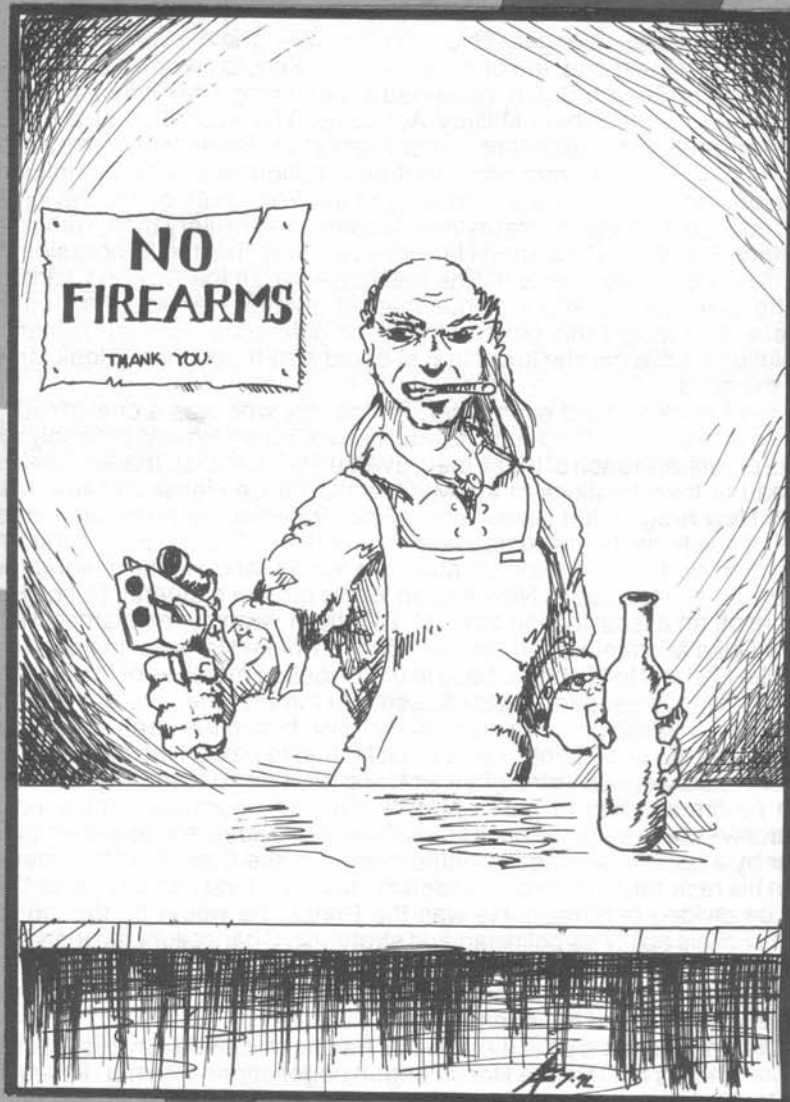
INTERSECTING LINES

Part 3

A Tale of the Cobalt Coil

military strategist, an incompetent traitor, and outcast drifter. I had thought to end my years in obscurity, tending bar at a small tavern in Solaris City on Gameworld, that odd, almost apolitical world. I was wrong. Suddenly, I was a character in a bad holo, the lone MechWarrior who has to clean up the town overrun by barbarians. However, this was real, and I'm far too old for the role of the hero; I might look fifty, but my eightieth birthday was several years past. There wasn't any way out. I fought for my life and everything I held dear.

It started in blood, as such things often do. Kio Tonner, a member of the local Yakuza clan, and a friend of mine, was murdered outside my bar. I stumbled onto the knowledge that he'd been killed by his boss, Toma Sakuro, as part of a scam to skim money from the Yakuza to pay for Toma's extravagant lifestyle. Toma knew I knew he was guilty and that I had no proof. He used that to force me into a 'Mech duel with his pet lance, expecting a slaughter. At stake, beside my life, was the Cobalt Coil, the bar I worked at. You might wonder why I was willing to fight for something that wasn't mine. If you've never been in the Coil, you can't understand. The Coil's a sanctuary where warriors can unburden themselves of their pain and their pasts. I don't own the bar, but I'm part of it. And to me, it was worth fighting for.

I sat in Apshai's cockpit and marveled at the twists of fate. I honestly believe the unifying force behind the cosmos, that single thing that binds all matter, energy, and events into a single whole is a perverse sense of humor. Who ever and what ever god may be, he/she/it is laughing up a storm at the way events warp lives. I'm a perfect example. In my time, I've been well-born aristocracy, dilettante warrior, a brilliant

All my friends pitched in when they got word of the duel , though they didn't know why it was happening. With their help, my old Marauder Apshai was restored to fighting trim, and even re-equipped with some of the NewTech that was

just hitting the market. I'd need it all. Four 'Mechs stood against me, a Wyvern, a Dervish, a Griffin, and Toma's Grand Dragon. Win or lose, this was going to be nasty. I had a hole card, one that carried an unknown price tag. It was a map of the Marik factory, the arena the duel would be fought in. Long ago, before the Succession Wars devastated the Inner Sphere, the factory-built orbital space craft. Now the ruined shell was battleground for staged 'Mech combat, remote feeds broadcasting blood sport for the enjoyment of the masses. All the map cost me was a promise of a 'return favor' to be paid sometime to ComStar, I wasn't looking forward to that debt coming due.

That was the future; the present was far more pressing. I sat in my cockpit, the neural helmet linking my brain to my 'Mech. Apshai moved as I moved. We'd fight together, and if fate so decreed, die together. Over the com link, the master of ceremonies droned on, explaining the rules of engagement and giving details of the participants' careers in the Solaris arenas. There wasn't a lot to say about me. This was my first gaming commission-sanctioned fight, and no one thought to look at old Lyran Commonwealth war records. I'd fought before, but not for exhibition.

Sweat slicked my palms as I watched the heavy blast doors that separated me from the factory. Memories of past battles played through my mind. I ignored them and glanced over my instrument panel. My gaze fastened on an old photo taken in the Coil six year ago after one of our 'Bad Joke Nights', when we give out awards for the worst joke or pun of the evening. Shadack won that night, and he stood in the center of a crowd of friends, that tattered old Davion Home Guard jacket slung over his shoulder. A lot of the others were there: Lenth, Donovan and his damned saber getting in the way, even MacCormack. But my attention kept drifting to Shadack. I missed him. Cancer took him three years ago. I was sorry Sarah never got a chance to meet him.

The tick of the chronometer counting second down to zero-time drew me out of the bitter-sweet memories. Fights in the Factory could be a grueling contest of nerve and endurance. The longest record in the factory is two days, three hours. The shortest is twenty-five minutes. Every 'Mech came in at a separate, randomly-chosen entrance. It all depended on how close we all were when we entered, and how quickly we found each other.

The chronometer hit zero, flashed, and began to count up. The announcer finished his spiel, ending with the required, "And let the games begin!" The blast doors ground open. Beyond lay the killing ground.

The factory was a landscape of industrial desolation. When they had built it centuries ago, the Factory was constructed to accommodate industrial 'Mechs. twenty meter tall corridors linked cavernous spaces. Water dripped from the ceiling, pooling on the floor. Laser burns traced across the walls between craters from missile and shell hits. Dime light filtered from hidden sources, providing enough illumination for the cameras to record the battles. After all, this wasn't war; it was spectacle.

I lumbered through the doorway and the massive steel doors slid shut. Quickly, I went through my sensor array to see what would work best in this setting. Magnetics were erratic; the steel in the walls provided too much interference. On the infrared, everything was a cool blue with thin yellow tracings marking active power lines. A moving 'Mech would show up as a splash of scarlet, but if it were obstructed, the rubble would mask its heat signature. I settled on visible light, trusting my eyes to pick out the shape of Toma's 'Mechs. Unlike me, they weren't using a camo pattern paint. I set an automatic motion detector to register any moving object over four meters in size than started forward, formulating strategy as Apshai picked her way over the rubble.

I had to find them before they linked up. The key was to think like Toma. In this setting, he couldn't use radios to locate his men, too much metal in the walls. So they would all head for a pre-set rendezvous. I called up the map which Raythan, the Solaris ComStar Precentor, had provided, and superimposed the telemetry data from the bootlegged system Donovan had rigged. A gold spark marked my location in what was labeled as the Arielon Assembly Area. I looked for likely rallying points. You see, maps of the Factory are available to any one who wants to buy one. They are all compilations of data from MechWarriors who survived bouts in the factory. None of the maps are particularly accurate, but they're enough to get you around. My map was special. If Raythan was to be believed, then it was a copy of the original floor plan. I saw no reason to doubt her. The logical place to find them was at the center of the whole complex, the Thruster Testing Pit. It was roughly equidistant from all the random start points. I wagered they'd head for it. So did I.

Walking through the ruined Factory was an eerie, nerve-taking experience. Shadows loomed from corners, forming 'Mech-like silhouettes in the uncertain light. In places, the floors were buckled and broken. Collapsed corridors blocked my route, forcing me to retrace my steps. I forged on, winding my way towards the center. Forty minutes later, I found the engine test facility.

A huge, corrosion-eaten gantry extended over yawning darkness. The pit was a hundred meters across and twice as deep. Completed shuttles had been locked into the gantry, and their engines test-fired into the pit. Technicians would have monitored the engines output and performance, making sure each craft was ready to lift humans or cargo. Now, only wreckage remained. All the electronics were long ago stripped away, and the pit bottom was clogged with refuse. Rain water pooled in the pit, bright with an oily, chemical tinge. Above, the vast domed ceiling was mazed with cracks. Tangles knots of steel girders, cables, and broken cranes that had once moved shuttles dotted the roof. The place was desolate, a dead reminder of what mankind once produced, reduced to a battlefield for the enjoyment of the masses. Sadness pressed in on me, and I wondered if humanity was already on the long, irreversible slide into barbarism.

For a while, I stood staring, overwhelmed by the desolation and sheer scale of this engineering marvel. I might have stood there stunned while Toma crept up on me if it hadn't been for the sudden trickle of sulfur-tainted air that swirled through the cockpit.

"Damn, must not have battened down the main hatch." I quickly unstrapped and checked the egress behind the couch. It seemed tight, but I cinched the the handle just to make sure. Someone might be using infernos and I didn't want to risk an unsealed cabin. By the time I strapped back in, the Factory was again just broken stone and steel, not a

LIVE! From the FACTORY
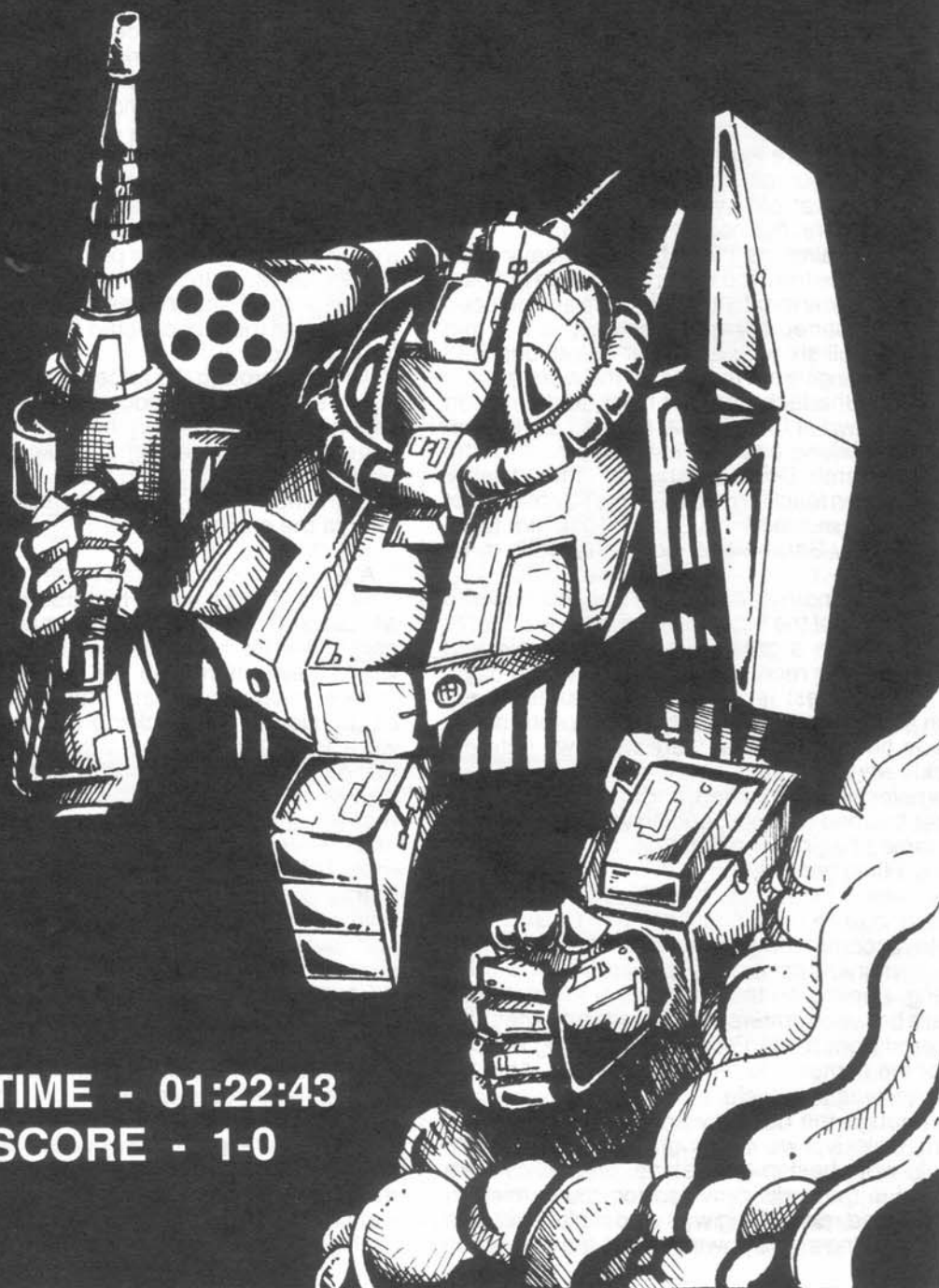
TIME - 01:22:43
SCORE - 1-0

symbol of human decay. I was ready to fight.

I looked at the maze of branching passageways that splayed out from the huge chamber. There were dozens of approaches and I still had no guarantees that this was the right place. For all I knew, Toma and his three lieutenants had already joined up and were on my trail. I shoved that thought aside. This was the logical place for them to head for, and Toma had never struck me as overly creative. I'd beaten them here, thanks to Raythan's map. Now I just had to figure out how to use my slight advantage. The chronometer clicked on while I considered the problem. Then an idea lit the darkness in my mind. I cranked up the external audio and listened. Sounds echoed through the chamber. I isolated dripping water and edited it out with the computer then did the same with Apshai's engine vibrations. One by one, I isolated and removed all the background sounds. Everything got quiet, except for an occasional clatter of falling rubble. I moved to the nearest tunnel and listened. Only silence. I went to the next and tried again. Again, nothing. On the eighteenth try, I picked up the sound of grinding stone and steel. Something was coming. I listened, using the computer to analyze the echoing sounds. As best I could tell, it was a single 'Mech-sized machine about a quarter-klick away. I quickly surveyed the area, looking for an ambush site. Less than fifty meters from the tunnel entrance lay a heap of broken metal where one of the overhead cranes had fallen. I moved behind it, trusting the metal to mask my image and crouched Apshai down on her huge, back-bending legs. With a mental command, I brought up the two weapons pods and set all the cross hairs on the shadowed mouth of the tunnel. Another command ordered the engine to shut down, cutting the flow of heat and power from the fusion plant to a trickle. In about an hour, the sensors would drain the batteries. I waited.

Sweat trickled down my body, pooling inside the folds of my gortex cooling vest. My hands cramped from squeezing the arm rests so I force my muscles to relax. The chronometer advanced, the only movement I saw. From the speakers came the sound of the advancing 'Mech, blending with the dry rasp of my breathing. Then, just when I felt sure I'd imagined the whole thing, something moved in the shadows. I cut out the audio and stared at the tunnel, willing my opponent to appear. The hidden 'Mech hesitated and I was sure he probed the cavernous space with his sensors. A sudden surge of fear that residual heat would show my position made my heart race. I fought down the panic and held back for him to make his move. At last he did. The crimson and gold Wyvern paced forward. Instantly, I brought Apshai's engine back on-lin. Before the indicators even registered that power was restored, I fired.

In the semi-darkness, it was as if someone touched off a star. Brilliant blue lances of artificial lightning blasted from the arm-mounted PPCs, tracked by the surging red beams of the pulse lasers. The heavy laser's light cored through the afterglow of the particle beams. The Wyvern stumbled and collapsed; molten, burning armor spraying back. Concrete chips flew from at least one missed shot. Heat washed through Apshai's cabin, baking the sweat from my skin. An alarm howled. I cursed and slapped at the override, narrowly avoiding and engine shut-down. Then, the freezers did their job, slamming cold over the heat. The monitors dropped back into the yellow, but I ignored them. Apshai was up, moving towards the fallen 'Mech.

I cut through the edge of the ruined crane, trading subtlety for speed, kicking aside the heap of rusty metal. The Wyvern was moving, levering itself up on one arm. I triggered both pulse lasers and they stitched lines across the floor. Then the Wyvern retaliated.

Its right arm came up and two stabs of laser light hit Apshai in the torso, carving armor. Both sets of missile tubes in the Wyvern's torso opened and a flock of missiles erupted. The long range ones didn't have enough time to arm. The ones that hit shattered off Apshai's armor and the rest exploded against the far wall. The short range missiles were more effective. Most of them hammered into Apshai's torso. One hit square in the cockpit, jolting me in my harness. I triggered more pulse laser fire as I closed. A sudden burst of smoke poured from the Wyvern's left arm. The arm dangled useless.

"Damn!" I swore, "Why couldn't it have been the right?" Wyverns carry their primary weaponry in their right arm, a heavy and two small lasers.

We swapped missile and laser fire as I closed. Apshai took a few more glancing hits, nothing that penetrated her armor, and the battered Wyvern staggered to its feet. I figured it was getting ready to jump clear before I pounded it to scrap. I had to do something. Even though the distance was too close, I dropped the cross hairs for the PPCs and the heavy laser and triggered off a savage barrage. Again, the cockpit temperature spiked and the warnings came on. But my shots went true. All three beams hammered the Wyvern's legs as it lifted up on a column of superheated exhaust.

I don't know if I actually shot it away or if a jump jet got blocked and the back pressure blew off the leg. In either case, the Wyvern tumbled out of control. It smacked into a wall and fell hard onto a pile of rubble. More smoke poured from joints in its body. I waited, all cross hairs centered on the seemingly dead 'Mech while Apshai cooled. I knew what I should do, close and kick in the cockpit to make sure the yak killer was dead. I hesitated. That was something Toma would do and take pleasure in. But I wasn't a murderer, just a soldier. In my mind I saw the audience clustered around their vids and wondered how many held their thumbs down. It wasn't their decision. It was mine. And I turned from him to wait for the others.

Yes, I know it was foolish. The Wyvern pilot could have been faking it, or simply knocked out by the fall. In minutes or hours, I might have him back on me. But it felt right to leave him, so I did. Under my direction, Apshai checked all systems. Sensors showed the armor over my torso and right leg were getting thin but nothing had been breached. I was ready for the next foe.

This time, I couldn't use my audio sensors to track incoming 'Mechs. Either the external pick-ups had been damaged, or the smoldering hulk of the Wyvern produced too much interference. A steady crackling hiss emerged from the speakers. I looked around for a good ambush position but nothing appealed to me. With no idea where they'd come from, any good defensive position could easily become a trap. So I kept moving, rotating around the chamber, checking each passage as I passed. If you've never tried to sneak in a seventy-five ton BattleMech, let me tell you that it's a nerve racking experience. Each movement seemed to disturb another pile of rubble, sending fragments skittering off into the darkness. Tension con-

stricted my chest. I kept seeing 'Mechs loom out of the darkness only to realize they were shadows. As each circuit brought me around, I paused to check the Wyvern's hulk. It didn't move, just lay there smoking like a charred body. I was beside it when the Dervish and the Griffin stepped from a corridor across the pit. They must have started near each other and linked up before heading towards the rendezvous. Just a bit of bad luck on my part.

Instantly, I saw my tactical disadvantage. They had no need to get near me, both the Dervish and the Griffin were equipped with long range weapons and jump jets. Separated by the blast pit, they could just pick shots at me. There was no way I could close with them; all they had to do was rotate away from me. If I turned and ran, they'd wait for Toma and then it'd be three on one. While I considered and discarded strategies, they started firing. Each of the 'Mechs carried LRMs, and they combined fire. Explosions peppered Apshai's armor while I dodged and moved right. As expected, the Dervish and the Griffin rotated away, firing missiles. I swore and wished I still had the autocannon. I snapped off a few PPC shots and managed to score a hit on the Griffin's right leg. The Griffin returned the fire, and I realized it was packing one of the new extended range PPCs. The bolt caught me square in the torso, ripping through the already weakened armor. Warnings shrilled; Apshai's skin was breached. Cold sweat soaked my face. At the rate things were going, they wouldn't need Toma to finish me off.

I scored another hit on the Griffin, a glancing shot that peeled gray armor from its right arm. LRM explosions rocked me as I moved, chipping armor. Another particle beam hit, this time boring into Apshai's right arm. The indicator light marking the right laser flashed, then went dark. Apshai was slowly dying. Realizing I had to out-think them I started looking for a way to turn the arena to may advantage. Suddenly, I saw an ally, the ruined cranes in the ceiling. It would be a long shot, but if I could just maneuver one or both of them beneath a crane, then knock the crane free...

A fresh set of explosions hammered Apshai. Blue light washed through the cockpit. Apshai staggered and fell, warning sirens howling. I cursed and hunted for signs of damage. A PPC shot had caught me and part of the charge had bled in through the armor. My targeting computer was down. With a flash of inspiration, I ripped open the set pouch and pulled out the worn circuit board Sarah had given me for luck. Supposedly, it came from a regular's old 'Mech. Frenziedly, I pulled open the access panel to the main controls. Smoke led me to the burnt board. More missiles hit as the Dervish and the Griffin fired again, trying to make sure I stayed down. I yanked out the destroyed board and slammed the replacement in. For a moment, my breath caught as I waited for my computer to access the new circuitry. I was sure it wouldn't work. Then it did. The god and red targeting cross-hairs appeared in the HUD. I swung them towards the ceiling.

It was an impossible shot. The distance was three times the normal effective range of a particle projection cannon and I was firing prone while missiles rained around me. I fired three times, barely giving the charging coils time to cycle. Two shots hit the mass of twisted steel hanging from the ceiling. Fragments rained down and I saw the Griffin and Dervish look up. Then, with a rending scream that shud-

dered through the chamber, the entire mass ripped free. Trailing broken cables and chunks of stone, it plummeted. The Griffin reacted in time and leaped free, the glare of its jump jets shining like twin flares. The Dervish vanished under tons of scrap metal. For a few moments, fragments pelted down but nothing came up through the ruin. I knew the Dervish was dead. But the Griffin was still fighting.

I staggered upright as the Griffin landed. We fired in the same instant. A lance of artificial lightning tore into Apshai's left leg, staggering the huge war machine. My shot caught the Griffin in the cockpit, decapitating it in a fan of cobalt blue sparks. For a moment the Griffin tottered on its feet. Then it fell backwards across a heap of shattered concrete.

"No!"

The scream erupted from my com link. Toma had arrived in time to see his last man fall. As luck would have it, he came in behind me.

A blast of charged particles ripped through Apshai's rear armor. Pain blasted me through the neurohelmet as circuits overloaded. A rank of indicators flashed then darkened. Through the view port, I saw Apshai's right arm spin free, sparks and broken cables spewing from the stump. Toma charge into view.

The bright floral pattern painted on his Grand Dragon made a splash of brilliant color in the dim gray of the Factory. Wisps of ionized vapor curled up from the stubby muzzle of the Lord's Light PPC that formed the 'Mech's right arm. As he moved in, his left arm snapped up and a stab of crimson laser light hit me in the leg. A steady stream of Japanese epithets boiled from the com. In a sudden burst of irrational humor, I wondered if the live broadcast included our radio chatter. If so we'd just lost the family audience. Then another PPC bolt hit and all levity was erased.

Apshai fell with a crash. I bounced in my harness, and tasted blood. Reflexively, I brought down the laser targeting and fired. One pulsing beam shot out, stitching a line across Toma's right leg. I suddenly realized the heavy laser hadn't fired. A quick check confirmed that it was off-line, probably taken out when I fell. Apshai was down to two usable weapons, her armor was breached in a dozen places and the on-board computer flickered with erratic power surges. Toma was essentially untouched. In the back of my mind, a little voice whispered I was going to die. The yawning muzzle of Toma's PPC swung into my view screen.

With a burst of adrenalin, I twisted in my harness and kicked out with both legs. Miraculously, Apshai somersaulted. A blaze of artificial lightning slagged the floor where moments ago my head had rested. Before Toma reacted, I was up and staggering at him. His laser shot went wide as I smashed into him.

Apshai screamed in protest, her voice torn from shearing metal. Toma stumbled back. Massive dents and broken armor plates showed where Apshai hit. I triggered another laser shot and carved armor from his torso.

"Maybe I can pull this off," I muttered. Blood stained my lips as I hit him again with the laser. Then his PPC fired and Apshai went down. This time her engine cut out. Toma advanced and his voice hissed from the com link.

"Now I will kill you." His words were flat and cold, the rage replaced by an icy, homicidal calm. "It is always thus. The servants of the Dragon are above mere mortals, the blood of ancient warriors strengthens us, drives us on to victory over any foe!" His voice rose in pitch and I saw a blue glow

form inside the muzzle of his PPC.

This is how my story ends, I thought. From behind my head, I thought I heard a sigh of disappointment. Instinctively, I turned to look and Apshai responded to my thoughts and movement. Driven by battery power, she rolled over just as Toma fired. The bolt hit stone, blasting a crater in the floor. Toma kept coming, spouting Japanese curses and Kurita propaganda. I saw the play of vapor around the muzzle of the PPC and on some level of my mind the pieces clicked. *Cambeal's story about how a charged particle beam left an ion trail through moist air. Like the inside of a dam...or a leaking Factory!*

"Cambeal, bless your heart," I muttered, hope banishing the crushing fatigue that dragged at me. I slapped the engine start and held my breath as the fusion pile tried to rekindle the star-hot core. Toma paced closer. Power surged back through Apshai's wounded systems. The targeting cross-hairs materialized but I ignored them. I wasn't going to win this fight with firepower. A mental command brought up Raythan's map and exploded the Blast Test Chamber graphic, then had the computer fix my location within it. I was so absorbed in my plan, I almost lost track of Toma. He was less than five meters away when he fired.

Apshai's sudden movement threw off his shot. The bolt grazed my leg, blasting away a pair of freezers but leaving the leg actuators intact. I crawled Apshai backward, playing the part of the cringing victim while I looked for the key to my escape within the plans. I saw it, about thirty five meters from my position, a four meter thick pillar labeled primary bus-connection. It was the power feed for the entire chamber. The only question was...was the feed still hot? I had to assume it was; if I turned to check it with infrareds, Toma might suspect. I had to draw him in.

I hauled Apshai across the floor like a crippled insect. Toma followed, a relentless executioner. He still cursed me over the com link, swearing how knowledge of his crimes would die with me. I led him back to the massive cement pillar and crashed into it as if I didn't know it was there. Apshai slumped. I lay unmoving, trying to make Toma think I had given up and was ready for the killing stroke. Toma stalked in.

"Thus will perish all my foes." I heard the gloating chuckle behind his words. The muzzle of his PPC loomed in my view screen. I stared into its black depths, thinking of the lethal energy it heal and waiting for the flow that heralded a shot. My eyes burned with the strain, but I couldn't blink. I'd have a fraction of a second to react before it fired. The blue nimbus formed. I threw everything I had into a side roll. Apshai flipped right. Toma fired.

I didn't see what happened until later, on a video replay. I was too busy trying to get clear of the fireworks. Toma's shot cracked open the cement casing over the power bus. I suppose the PPC's ion trail didn't really matter. What mattered was that all that electrical current went looking for a ground. Toma's Grand Dragon was right there. The electricity arced and the Dragon came apart at the seams.

In slow motion, you can see the play of the huge sparks across the legs. They carve through the armor like laser scalpels through flesh. Almost instantly, explosions start

within the body of the 'Mech as myomer bundles burst. The explosive charges in the cockpit escape go next. The head blows free and arcs into the blast pit. Then, all those unfired LRM's detonate, and the CASE packing doesn't help much. Finally a golden star blossoms in the ruined 'Mech's chest as the fusion chamber splits. Toma's crest vanished in a burst of light and plasma.

At the time, all I knew was that my trap worked. Arclight washed through the cockpit as I rolled. I kept moving, ignoring the grating and clanging that echoed through Apshai. Then the fusion-spawned glow filled the chamber and I knew Toma's engine had gone. The fight was over. I'd won. It took me nearly five minutes to get Apshai upon her legs. Then I started out. As I moved, I pulled up complete damage reports and calculating how long it would take to get the old girl back in fighting shape. Somehow, I felt this wasn't destined to be our last battle.

At the Coil that night, happy bedlam reigned. It was a victory celebration as well as a validation of spirit. It wasn't my victory, it was ours. We'd come together under adversity and each gave all we could. The Tech crew swore they'd stick together to rebuild Apshai and already they were talking about more improvements. I let them. Now, I could afford it. The final accounting wasn't in yet, but preliminary counts of salvage rights and additional distribution of the fight tapes were promising. It looked like I'd be able to pay off all those who'd advanced me money, fix Apshai, and still have change left over. Already, offers for more fights were coming in, it seemed I'd put on quite a show. I planned to refuse them all. Solaris may live and die by the games, but I don't. Three men died in that arena, the Griffin and Dervish pilots and, presumably, Toma. The Wyvern pilot survived, but it was doubtful he'd ever walk again. Yes, I did what I had to, but still, the thought of those men soured the taste of victory.

No one else shared my touch of melancholy and, truth to tell, I didn't dwell too long on it. The key-note was celebration and we did a lot. I still insisted on pouring. At the Coil, I'd feel uncomfortable if I wasn't behind the bar. My back got slapped and everyone wanted to buy me a drink. All the table top 'vids were running the fight, though without the audio feed. In all, it was the best victory party I ever attended. And you know, something interesting came out of it. I kept overhearing fragments of conversations and eventually I put the pieces together. A lot of people in that bar bet heavily on the fight, wagering I'd win despite the odds. Now, the odds were paying off and the winners discussed how they were going to spend their new-won riches. Interestingly, there was a common theme. Most of them wanted to reclaim their status as MechWarriors.

Men and women who hadn't fought in years, many who'd run from their pasts, were suddenly talking about saddling up again. As the hours trickled by, over a dozen loose partnerships formed up of people dedicated to recapturing their past. Most of them didn't want to fight in the arenas, but to find real work, warrior's work, maybe even take a slap at the Clans. I smiled and felt satisfied. The Coil's magic was at work again.

About ten that night, Lenth called me over to the com link behind the var. It was Raythan, looking faintly smug. The sight of the austere, lined face and pointed widow's peak nearly drove the party atmosphere from my lungs. I managed a sick smile and formal bow.
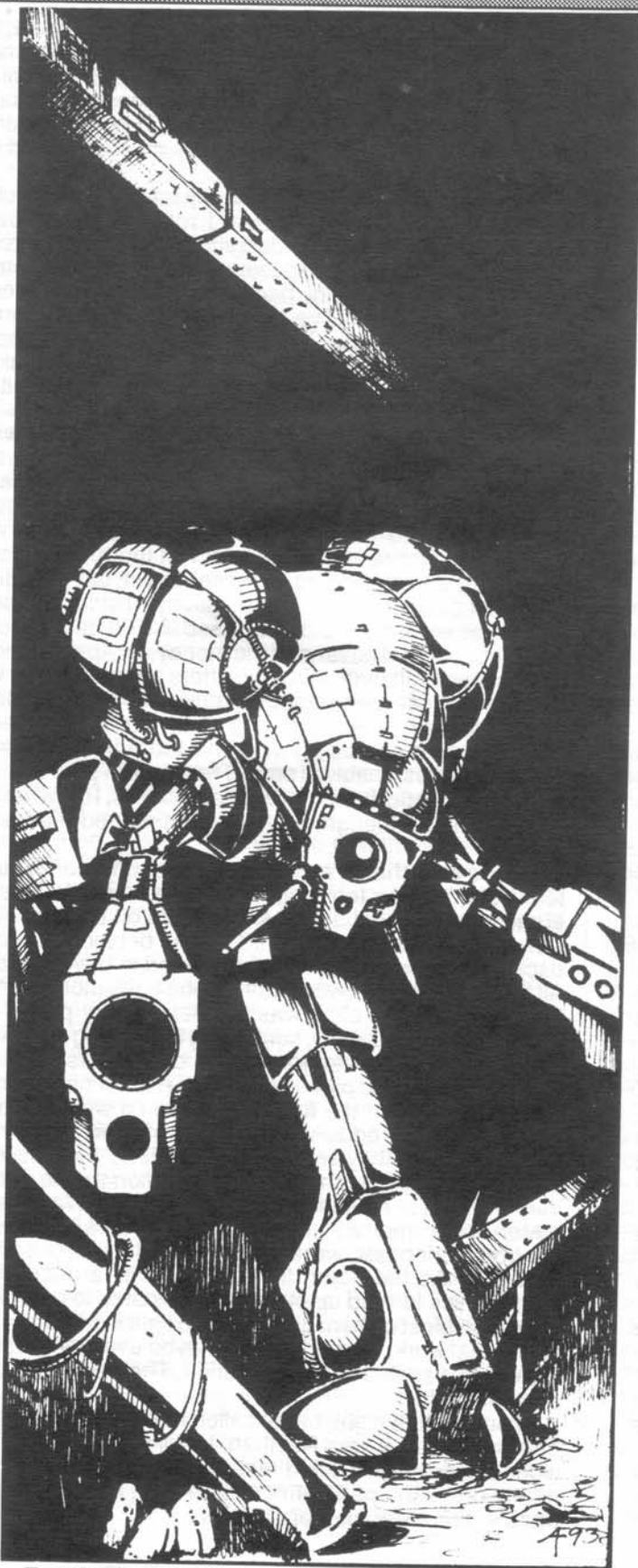
"Precentor," I said, my voice amazingly composed.

She dipped her head slightly, her hard brown eyes glittering.

"You fought remarkable," she said. "I've never seen anyone perform gymnastics in a Marauder. Was my offering useful?"

I nodded.

"Then I shall be back in touch...later." This time her smile was genuine. As the image faded, I wondered how long it'd be before she called in her marker.

"What was that about?" I heard the concern in Sarah's voice and decided to tell her all about Raythan's offer. A commotion at the door interrupted me. When I saw who'd come in, I felt as if someone had just dumped a bucket of ice water down my shorts. It was Kito Hasia, Toma's *Oyabun* in the Neon Orchids, escorted by four of his body guards.

No one else in the place recognized him. To them, Kito was just another middle-aged asian gentleman in a conservative suit with a few assistants who might have happened into the Coil. I knew better. The last time I'd seen Kito, he was walking across the rain slick pavement outside the Factory, Toma at his side. His words echoed back in my mind; "I am most interested in the outcome of this duel." I stood frozen by indecision while he moved through the crowd. Sounds seemed oddly muffled and everything moved in slow motion. I expected guns to emerge and death to rip through the Coil. Instead he stopped at the bar and bowed. By now, some of the regulars had noticed what was going on. Kito and I were the center of attention.

"Jansfield-san," he said, his voice soft yet powerful. "I come to offer my congratulations on a well won victory. Truly you are a warrior of rare skill and honor."

I managed a thank you. Kito bowed again.

"It is I who must thank you. Your actions took care of a very complex problem, the one that brought me to Solaris." For a moment, cold fury lit his eyes. "Kio Tonera was a relative of mine. He was sent to assess how Toma was running the organization on Solaris. I was readying myself to move against Toma when he unknowingly killed my wife's youngest brother. Had I acted with greater speed, the young man might still live. In any case, you have decapitated Toma's organization and now, I can reform it without having to explain to my superiors exactly why it was truly needed. All they need know is that Toma died as a failed warrior. For this service, I am indebted to you."

With that, he turned and left. It took me a few moments to regain my composure. It's not every day an interstellar ganglord tells you he's in your debt. It looked like Raythan wasn't the only one who wound up with a marker.

In any case, the party kept up until I decided it was time to close. At four, I served up the last

round, then booted everyone out. I left the mess for Lenth to clean, served him right for sort of causing the whole problem to start with. Sarah was waiting for me outside.

"I've been meaning to ask you, which of the regulars gave you that old circuit board?" The key clicked in my hand as I locked the door. Above, the neon sign was dead for the night.

Sarah shrugged.

"I'd never seen him before or since. He met me near the warehouse two days before the fight and said he was a friend. I trusted him. Anyone who wins a Davion Home Guard posting has to have a streak of honesty."

A shudder traced my back. I remembered how Shadak looked that day years ago when we laid him out in his cheap plastic coffin. His most prized possession, his old Home Guard jacket, was laid across his shoulders, the jacket I'd never seen him without. I looked around into the fog, expecting to see...but Sarah and I were the only two on the street. The universe is vast and unknowable. Sometimes mysteries have mundane roots. Sometimes they don't.

"I'm hungry." I announced, trying to banish the lingering chill. "Let's head to Yang's Flapjack House. He fixes a breakfast big enough to feed a regiment."

Sarah grinned and offered me her hand. I took it.

Solaris Match Schedule

Location: Ishiyama Arena   *Date of Event:* 7/13/53
Type: Team match, two-on-two   *Stables:* (Independent Teams)
'Mechs: Marauder and Wasp vs Caesar and Spider
Conditions: One side wins when both enemy 'Mechs are destroyed or leave the arena. All hazards are in place.
This match is a non-championship match and will have no bearing on the current rankings.

Locations: Steiner Stadium   *Date of Event:* 7/15/53
Type: Standard one-on-one duel   *Stables:* Independent vs Silver Dragon
'Mechs: Highlander vs Hatamoto-Chi
Conditions: All obstacles permanently in place until end of match. Match ends when one side's 'Mech can no longer fight.
Grudge Match — will have no bearing on the current rankings.

Location: The Jungle   *Date of Event:* 7/20/53
Type: Duel   *Stables:* Blackstar vs Starlight
'Mechs: Mad Cat vs Marauder II
Conditions: Match ends when one 'Mech can no longer fight or has left the arena.

The purpose of this match is uncertain, but it will not affect current rankings.

Location: Xolara BattleMech Range   *Date of Event:* 7/30/53
Type: Duel   *Stables:* Xolara vs Nowhere
'Mechs: Assassin vs Stinger
Conditions: Match ends when one 'Mech can no longer fight or has left the arena

This match will determine if one of the MechWarriors is Class 2 champion. Both are expected to become Class 3 contenders.

These are the matches for which tickets are available as of 7/09/53. Check your local ticket outlet for prices. Matches subject to cancellation at any time.

The Saga of the
Amaris Star

In my capacity as a systems technician at my world's nadir point space station, I have seen many different types of vessels come and go. Once a convoy of Wolf's Dragoons came by, escorted by several of their Star League era warships. But this day, I saw one of the most unusual vessels that I had ever seen appear. This JumpShip carried four DropShips including two Mules, a Seeker, and an unfamiliar small spheroid type DropShip. Several aerospace fighters from the JumpShip escorted it while one of the Mules detached itself and accelerated towards the planet. The JumpShip was studded with weapons mounts full of lasers, missiles, and PPCs, as well as other weapons that I could not readily identify. I also saw some indications of recent battle damage on the arriving JumpShip's hull. That was unusual because of the general prohibition on attacking JumpShips. After docking, several of the JumpShip's crew came aboard the station for some R&R. I quickly learned that the JumpShip belonged to TekTeam, and was enroute to their home base in the St Ives Compact after assisting Federated Commonwealth forces in operations against the Clans. I asked one of the crew about how they managed to acquire such a unique vessel.

She said that TekTeam had several years ago utilized a Scout class JumpShip as its interstellar transport. During salvage operations in a planetoid belt near the Rimward edge of the Inner Sphere, an anomalous sensor reading led them to a remote, densely packed section of the planetoid belt. TekTeam found a large, heavily damaged JumpShip with a single small spheroid DropShip attached. With the exception of a single blown hatch, the DropShip was totally undamaged. TekTeam's DropShip moved in closely to land a boarding party on the mystery JumpShip. TekTeam's salvage team found major damage to the JumpShip's weapons, maneuver drive, fuel tanks, and Jump sail. The salvage team also found many bodies in the JumpShip, both in and out of spacesuits. When the DropShip was searched, while a large amount of equipment was discovered, only a few bodies were found, mostly in the areas furthest from the blown hatch.

It was only after TekTeam's salvage crew examined the computer logs of both the JumpShip and DropShip that they discovered what had happened. The JumpShip had been the *Amaris Star*, in the service of the Rim World Republic Navy. She had been transporting assault DropShips during operations against Star League force opposing Stefan Amaris. The *Amaris Star* and her supporting vessels were ambushed by Star League warships near the planetoid belt. Her DropShips and fighters annihilated, her weapons shattered, and her drives heavily damaged, the *Amaris Star* limped into the planetoid belt. The drives suffered a final

breakdown as their power plant failed due to lack of fuel. The *Amaris Star's* crew prepared a lethal surprise for the Confederate class DropShip which was weaving among the planetoids in order to board their ship. After the surviving crew members donned spacesuits, they filled the interior with lethal nerve gas at many times the JumpShip's normal atmospheric pressure. Unfortunately for the crew of the *Amaris Star*, they used too much pressure. The gas also penetrated their own suits, with deadly results. When the Star League DropShip attached itself to one of the *Amaris Star's* docking rings and opened the airlock, the gas rushed inside, killing the entire crew. Only the dying efforts of a crewman to blow open a hatch allowed the gas to escape both vessels. Apparently, the other Star League vessels had presumed that both vessels had been lost in the planetoid belt and abandoned any search.

TekTeam's personnel found treasure on the DropShip: a lance of advanced Star League era BattleMechs and a lance of modified Kanga hover/jump tanks as well as a large amount of supplies and spare parts. After towing the two vessels out of the planetoid belt, TekTeam performed some hasty repairs, charged the *Amaris Star's* K-F drive from the Mule's fusion engine, and Jumped out of the system along with their scout class JumpShip. Both JumpShips traveled out to the Periphery system where certain Belt Pirates who owed them a favor had a base. TekTeam had to seek assistance in repairing their new discoveries. At first, the Belt Pirates only were interested in trading for the *Amaris Star*. After some detailed negotiations, the Belt Pirates agreed to refit the *Amaris Star*, rearm the weapons stations to the extent possible, using available weapons, and even to provide several salvaged Aerospace fighters in exchange for the Scout class JumpShip that TekTeam had been using — and the complete technical data on Star League era JumpShips that the *Amaris Star* had in her data banks. TekTeam renamed their new JumpShip the *Lorelei's Hope*; they now had a heavily armed JumpShip capable of carrying four DropShips and sixteen small craft, with several large cargo holds left in reserve.

I asked the crew member from *Lorelei's Hope* about the damage on the JumpShip's hull. She said that after the *Lorelei's Hope* was returned to service, TekTeam participated in numerous operations throughout the Inner Sphere. While lacking the large advanced weapons that the *Amaris Star* had carried during the Star League era, the *Lorelei's Hope* utilized much of the *Amaris Star's* available weapons systems space to mount the formidable array of weapons that saved her during one of their recent encounters with the Clans. While assisting with the evacuation of Sudeten during the Jade Flacon attack, the *Lorelei's Hope* was ap-

AMARIS STAR
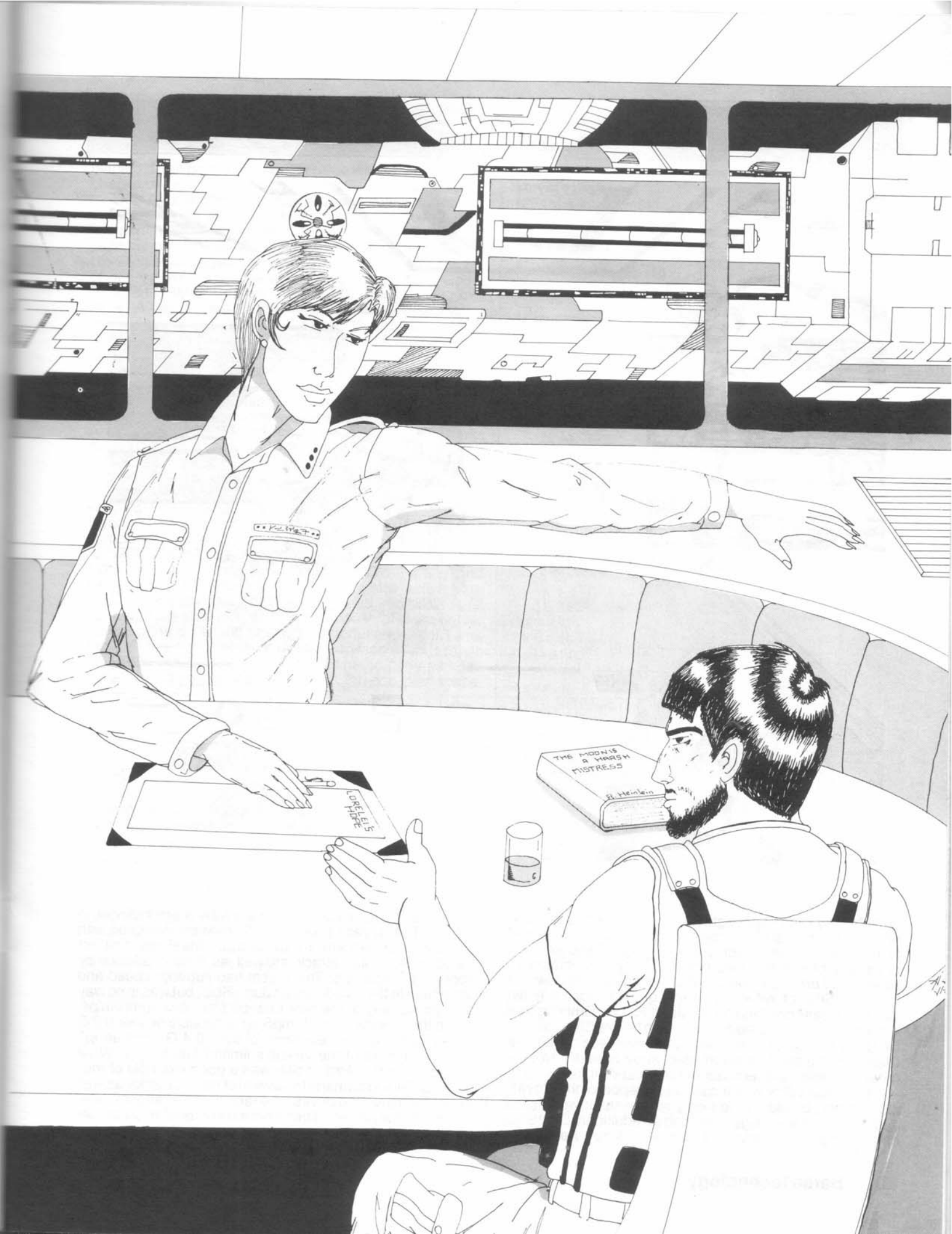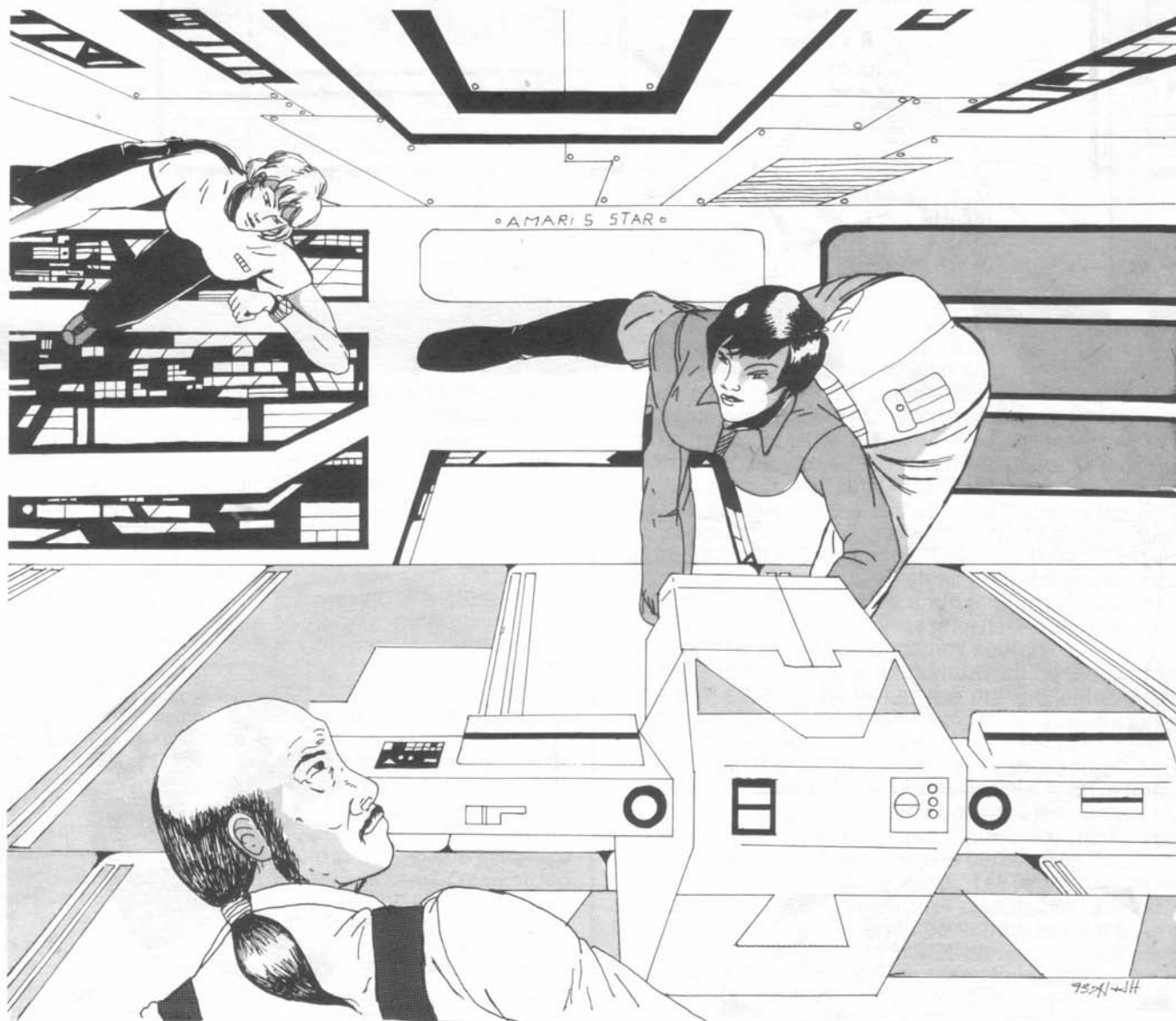
proached by Clan OmniFighters. They examined the exterior of the *Lorelei's Hope*, identifying it as having belonged to the Amaris forces, which the Star League Defense Force practically bled itself white fighting. They immediately attacked the *Lorelei's Hope* just after she had locked down the last DropShip of refugees. The *Lorelei's Hope's* heavy defensive batteries held off the Jade Falcon OmniFighters just long enough to jump out of system before Clans assault DropShips could get into firing range. She was certain that Clan Jade Falcon has sworn to destroy *Lorelei's Hope* in order to eliminate a remnant of the cursed Amaris legacy.

The *Amaris Star* was a combat transport of the Royalty class. It was based on the highly successful Invader class JumpShip, but was larger, carrying an additional DropShip, had an organic complement of over a dozen AeroSpace

fighters and other small craft. There were major changes in design. The Royalty class JumpShips were designed with sufficient armament to defend themselves against AeroSpace fighter attack as well as limited attacks by opposing DropShips. The vessel had superior speed and protection to the Invader class JumpShip, but was in no way a match for any of the Star League's combat JumpShips. While the Royalty class JumpShip is capable of over 0.8 G acceleration, any acceleration of over 0.4 G uses an excessive amount of the vessel's limited fuel supply. What happened to the *Amaris Star* was a good example of this. After sustaining damage to several of her fuel tanks, as well as her maneuvering drives, she ran out of fuel after maneuvering into the planetoid belt where she was later found. Her last remnants of fuel were used to stop her within the

planetoid belt before she could collide with one of the large chunks of rock.

The *Amaris Star* had dual Barracuda missile launch systems as well as several lasers in its bow. Covering the left and right flanks of both the command and engine sections are turrets mounting a pair of ballistic weapons covering both long and short ranges in addition to a number of energy weapons. One combination would be a Gauss Rifle, an SRM-6 with Artemis IV FCS, and a large pulse laser. A less sophisticated weapons mount combination would have an A/C 20, an A/C 5, a PPC, and four medium lasers. TekTeam has mounted various autocannons in the turret mounts. The Barracuda missile systems were replaced by an A/C 20, two LRM-20s, and six medium lasers. As supplies of Star League design weapons become available, TekTeam plans on retrofitting such advanced systems into the weapons systems of the *Lorelei's Hope*. Already, the nose and aft arcs have anti-missile systems covering them. The bow A/C 20 has also been replaced by a Gauss Rifle. The electronic equipment suite has also been improved by the addition of a Beagle Active Probe and the fitting of a Guardian ECM package. The original station keeping/maneuver drive was replaced by a variation of the Sunburst M220L drive used by the Star Lord class JumpShip. Currently, TekTeam is looking for additional recovered technology equipment to retrofit to the *Lorelei's Hope,* hoping to include a Lithium-Fusion Battery and captured Clan equipment. TekTeam is also actively recruiting for additional AeroSpace fighters and pilots to fill combat losses as well as to bring the AeroSpace fighter complement up to full strength. Unfortunately, TekTeam has not been able to procure the services of an assault DropShip like an Achilles or an Avenger to carry as additional fire support during sorties into Clan-occupied space.

Lorelei's Hope (formerly the Amaris Star)
variant on the Royalty Class JumpShip
Tonnage: 210,000
Dimensions:
  Length: 600 meters
  Sail Diameter: 1140 meters
Crew: 32 crew, 16 small craft pilots
DropShip Capacity: 4
Small Craft Capacity: 16
Drive System: K-F Mark VIII-A
First Introduced: 2695
Frequency of Sighting: Unique

Lorelei's Hope		Tons
K-F Drive Integrity: 5		160,000
Energy Collector Sail Integrity: 4		60
Maneuver Drive: 1.0 G		13,500
Docking Hard Points: 4		4,000
Small Craft Cubicles: 16		2,400
Small Craft Bay Doors: 4		0
Grav Deck: 1		100
Fuel (1 Thrust Point/ton): 500		500
Consumption: 39.52 tons/burn-day		
Bridge:		383
Heat Sinks: 250		130

Armor Factor (8 points/ton): 800		100
Command Section		
Nose	120	
Right Side	100	
Left Side	100	
Cargo Section		
Right Side	100	
Left Side	100	
Engine Section		
Right Side	100	
Left Side	100	
Engine	80	

Armament:
1 x Gauss Rifle
5 x LRM-20
4 x A/C-20
4 x A/C-5
3 x Large Lasers
4 x PPC
34 x Medium Lasers
3 x Anti-Missile Systems (AMS)
Armament Dispositions; (Fire Factor)
  Command Section:
    Nose: 2 x LRM-20, 1 x Gauss Rifle, 6 x Medium Lasers, 1 x AMS (7)
    Right Side: 1 x A/C-5, 1 x A/C-20, 1 x PPC, 4 x Medium Lasers (7)
    Left Side: 1 x A/C-5, 1 x A/C-20, 1 x PPC, 4 x Medium Lasers (7)
  Cargo Section:
    Right Side: 1 x LRM-20, 1 x Large Laser, 4 x Medium Lasers (4)
    Left Side: 1 x LRM-20, 1 x Large Laser, 4 x Medium Lasers (4)
  Engine Section:
    Right Side: 1 x A/C-5. 1 x A/C-20, 1 x PPC, 4 x Medium Lasers, 1 x AMS (6)
    Left Side: 1 x A/C-5, 1 x A/C-20, 1 x PPC, 4 x Medium Lasers, 1 x AMS (6)
    Engine: 1 x LRM-20, 1 x Large Laser, 4 x Medium Lasers (4)
Other Equipment: 1 x Beagle Proble, Guardian ECM
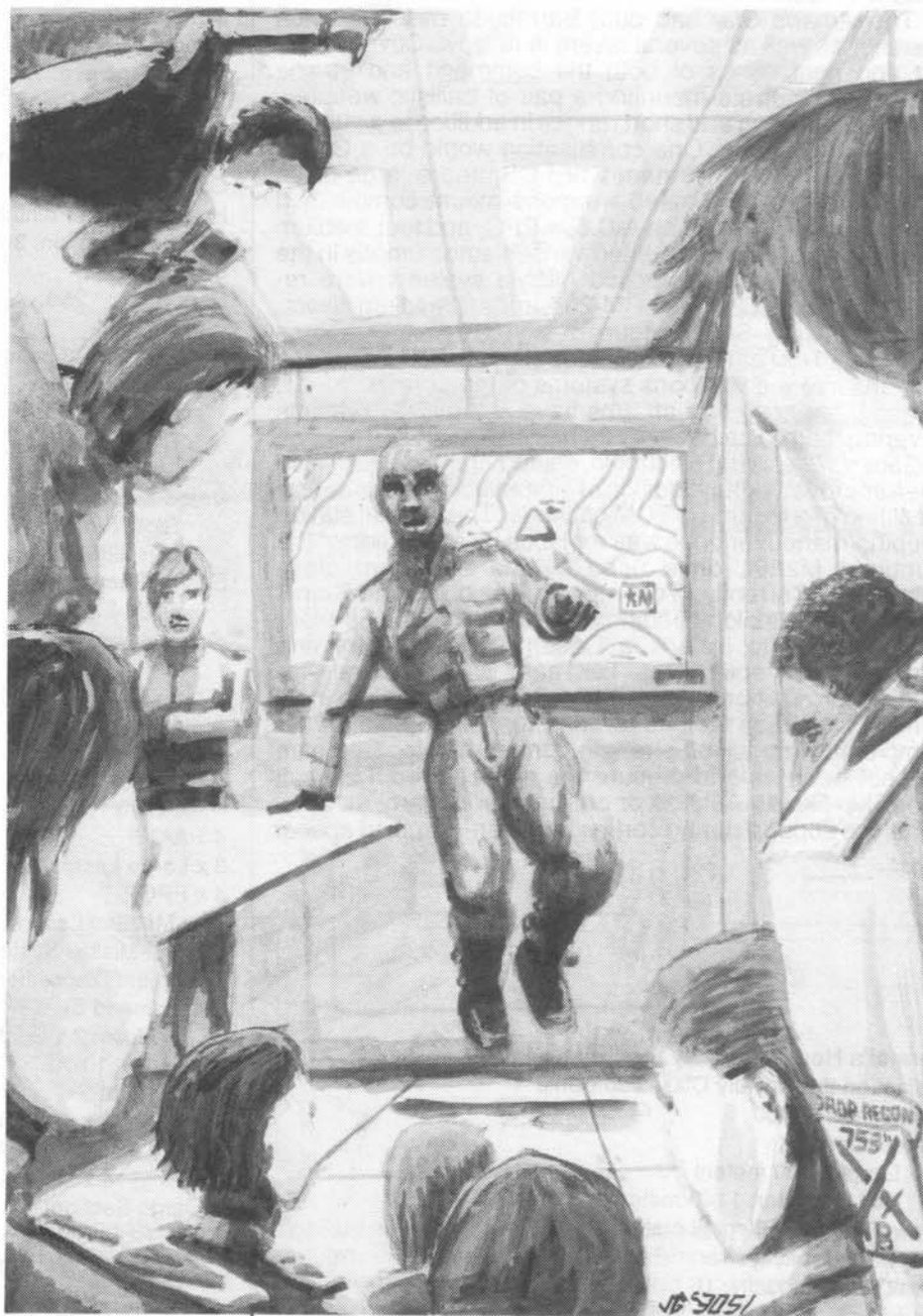
A Soldier's Luck

"Congratulations, Ladies and gentlemen! You, yes you, have won an all expense paid trip to your next target!" Captain Mabuto said with his characteristic cheerfulness.

Crammed into the tiny rec room turned briefing hall, aboard an old Fury class DropShip, a dozen officers and ranking NCOs dressed in tan infantry uniforms clung to handholds or floated in fairly stationary positions in front of the Captain. A holo projector that normally played commercial tri-V reruns but now flashed colorful images of terrain adorned the wall behind him. To the uninitiated, the soldiers could have easily been mistaken as regular line infantry. Except for shoulder patches that had 'DROP RECON' emblazoned upon it, they did in fact look like infantrymen, but these soldiers were Pathfinders.

Sometimes scouts, sometimes spies, a Pathfinder's job is to race unsupported ahead of the main body of a mission, slip through the enemy's defences, and land in hostile territory to scout and mark and mark good landing sites with electronic beacons for the troops to guide in on. We then get to camp beside the sites, to advise our troops if the situation changes.

While there are BattleMech Pathfinder units specially designed for heavily defended targets, real pathfinding missions require stealth, something multi-ton war machines find difficult to obtain. So the work is left to a bunch of old fashioned soldiers sneaking around in the bushes, trying to get to the proper landing zones without tipping off the enemy ahead of time.

After the chuckling from his audience subsided, "As all of you know, earlier this year the Clans invaded and captured the Twycross system. The high command has decided to try to take back one of the worlds they've taken in this latest wave of attacks. That world will be Twycross, ladies and gentlemen!"

"Some of you have seen combat against the Clans already, that is why you are here today, your experience will prove invaluable in this mission... You people will be the first FedCom troops to get ground-side in this invasion, and the 'Mech boys are relying on us to mark their Drop Zones so

they don't mess up and get themselves lost.

"With luck, we can take back the initiative and push the bastards back where they came from. Now I'll turn things over to Leftenant Perkins for the specifics."

When the sporadic applause ended and the Captain coasted away from the center of the crowd of commanders, the wiry intelligence officer, obviously unaccustomed to micro-gravity, pulled his way awkwardly along fixed tables. After locking his mag-boots firmly to the metal floor, withdrew a pointer from his uniform pocket and began to outline the Drop Zones of the first platoon.

As he went through the miscellaneous details that go into landing twenty eight men intact and all together on a hostile plane, I thought of the 'Big Picture' that had lead up to this operation. The Federated Commonwealth had begun to gain an advantage over the other powers of the Inner Sphere, and finally stood more than a fair chance of ending the Succession Wars for good.

Then the Clans came.

Hit by surprise, the rimward stretches of the Tamar March could do nothing but collapse under the brutal firepower of the Jade Falcons. I should know; I was stationed on Trellwan along with the rest of my Pathfinder company, we were pressed into service to defend the last remaining spaceport.

That company no longer exists.

Of my entire platoon, only myself and six other troopers were lucky enough to make it to the last ship to leave as its hatches clanked closed.

Now with a new unit, we were finally preparing to hit back. Just as Captain Mabuto had said, the FedCom brass had decided to make a counteroffensive on Twycross, an obscure world in the interior of the Tamar March.

The briefing material said the planet was a dry dust bowl with fierce winds and storms for most of the year. The only things of worth in the backwater system were a couple of 'Mech factories and a half billion people. The true reason for the assault was in the hopes that if we could retake the initiative, the Clans would have to stop the offensive to defend their ill-gotten gains.

That was the plan anyway, but as the intel officer began to describe our assigned Drop Zone, I could not help but remember those unholy Clan death machines as they tore through the port with impunity. Or stop hearing the shouts and screams as my troops fought and died trying to stop an armored enemy with small arms and flesh and bone echo through my mind. I felt an apprehensive sense of dread at the thought of facing them again, as if by pushing our luck this time, it would abandon us when we needed it the most.

"...the fighters and this ship will immediately disengage and begin a three gee burn toward the target, ETA to orbital zone...four hours." Perkins said amongst a chorus of groans from the assembled officers.

I was adding my own epigraph to the general grumblings of the small and stuffy compartment when it suddenly dawned on me, something the Leftenant had said. A transit time of four hours, at three Gs? That could only mean one thing.

Pirate point.

The standard method for Jumping into a system was to materialize above the system's star far enough out to be clear of most of its gravitational field. Unfortunately, this usually gives the target's defenders days or even weeks to prepare a welcoming committee.

The alternate technique is to use a non-standard Jump Point, or pirate point, as they are often called. Coming in close to the target world, a pirate point can cut transit time to hours instead of days.

Unfortunately, solar systems tend to be full of junk, meteorites, and comets just floating about unseen: to all of which JumpFields react rather poorly. Ships have been known to blow up, turn inside out, or simply vanish when they tried to materialize over solid matter. To use one you have to be either damn good or hopelessly desperate, and I was not quite sure in which category we fit.

As the Captain dismissed the staff meeting and we made out way through the narrow, conduit lined corridors, I managed to dismiss my fears as pre-battle jitters.

Once back in my platoon's cramped, cell-like troop bay, I was too busy to think of anything besides what my sergeants needed from supply, or why fourth squad still hadn't recalibrated the waldo frames of their man-pack particle cannons to compensate for Twycross's gravity. Even after a week in transit as the DropShip made its way to the assembled starship fleet, there always seemed a hundred things to do before we Jumped in-system, and geometrically less time to do them in. But as the time before the operation dwindled from hours to minutes, the soldiers of my command, veterans all, stowed their gear, put the finishing touches on weapons, and privately prepared themselves for the ordeal to come.

"T minus one minute to Jump," squawked the intercom mounted on the grey ceiling of the troop bay.

Strapped flat to my bunk, the least painful way to endure a high-G transit, I listened to the mutterings of nervous conversations, and the muted hum of the ship's ventilation system.

"T minus five...four...three...two...one"

There was a nauseating hum in my ears and the bunk above me and the well lit bay seemed to fade out of existence. Then a felling of infinite motion overwhelmed my head, but with a lurch of my stomach, the troop compartment was again solid and my body floating listlessly just as it had before moving an unimaginable distance in an instant.

"Position confirmed, we are go for separation!" the intercom said in conjunction with a baritone Klaxon and flashing amber lights.

My head still clouded from the after effects of the Jump, I was unprepared for the jarring bang as the DropShip disconnected from the docking collar of our JumpShip. From somewhere in front of me came a wrenching sound as an unidentified trooper lost control of his stomach. Unfortunately for the Jumpsick soldier, the ship's pilot choose that exact moment to light the fusion drive of the delta-winged DropShip. Kilo built on kilogram as the tissues of my body compressed with the G-forces and the unpleasant sound became a miserable gurgle that was joined by a shout of outrage, probably from the bunkmate beneath him.

Four hours may not seem that long, but waiting to land on an unfriendly planet with the equivalent of two people sitting on you, it can take forever. With every movement a conscious act, I spent most of my time memorizing mission information, sleeping, and worrying, mostly worrying.

At turn-around there was a brief respite of zero-G, with time to use the head, and time for the 'cookie catcher' detail to clean up the mess. Soon the ship began its deceleration

leg and the crushing pressure came back with a vengeance.

On the last half of the journey, the bridge began piping in commentary over the ship's intercom. As the ship entered Twycross' near orbital space, the fighters that had come along as escort and to carry out out the first air strikes on ground targets began to tangle with the Clan interceptors that had scrambled to meet them. Of course, they don't tell the grunts down in the bowels of the ship everything; would they even let us know when the ship was to be hit with a spread of missiles? So, deaf and blind, we lay listening to the creaks and groans from the ship as the pilot increased and decreased thrust or fired the vessel's maneuver thrusters to make the craft as hard a target to hit as possible. Only the sporadic ringing crashes of hits on the ship's armored hull and the near-constant hammering of its tail stinger autocannon gave us a concrete feeling of the reality of the battle raging in the vacuum around us.

"Pressure breach in the starboard weapons bay!" came after a particularly rattling impact.

Did that mean the hit had simply broken a seal in the compartment, venting its air into hard vacuum; or had it torn the ship's entire wing apart? I thought furiously as the ship continued its chaotic journey.

"Atmospheric entry in thirty seconds," the intercom said and the transit drives died out, bringing the welcome relief of free fall once again.

The pilot had come in fast and hard, hoping to speed past the dueling fighters, relying on dumping the Fury's excess velocity in heat and friction with the planet's upper atmosphere. At first the whistling passage of rarefied gas marked our contact, but soon the whistle had built up to a roar as friction and drag pulled at the aerospace craft, converting the ship's solar speed into scorching of heat.

Slowly the noise abated and the ship lost speed as it fell into thicker, more substantial air. From somewhere aft of us came a rumbling whine of the air-breathing maneuver drives as they came on line, once again providing thrust, but this time directed rearward much like a conventional aircraft.

The best thing about finally being within the bounds of Twycross' atmosphere was that even with the engines pushing at maximum thrust, there was little force to affect us besides turbulence and a gentle swaying as the ship cut through unstable air as I moved with muscles that screamed with pain after hours of neglect and high-Gs.

"Let's get ready for the party, Sergeant," I said to Staff Sergeant Collier as he bounded into the women's bunk row with a double-barreled blazer rifle in hand as if the past four hours had been spent aboard a luxury liner.

"Al..l..ll..right, people, get your lazy butts in gear! Squad Leaders! I wan't status reports in five minutes," his voice booming off every wall in the bay as he disappeared into the body crowded corridors between rows of triple stacked bunks.

Like a well-oiled machine, the platoon broke out weapons, gear, and ammunition from their individual lockers. Laser rifles, missile launchers, and the rapid fire blazer rifles; in the days before the Clans, only heavy assault units carried such high-powered weaponry. Now such armament was necessary just to give us an even chance against the enemy battle armor.

As Charlie Platoon, we would be the next to last group to drop. Over an hour's time, we heard A and B platoons make

their way to the aft vehicle bay where they would exit from its open hatch. Eventually, we would get the call, and make our way to the bay as well. Compared to the bunk-lined troop bay, the cargo bay was absolutely cavernous, twenty meters long and ten wide, with nothing within its tie-down metal walls besides a cluster of para packs and parachute equipped supply containers.

Each trooper picked up a para pack, checked the conditional of its external rigging and electronic altimeter, and slung its harness across his back. At the one-minute buzzer, I called attention. Every eye in the platoon was upon me.

I've personally never liked giving speeches and pep-talks, preferring to let the platoon sergeant and the squad leaders do the morale building bit. But it's a traditional facet of being a leader of soldiers to give the prebattle speech. Pitching my voice down to sound more confident than I felt, I let all twenty seven of the people in my command have it.

"You all know why we're here. The enemy has been kicking our ass all over the realm, pushing us back whenever they feel like it. Well, now it's our turn! We're going to do what we are trained for, leading the way! PATHFINDERS! It's pay back time!"

The platoon let out the obligatory emotional cheer and the massive ramp to the bay began to open with a loud thump. The troops turned about clumsily under the weight of their bulky parafoils and awaited the green light to go.

Almost immediately the bay was filled with cold wind as the soldiers stood in nervous anticipation. Then the jump light flashed to green and first the supply containers were pushed out of the hatch, and fourth squad disappeared behind it, followed by the third, then the second, until I stood on the edge of the bay looking down. It was near dawn in this area of Twycross and the ground was still an indistinct dark carpet but the horizon was lt with a slash of orange by the promised day. Taking one last look back into the bay, I walked down the end of the ramp and into nothing.

The cold slipstream blasted me away from the DropShip, then the transport was gone, and I was free falling through a dusty copper sky. We started the jump at '2000 meters', and as I looked at the altimeter strapped across my harness, the red digits had already dwindled to '1800' and they continued to spin down. At '1000 m', I pulled the rip cord that deployed the grey nylon parafoil with a pop and snap.

After making sure the 'chute was good and its control lines responded positively, I slipped the infrared vision eyepiece out of its recess in the front edge of my helmet and over my right eye. The triangular tops of many parafoils stood out sharply from the cold ground below as they circled tightly toward the ground.

Only a few hundred meters off the desert floor, I took the opportunity to look over the surrounding terrain as a cross wind buffeted me. The place we had been put down to secure as a potential landing zone was a shallow valley within the sheltered foothills of the Wind Break Mountains. It was about as flat as land gets on Twycross, the expanse of rolling windswept sand dotted with small barrel cactus and eroded rock outcroppings.

The only ground I could see that looked even remotely defensible was a small bump in the ridge that the maps said was a hill called 3490, to the southwest close to where the valley opened up into the wasteland of the Plain of Curtains. I checked my I/R. Aside from the airborne humans, there

JG '3051

was the welcome absence of heat sources from any other living thing.

As I came in for a landing I angled in on the largest clump of soldiers. Pulling down hard on the twin D-ring lines, I slowed my fall just before reaching the ground and came to a gentle touchdown close to the spiny hump of a cactus.

Before the wind could take control of my canopy and give me an involuntary tour of the country side, I unsnapped the buckles where my jump harness met the shroud lines, releasing me and collapsing the fabric envelope.

After chasing down the flapping material in the dark, I made my way toward the nearest group of soldiers. After rounding up Sergeant Collier and the squad leaders and getting a full accounting of everyone, we set off foot the hilltop.

As we attempted to pull the supply containers the short distance across the desert, we discovered that the narrow wheels of the boxes would sink into the sand or catch on a cactus every few meters. After futile attempts at alternately pushing and pulling the containers, we realized that they were simply not designed for operating in deserts. With time wasting, I chose the simplest solution. Assigned each squad to a box, we carried them across the cool predawn desert like ants at a picnic.

We crested the hill just as Twycross' bright orange sun broke through the summit of the eastern mountains. Almost immediately, the temperature began to climb, and we discovered one of Twycross' more charming features, the ability of its wind-blown fine red sand to get into everything. From the meal packs we were trying to eat for breakfast to the weapons that had to keep us alive, it settled upon anything not moving. My men quickly began to curse the gritty dust.

The hill itself was roughly oval in shape, crowned by broken and weathered granite blocks. With the platoon occupied in digging slit trenches and bunkers, using parafoil material to keep the dry sand from simply caving in on the excavations, the communications tech and I succeeded in preventing the wind from blowing our portable dish antenna over for long enough to transmit a situation report to unseen receivers in the brassy sky.

Aside from the nuisances caused by the wind and sand, the mission had gone very well. By noon we had the bunkers and their connecting trenches finished, with good visibility of the surrounding terrain even through the blowing sand. I allowed my soldiers a chance to relax. As the heat of the day built, the surrounding rotund cacti rapidly became festooned with helmets and armored vests.

With less than an hour before friendly reinforcements were due to arrive, and despite the fact that we were still stranded in enemy territory, it looked as if my earlier uneasiness had just been imagination. This mission would have the best kind of ending for a Pathfinder; a quiet one. But as I was finishing a ration pack of sand, rice, and mystery meat, the call went out.

"Toads in sector three!"

Forgetting my unpalatable meal I snatched up my helmet and dashed across the hilltop. Dropping down into the trench next to the sentry who had called out the warning, I raised the electronic binoculars in the direction he pointed and peered through the swirling dust up the valley toward the vaulting mountains.

At first the only thing I could see were five indistinct shapes that looked more like mirages than the brutal killing machines they were. Then the dust cleared slightly and I could clearly see the oversized arms and gaping mouth-like arrangement of its frontal chest armor.

Without their backpack missile racks, the Toads looked lees like armored amphibians and more like mechanical apes trudging through the sand. They were spaced about at 10 meter intervals along the low spot between two dunes, moving almost perpendicular to our fortified hill.

"Good eyes, Jericson. Lord! If we could call artillery down on them, we'd bag two of 'em at least!" I said as SSgt Collier ducked into the position.

"You want to hit them?"
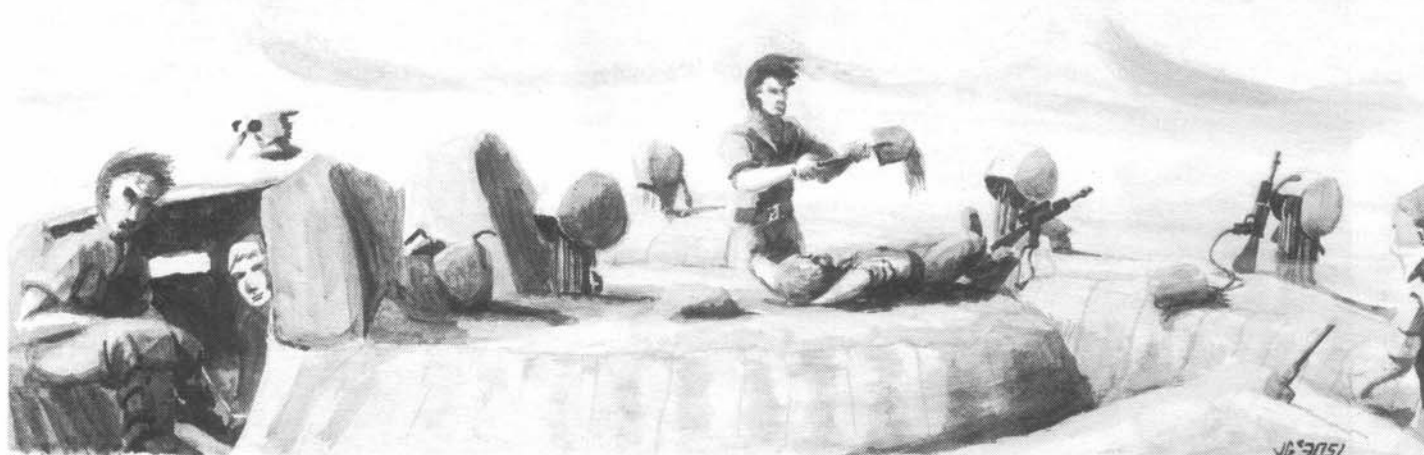
"No, let them go. I don't think they've seen us yet, but if they want a fight, we'll let them pick it," I said, scanning the rest of the ridge.

Bracing the binoculars by resting my elbows on the sandy parapet, I looked back the way the Toads had come, dialing up maximum magnification. Through the blowing sand, the dark shape of rocks took on ominous shapes, but the ones that remained stationary could be discounted as harmless. Then one seemed to fission into two, then three. Zooming in on the lead shape, I could see the menacing silhouettes of more armored suits moving directly toward our position.

Swinging around, I tried to find the first set of enemy troops. The horizon was empty, but it did not make me feel any better. With the wind and sand, the enemy could have a company of BattleMechs out there and we wouldn't know it until they were pratically on top of us.

"That does it then, we've been made," I said, looking at the fast approaching group of Toads, "Get ready for a twin pronged attack from the east and south. Move the PPCs to cover both sections."

"Yes, Ma'am," he said, and was off, bellowing orders and slapping soldiers on the backs of their heads if they had not put on their helmets.

The binox's rangefinder was useless in the cursed sand, leaving me to approximate the distances. It *looked* like they were still at most a half kilometer into the valley. Rapidly, there were eight, then ten figures approaching. Two squads to the east and one out of sight in the south, that makes fifteen so far; almost a full platoon. Without reinforcements we might hold them off, but if they go 'Mech support, all bets would be off.

There was a nearby clank of metal as one of the weapons squad's soldiers and his man-pack PPC set up in a crude bunker built from small boulders and the remains of a supply container. Elsewhere men and women charged the capacitors on their laser rifles and lowered their dark anti-laser visors over eyes. The figures stood motionless atop a low rise, just far of the last reflective range marker put out by the weapons team this morning.

"What are they doing?" asked one of the privates beside me as she clicked off the safety on her missile launcher.

"Bidding to see who gets the honor of dying first, no doubt," I muttered derisively, remembering my own experience and endless intelligence briefings, "PPCs, do you have the range to target?"

"They're just out of range, Leftenant, but I think I can hit 'em," one of the gunners responded eagerly.

I remembered a lecture on the strange battle tactics of the Clans. *The Clans have very formal rules of engagement for their battles which they call 'trials'. As such these trials are subject to their practice of bidding, which obligates a commander to use the minimum troops necessary to accomplish his mission. However, if battle etiquette is breached by the other side, he is no longer held by the rule, and can attack with all the forces at his disposal.*

"No, wait for their charge," I said, hoping the enemy commander would behave true to form and give us a chance to defeat him piecemeal.

Through the binoculars, I could see the two center suits, apparently in conversation, waving their arms. Then the five Toads to the right sprung into the sky and brilliant lances cut through the airborne sand to probe our hill.

There is something bone-chilling about the keening hiss of a high power laser followed a sharp explosion as the energy vaporized whatever solid matter it encountered. The defused laser light left blinding purple streaks across the retinas of my eyes before I could drop the photo-reactive visor of my helmet.

"Let 'em have it!"

My earlier anxiety vaporized in the heat of combat as red lasers lanced in and the duller green of laser rifles and the dazzling white of M-PPCs returned the fire. The soldier next to me raised her SRM launcher, aimed, and fired. With a crack-whoosh, the rockets raced down the hill to strike a Toad squarely in its faceplate just as it came down from a
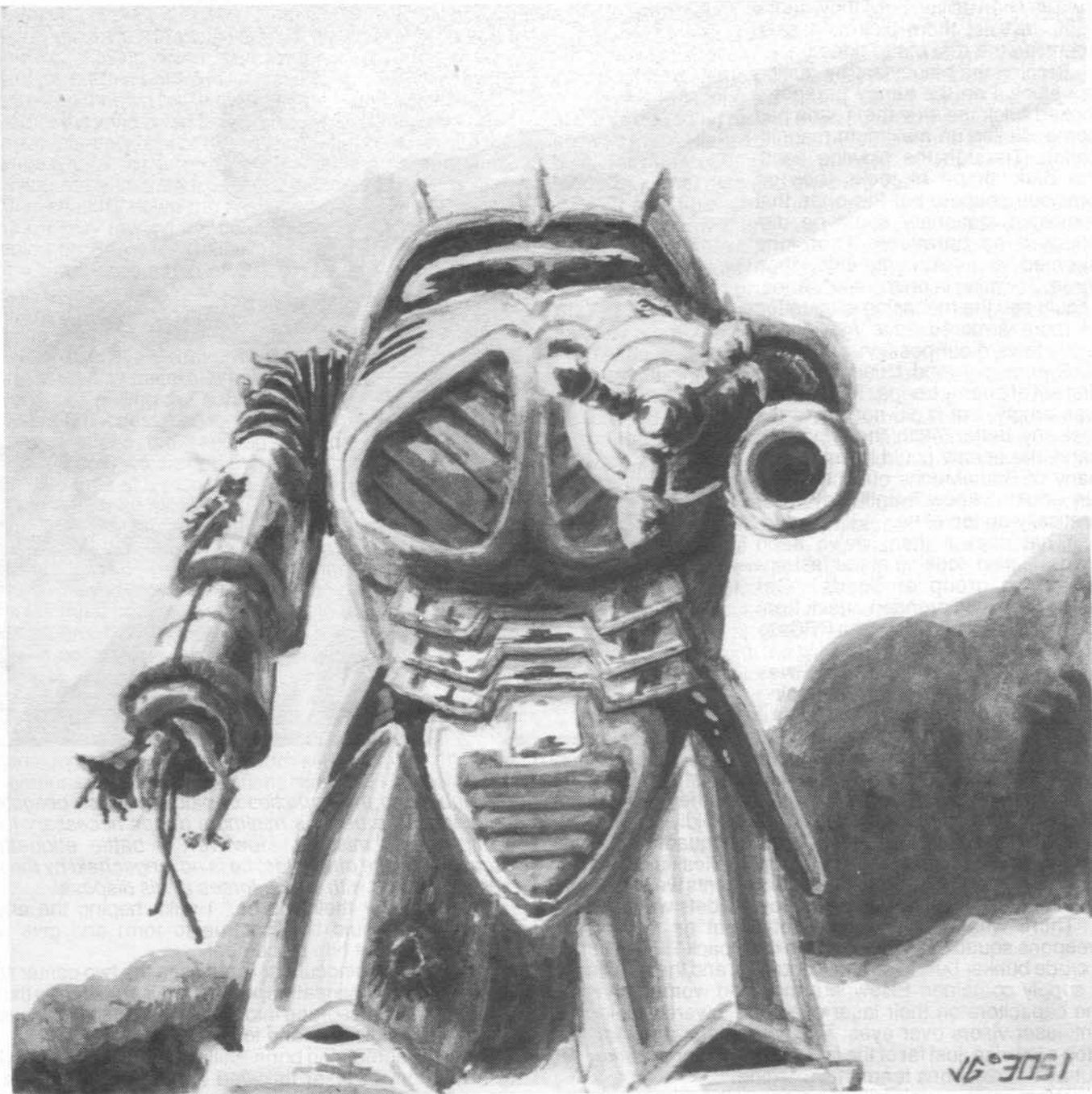
jump. The flashes of high explosives blew the squat head off the suit and it toppled lifelessly over.

As the gunner turned and gave me a smile and thumbs-up sign a beam struck the side of her helmet, vaporizing her life away in a brilliant instant.

I had no time to feel remorse over the death, for as her smoking body fell to the bottom of the trench, first one, then two Clan laser bursts blasted closer and closer to the bunker where the M-PPC fired.

"PPC, get out of there! They're zeroing in on you!"

The man obeyed, but as the weapon's red-hot muzzle withdrew from the firing slit, a shot found its mark. The bunker exploded in a shower of metal and rock fragments.

Ducking the pelting impacts, I gazed down slope at the attacking Toads. The battle was but a few seconds old, but they were already down two armored suits, with the other three under withering fire. But they kept coming, making great hopping leaps that ate up the distance.

"Bandit two, this is Bandit one." I yelled the battlespeech into my radio against the thunder of combat. "What's your status, over?"

"This is Bandit three. The Sarg bought it! We're taking a beating over here; they took out our PPC, and I've got four casualties so far!" came the frantic response.

Damn, with Collier down there was no one on that side of the hill to direct the troops' fire! "What's the enemy doing there?" I asked.

There was an explosion behind me from where second squad was, echoed in my headset by a burst of static. After a pause the squad leader came back on, "I see one, no, two squads! Repeat, two squads of enemy Toads moving toward my position, over."

Shee, this just keeps getting better and better, I thought. We'd missed one of the enemy groups, and now they were bearing down on the right side of the hill.

"Bandit four, redeploy and support Bandit three's position now," I said.

By moving the third squad to support the beleagered second, we would be able to bring more firepower to bear against the enemy, but it left that side of the hill undefended. It was a chance I had to take, if the enemy had troops on that side it wouldn't make much difference. They would simply overwhelm us.

I directed the fire of the soldiers around me, adding my own from the rifle I'd taken from a fallen man. Firing wildly at the attackers, we tried to burn them down. They seemed to avoid or shrug off continous hits until they reached the bottom of the hill.

The moment the first Toad touched down, it was sent up again by the detonation of a half-kilo of shaped charge explosive from an anti-armor mine it had landed on.

The other two triggered mines when they came down, and one of them fell on another of the devices, blowing it apart. The concentrated bursts of over ten laser weapons reduced the cripple Toads to riddled junk.

The troops around me let up a ragged cheer that was cut short by a roll of rapid fire explosions that dropped a soldier screaming, clutching at his bloodied face. I looked up and saw with cold horror the *other* squad of armored troopers running and jumping in the tracks of their comrades.

The fresh enemy were already halfway to the hill when we started opening fire on them, and I knew we would never bring them down before they reached the top of the hill. The subjection of the hill top to the savaging of high-powered laser fire had blown most of the protective trenchworks into craters, leaving precious little cover for my remaining troops to fight from. I had to get them to new positions further back on the hill.

"Fall back to second squad's position! Keep down an..."

I never finished. There was a shrieking blast behind me and I was flung up and dumped into the sand.

The next time I opened my eyes, I was lying on my back near a large, laser-scarred boulder. At first I was disoriented, trying to remember where I was. Then it came back to me; the battle, the Toads, and my command. I tried to jump up and instantly regretted it; waves of nausea washed over me. I slowly sat up, leaning against the rock, and tried to key in the radio built into my helmet. My hand came away bloody; my helmet was missing. Apparently something heavy and moving very fast had torn it away and cut a gash across my head from behind my right ear all the way to the

temple. Luckily, it hadn't hit directly at the base of my skull, where it probably would have cleanly taken my head off.

Dizzily, I looked around my position. Although I did not know where exactly on the hill I was, I could still see fighting going on in other areas, so I couldn't have been out that long. The explosion had deafened me. I could not hear anything but a loud buzzing ring, which made the spasmodic flashes and smoke of battle seem surrealistic.

I edged my way up the rock to a standing position, with more blood running down my cheek and dripping from my chin. Looking around the corner of the boulder, I saw an enemy armor suit moving rapidly toward me!

Ducking back around the rock I pressed my back against it as the throbbing pain darkened my vision. My laser pistol was missing from its holster, so I drew my vibroblade from its sheath and pulled a solitary hand grenade that had managed to cling to my tac harness. Wrapping a finger around the arming pin, I waited for the Toad to come and smash me. I'd take the malfer with me! The enemy soldier, looking like some kind of miniature, alien BattleMech, strode by with rapid, powerful movements. It seemed unaffected by the many gaping, sore-like laser burns all over its body.

It didn't see me! Was its pilot blind? For a split second, I had the insane impulse to tap it on the shoulder and yell "Hi there!" to its startled inhabitant. Resisting the urge, I lunged at it with the vibroblade instead.

The weapon bit into the middle of its back, sinking to the hilt in the unknown contents of the suit. The Toad paused, jerked once, and fell forward on its face.

I nearly collapsed in relief, but then the suit began to twitch, and its limbs started to gather under it in an attempt to rise.

"NO!" I screamed.

Jumping upon the Toad's back, I was about to jab at the rousing monster with my vibroblade when I saw a large blast hole a little higher up on its back than my first stab wound. With no time to lose, I pulled the pin from the grenade, jammed the cylinder into the hole, and threw myself clear of the thing.

The grenade exploded with a curiously muffled thump through my shocked ears. The only thing that showed what had happened was a curl of grey smoke and a viscous black fluid that leaked from the seams and holes in its armor.

I must have lost a lot more blood than I thought because it seemed to take forever to summon the strength to try to stand again. When I did, and then looked up, I was rewarded with the sight of another one of the Toads standing in front of me, this one in better shape except for a shot-up right weapons arm. It raised its other wickedly clawed arm and pointed the weapon slung there at me.

"What are you waiting for?" I yelled. Giving up, I sank back to the sand and stared up at it, trying to look past the dark faceplate and into the eyes of my killer. "Do it, you son of a..."

Something struck it on the back of the head, and the Toad stepped back and turned, revealing a soldier with a look of crazed fury on his face and an entrenching tool clutched in his hands, bringing it up for another swing.

He didn't get a chance; the armored suit almost casually lashed out with its arm, knocking him off his feet.

The terror turned back to me, but something made it stop again. It froze as something made the ground shake; small

pebbles danced off the ground. *An earthquake?* I thought groggily, unsure of anything I sensed.

The Toad fired the jump jets mounted in its lower legs, and leapt into the sky, leaving a cloud of hot dust behind. Confused, I followed the suit in its flat arching trajectory until a lancing flash of lightning caught it in midflight, blowing it into burning chunks.

At first I thought someone from the heavy weapons squad had gotten it, but then I remembered both guns had been knocked out early in the fight. Turning my head slowly and painfully, I looked at my savior.

Even standing on the sandy floor of the valley, I had to look up at the bulbous head of the BattleMech, a Griffin class, judging by the steaming, rifle-like weapon clenched in its right fist and its massive shoulder armor. Elsewhere behind the metal giant, other war machines descended into the valley on brightly burning jet packs. As I looked back at the 'Mech, its pilot waved cheerfully from behind the armored canopy of his cockpit. The insignia of the Tenth Lyran Guards was stenciled across its left chest.

And, as they say, the rest is history.

I spent a lot of time after pick up thinking about how much luck, both good and bad, rules the lives of the soldiers that throw themselves upon the mercies of fate. Sometimes I feel as if luck and chance were a set of scales with life in the balance. With luck on your side you can succeed and survive, even if terrible odds are against you, as I or the soldier that attacked a Toad with a shovel both did.

The equation has a dark side too. If bad luck upsets the balance, death will take you just as it did SSgt Collier and all the others that fell that bloody day on a nameless hill. When I'm feeling melancholy, or when I'm preparing for another mission, I think of all those I have seen die. I wonder when I, too, will be unlucky.

Captain Andrea Fuller is the third child of Lord Vance Fuller, the head of House Fuller, a barony on the Federated-Commonwealh world of Fincastle. Though the family is noble, with several MechWarriors in each generation, it is traditional for the third born to become infantry officers. Ms Fuller entered the Sakhara Academy in 3042. In 3046, she graduated with honors and received her commission and a position wit the 24th Royal Fincastle Infantry Regiment. She then served in the Capellan March for two years before volunteering for the Airborne Pathfinders. The Twycross campaign was her third combat insertion, and at the time of writing, Captain Fuller had seen action twice more against the Clans. The last engagement resulted in her promotion to Captain and the command of C Company, 783rd Pathfinder Battalion.
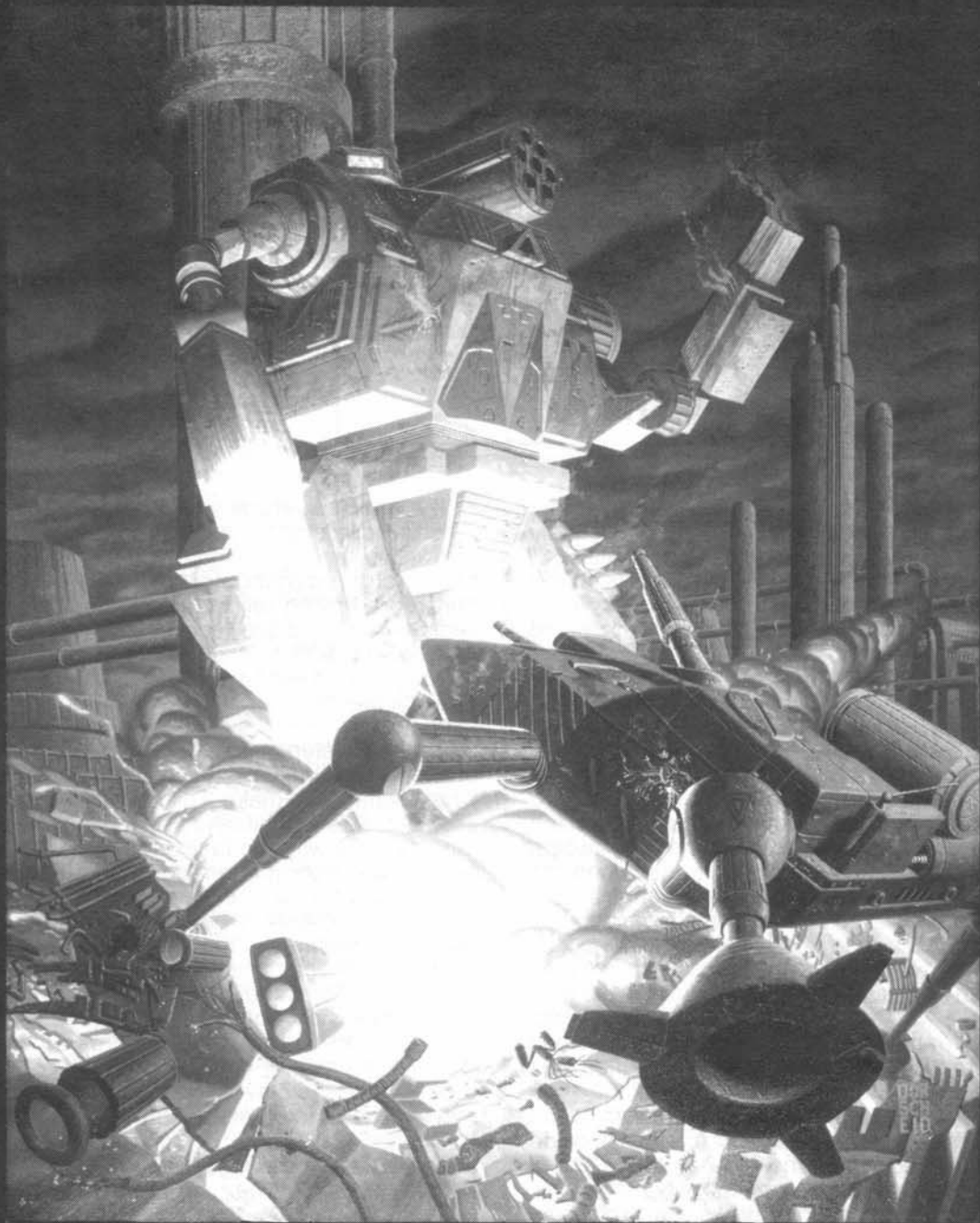
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