



BATTLETECH™

A TIME OF WAR

• **CATALYST GAME LABS** •

THE UNIVERSE BEFORE YOU

Welcome to the BattleTech Universe	16
Starting Out	16
What is a Roleplaying Game?	16
What's Needed to Play	17
A Universe at War	21
House Davion (Federated Suns)	21
House Kurita (Draconis Combine)	21
House Liao (Capellan Confederation)	21
House Marik (Free Worlds League)	22
House Steiner (Lyran Alliance)	22
ComStar	23
Word of Blake	23
The Clans	23
The Periphery	24
A Brief History of BattleTech	25
Colonizing the Stars	25
Age of War	25
Star League	26
The Succession Wars	26
Clan Invasion	26
Civil War	27
Jihad	27
The BattleTech Universe	31
Core Rulebooks	31
Technical Readouts and Record Sheets	31
The Jihad	31
Handbooks	32
Historicals	32
Maps, Terrain and Miniatures	32
Fiction	32
BattleCorps	32
Choose Your Rules	33
Gamemaster Adjudication	33
Fiction vs. Rules	33

BASIC GAMEPLAY

Overview	34
Characters	34
Character Record Sheet	34
Attributes	34
Traits	36
Skills	36
Personal Data	37
Combat Data	37
Biographical Data	37
Inventory	37
Vehicle Data	37
Actions	38
Attribute Checks	38
Skill Checks	39
Opposed Actions	39
Basic Action Resolution	40
Edge	42

CHARACTER CREATION

Overview	48
Choosing the Character Concept	48
Character Creation Basics	49
Points-Only Character Creation (Optional)	51
Prerequisites and Accumulating Experience	51
Choosing Life Modules	52
Stage 0: Affiliation	52
Stage 1: Early Childhood	52
Stage 2: Late Childhood	52
Stage 3: Higher Education (Optional)	52
Stage 4: Real Life (Optional)	53
Stage 0 Modules: Affiliations	53
Universal Experience Points	53

Changing Affiliations	53
Stage 1 Modules: Early Childhood	65
Back Woods	65
Blue Collar	65
Born Mercenary Brat	65
Farm	65
Fugitives	65
Nobility	66
Slave	66
Street	66
Trueborn Creche	66
War Orphan	66
White Collar	66
Stage 2 Modules: Late Childhood	67
Adolescent Warfare	67
Back Woods	67
Clan Apprenticeship	67
Farm	67
Freeborn Sibko	67
High School	68
Mercenary Brat	68
Military School	68
Preparatory School	68
Space Family	69
Street	69
Trueborn Sibko	69
Stage 3 Modules: Higher Education	70
Overview	70
Choose Your Schooling	70
Age	71
Repeating Stage 3	71
Stage 4 Modules: Real Life	74
Age	74
Repeating State 4	74
Agitator	74
Civilian Job	74
Clan Watch Operative	74
Clan Warrior Washout	75
Cloister Training	75
Combat Correspondent	75
ComStar/Word of Blake	75
Cover Operations	76
Dark Caste	77
Explorer	77
Goliath Scorpion Seeker	78
Guerilla Insurgent	78
Merchant	78
Ne'er-do-well	79
Organized Crime	79
Postgraduate Studies	79
Protomech Pilot Training	79
Scientist Caste Service	80
Solaris Insider	80
Solaris VII Games	80
Think Tank	80
Tour of Duty	80
To Serve and Protect	81
Travel	82
Purchasing Attributes, Traits and Skills	85
Determining Final Levels	85
Opposed Traits and Canceling Experience	87
Buying Additional Experience Points	89
Optional Points-Only Design System	89
Final Touches	91
Defining Features	91
Character Background	91
Purchasing Equipment	91
Sample Characters	93
MechWarrior	94
Tanker	95
Aerospace Pilot	96
Elemental	97
Scout	98
Faceman	99
Renegade Warrior	100
Battlefield Tech	101

TRAITS

Overview	106
Trait Points	106
Character and Vehicle Traits	106
Positive, Negative and Flexible Traits	106
Multiple Traits	107
Opposing Traits	107
Variable-Level Traits	107
Trait Descriptions	108
Alternate ID	108
Ambidextrous	108
Animal Antipathy	108
Animal Empathy	108
Attractive	108
Bloodmark	109
Citizenship/Trueborn	109
Combat Paralysis	110
Combat Sense	110
Compulsion	110
Connections	111
Custom Vehicle	112
Dark Secret	112
Dependents	113
Design Quirk	113
Enemy	113
Equipped	116
Exceptional Attribute	116
Extra Income	116
Fast Learner	117
Fit	117
G-Tolerance	118
Glass Jaw	118
Good Hearing	118
Good Vision	118
Gregarious	118
Gremlins	118
Handicap	118
Illiterate	119
Impatient	119
Implant/Prosthetic	119
In For Life	120
Introvert	121
Lost Limb	121
Natural Aptitude	121
Pain Resistance	121
Patient	121
Phenotype	121
Poison Resistance	122
Poor Hearing	122
Poor Vision	122
Property	123
Rank	123
Reputation	124
Sixth Sense	125
Slow Learner	125
Tech Empathy	125
Thick-Skinned	125
Thin-Skinned	126
Title/Bloodname	126
Toughness	127
Transit Disorientation Syndrome	127
Unattractive	128
Unlucky	128
Vehicle Level	128
Wealth	128

SKILLS

Skills Overview	140
Using Skills	140
Linked Attributes	140
Target Numbers	141
Complexity Rating	141
Subskills	141
Specialties	141
Tiered Skills	141



Available Skills	141
Acrobatics	141
Acting	142
Administration	143
Animal Handling	143
Appraisal	143
Archery	143
Art	144
Artillery	144
Career	144
Climbing	144
Communications	144
Computers	145
Cryptography	145
Demolitions	146
Disguise	146
Driving	146
Escape Artist	147
Forgery	147
Gunnery	147
Interest	147
Interrogation	148
Investigation	148
Language	148
Leadership	148
Martial Arts	149
MedTech	149
Melee Weapons	149
Navigation	150
Negotiation	150
Perception	151
Piloting	151
Prestidigitation	152
Protocol	152
Running	153
Science	153
Security Systems	153
Sensor Operations	153
Small Arms	153
Stealth	154
Strategy	154
Streetwise	154
Support Weapons	154
Surgery	154
Survival	156
Swimming	156
Tactics	156
Technician	157
Thrown Weapons	158
Tracking	158
Training	159
Zero-G Operations	159

THE FIRES OF HELL: RECON 160

COMBAT

Overview	164
The Combat Turn	164
Initiative Phase	164
Action Phase	164
End Phase	164
Initiative Phase	164
Individual vs. Squad and Team Initiative	165
Initiative Modifiers	166
Holding Action	166
Action Phase	166
Movement Actions	167
Movement Modes and Maneuvers	167
Terrain and Encumbrance	169
Movement From Previous Turn	170
Command Cohesion	170
Resolving Actions in Personal Combat	171
Ranged Combat Resolution	171
Ranged Attack Roll	171
Ranged Line of Sight	171
Other Combat Modifiers	172
Special Ranged Attack Effects	172
Melee Combat Resolution	175

Melee Combat Rolls	175
Melee Combat Limits	175
Range and Line of Sight	175
Other Combat Modifiers	175
Special Melee Effects	175
Damage Resolution	177
Damage Notation	177
Standard Damage vs. Fatigue	179
Standard Ranged Attack Damage	179
Standard Melee Attack Damage	180
Continuous Damage	180
Falling Damage	181
Fatigue	182
Damage Effects	182
Injury Modifiers	182
Fatigue Modifiers	183
Consciousness Check	184
Bleeding Effect	184
Death	184
Tactical Kill	184
Stun	184
Traits and Damage Effects	184
Armor and Barrier Effects	185
Armor and Barrier Types	185
AP vs. BAR	185
Armor Degradation	186
Stacked Armor	188
End Phase	189
Bleeding and Continuous Damage	189
Fatigue	189
Resolving Extended Actions and Automatic Events	189
Optional Personal Combat Rules	189
Morale Checks	189
Hit Locations	190
Knockdown Damage	192
Lethality Reduction	192
Healing and Recovery	192
General Healing Rules	192
Normal (Unassigned) Healing	193
Assisted Healing	193
Surgery	193

THE FIRES OF HELL: HEAVY ARTILLERY 196

TACTICAL COMBAT ADDENDUM

Overview	200
Vehicular vs. Infantry Units	201
The Combat Turn	202
Initiative Phase	204
Rolling Tactical Initiative	204
Tactical Action Sequence	205
Tactical Action Resolution	205
Action Phase	206
Action Sequence	206
Movement Actions	206
Vehicular Combat	209
Weapon Damage Conversion	211
Margin of Success/Failure in Tactical Combat	212
Vehicular Weapon Traits	212
Battle Armor Weapons	214
Damage to Vehicle Pilots/MechWarriors	218
Physical Attacks	218
End Phase	218
Heat (Mechs and Fighters)	218
Special Pilot Abilities	219
Gunnery Abilities	219
Piloting Abilities	222
Miscellaneous Abilities	225

THE FIRES OF HELL: JOURNEY 226

SPECIAL CASE RULES

Planetary Conditions	230
-----------------------------	-----

Movement Modifiers	230
Terrain Types	230
Clear	231
Vegetation	231
Rough	232
Ice	232
Water	232
Paved	232
Urban	232
Magma	233
Terrain Conditions	233
Soft Terrain	233
Fragile Terrain	234
Dynamic Terrain	235
Weather Conditions	236
Exotic Conditions	237
High/Low Gravity	237
Creatures	238
Encounters	239
Creature Attributes	239
Creature Skills	239
Creature Combat	240
Creature Compendium: Terrestrials	241
Creature Compendium: Extraterrestrials	242
Creatures Table	245
Diseases	245
Medical Maintenance	245
Random Disease Effects	248

THE FIRES OF HELL: STORMING THE OBJECTIVE 250

EQUIPMENT

Overview	254
Supply and Demand	254
Equipment Ratings	254
Acquiring Gear	256
Using Equipment	259
Equipment Data	259
Repairs	259
The Warrior's Catalog	260
Melee and Archaic Weapons	260
Archaic Melee Weapons	260
Archaic Ranged Weapons	260
Modern Melee Weapons	260
Small Arms	264
Ballistic Weapons	264
Energy Weapons	265
Flechette Weapons	266
Gauss Weapons	272
Gyrojet Weapons	272
Miscellaneous Small Arms	272
Support Weapons	272
Machine Guns	272
Grenade Launchers and Mortars	274
Missile Launchers	276
Recoilless Rifles	276
Support Energy Weapons	276
Support Gauss Weapons	276
Explosives	277
Standard Explosives	277
Demolitions	279
Ordnance	279
Specialty Ammunitions	279
Weapon Accessories	285
Personal Protective Equipment	287
Flak Armor	287
Ablative Armor	287
Ablative/Flak (AB/FLAK) Armor	287
Ballistic Plate Armor	287
Neo-Chainmail Armor	287
Myomer Armor	287
Concealed Armor	289
Combat Armor Accessories	289
Standard Armor Kits	291
Exotic Armor	291
Hostile Environment Gear	291
Stealth Gear	297

THE UNIVERSE BEFORE YOU

BASIC GAMEPLAY

CHARACTER CREATION

TRAITS

SKILLS

COMBAT

TACTICAL COMBAT ADDENDUM

SPECIAL CASE RULES

EQUIPMENT

GAMEMASTERING GUIDE

INDEX



Non-Combat Attire	297
Battle Armor and Exoskeletons	298
Special Game Rules	300
Electronics	300
Communications Equipment	300
Audio/Video/Trideo Equipment	300
Computers	301
Surveillance Gear	302
Optics	303
Remote Sensors	305
Power Packs and Rechargers	306
Power Packs	306
Rechargers	307
Miscellaneous Gear	307
Espionage Gear and Security	307
Repairs/Salvage Gear	309
Other Miscellaneous Gear	309
Health Care	311
Medical Equipment	311
Prosthetics	314
Limb and Organ Replacements	314
Elective Implants	316
Drugs and Poisons	317
Special Game Rules	318
Personal Vehicles	321
Special Game Rules	323
Fuel	323
THE FIRES OF HELL: BURNOUT	326

GAMEMASTER'S GUIDE

Character Advancement	330
Rewards	330
Character Advancement Overview	332
Aging	332
Attributes	333

Traits	333
Skills	333
Training	334
Downtime	334
Wealth and Property	334
Rank and Power	336
NPCs and Random Encounters	336
NPC Templates	336
NPC Types	337
Random Encounters	340
Gamemastering Tips and Suggestions	342
General Gamemastering Guide	342
Developing Stories	345
The Plot Approach	345
The Grand Plot	345
The Sandbox Approach	346
Combined Approach	346
Remember...	346
Adventure Seeds	347
Adventure Seed....	349
Political and Military Power	349
Roleplaying Power	349
Titles and Ranks Explained	351
Knight Bachelor	351
Knight Banneret	351
Baronet	352
Baron	352
Viscount	352
Count/Countess	352
Marquis/Marquessa	353
Duke/Duchess	353
Grand Duke/Grand Duchess	353
Heir/Prime Minister	353
Sovereign/Head of State	353
Clan Social Rank	355
Trueborn	355
Trueborn (Exclusive Bloodname)	355
Bloodnamed (Lesser, General Bloodhouse)	355
Bloodnamed (Lesser, Phenotype Bloodhouse)	355

Bloodnamed (Greater, General Bloodhouse)	355
Bloodnamed (Greater, Phenotype Bloodhouse)	356
Bloodnamed (Lesser, General Exclusive Bloodhouse)	356
Bloodnamed (Lesser, Exclusive Phenotype Bloodhouse)	356
Bloodnamed (Greater, Exclusive General Bloodhouse)	356
Bloodnamed (Greater, Exclusive Phenotype Bloodhouse/Kerensky's Legacy)	356
Common Military Ranks	356
Universal Aesthetics	359
Worlds	359
People	359
Politics	360
Technology	360
MechWarriors and Their 'Mechs	360
Touring the Stars	362
Society and Culture Across Human Space	362
Economics and Industries	366
Whistle Stop Tour	374
El Dorado	374
Arcturus	376
Ovan	377
Annapolis	380
Solaris VII	382

INDEX

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THE UNIVERSE
BEFORE YOU

BASIC
GAMEPLAY

CHARACTER
CREATION

TRAITS

SKILLS

COMBAT

TACTICAL
COMBAT
ADDENDUM

SPECIAL
CASE
RULES

EQUIPMENT

GAMEMASTERING
GUIDE

INDEX

THE FIRES OF HELL

GATHERING PLAYERS

Ben H. Rome

FORT DEFIANCE
MARIA'S ELEGY
HESPERUS II, LYRAN ALLIANCE
5 JUNE 3076

"Watch out!" came the cry from across the bay.

Lunging forward, Sergeant Busby "Buzzy" Matvey caught the teetering metal case just before it plunged down to the mid-sized hangar's ferrocrete floor. With a grunt, he shoved the olive-drab canister back onto the top of its stack while the forklift backed away.

But not fast enough.

Buzzy smiled as Lieutenant Luella Hildebrand boiled up to the side of the lift like a miniature tornado. He shook his head as he returned to his work transferring the supply crates into the tight cargo bay of the Mark IV Landing Craft. Already, Luella's dressing-down of the poor lift driver was reaching a staccato pace that even a Mydron Minigun couldn't match.

"Hot one, her, yes?" asked Buzzy's lanky partner.

"Da," he replied, handing over another narrow crate marked, "CAUTION: FLAMMABLE".

"You know I wasn't talkin' about her looks, now."

Buzzy sighed. "Da," he responded again, this time looking his companion full in the face. A grizzled soldier, Ethan Naoko had once more neglected to shave the stubble from his pointed chin. "You know, if the Captain sees that scruff, he'll have words again." "You know, if the Captain sees that scruff, he'll have words again."

The older man shrugged. "So what? Not like we're on a mission. Unless you've heard something I've not?"

"Nope," Buzzy replied. "I just know as much as you."

Pivoting, he grabbed another case from the stack. Luella's rapid-fire delivery finally ceased in the background and he noted the lift's whine as it backed away, almost as though the machine itself were sulking.

He heard Ethan's low whistle behind him. "Still, y'know, she's pretty hot..."

Buzzy sighed again and smiled. He turned and thrust the case at Naoko, cracking a smile.

"Da."



Lieutenant Luella Hildebrand stalked away from the retreating lifter, the confrontation filed away and forgotten. There was still too much to do and clearly not enough time. *Detonators*, she thought. *Did we pack enough?*

She consulted the datapad clutched in her left hand and scrolled down the list, her determined stride missing not a hitch as she stalked down the corridor toward the Captain's office. Without looking up, she deftly avoided collisions with her fellow officers, finally stopping in front of a nondescript gray-green door. Knocking once, she didn't wait for an acknowledgement and stormed in.

"Problem, Luella?" asked the man seated in front of her, his night-black face cast strangely aglow by the monitor he was staring into.

The Lieutenant snapped to attention and saluted. "Captain Travis," she barked. "No, sir. Just a lift driver who isn't aware of the regs regarding volatile and explosive cargo."

Captain Jared Travis leaned back, looking over at his exec. His white teeth practically lit up his face. "I assume you re-educated him?"

Luella relaxed slightly. "Yes, Captain. I'll report him later."

Jared waved it off.

"No need," he said. "We've got more important things at the moment." He stood and turned, searching the cluttered shelves behind him. "Has Corporal Logan reported in yet?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Very well. He should soon, I would expect. The shuttle from the *Duquesne* was probably delayed. Ah-ha!" The captain snagged a small book from the shelf and turned back to Luella.

"Have the team report to the hangar at twenty-hundred hours,"

he said as he opened the leather-bound book to a ribbon-marked page.

"Very good, sir." Luella turned to go, already churning through the supply list in her head.

"Oh, and Luella?" Jared called.

She stopped and turned to look back at him. "Sir?"

"Take a few minutes to relax. Don't know when we'll get the chance again."



Captain Jared Travis closed the small Bible in his hand and leaned back in his office chair, unable to concentrate enough to quiet his own self. The butterflies he felt in his stomach weren't from the orders sitting on his monitor, or their promise of action.

No, he thought, it's because she's coming.

Jared took a deep breath and released it slowly. The last time he and Belle Lee had crossed paths—two years ago—it had been a torrential downpour of violence, emotion, stress and fatigue.

And it all ended with a failed marriage proposal.

Ancient history, Travis! he chided himself. *Get a grip!*

He had no idea why his mind was dragging it all back up again. Yes, the fighting on Kittery was horrific; their escape from that Blakist hellhole a nightmare ordeal that still kept him awake sometimes.

But it was all in the past.

Travis snapped himself out of his reverie. The General was coming to brief them on a mission, not to re-ignite some short-lived, war-fueled relationship. Jared refocused on the monitor in front of him.

The orders were simple enough on the surface, but that wasn't saying much; a reconnaissance mission to an as-yet-undetermined planet, part of a larger operation currently being assembled. Travis knew without a doubt that the target world was already determined, but that operational security demanded such information be withheld until all the players were in place and ready to strike.

That was simply how these things went down.

The rest of the orders contained little else in the way of useful information beyond the standard bureaucratic rhetoric. Indeed, the only part that had Jared's insides doing somersaults was the last line: "General Belle Lee will present your operational orders in person."

Shaking off the malaise, he refocused again on the screen, bringing up the profiles of his two new team members. He tapped past Luella's dossier; she'd already been here a week and he felt he had her pegged.

That brought him to the "newbie": Franz Logan.

Jared's mouth turned down as he scanned Logan's short record. Recent academy grad from Skye, failed the MechWarrior MOS twice, two reprimands from his drill sergeant for daydreaming on watch. Excellent weapons skills, passable first aid, and licensed to operate standard WorkMechs.

"So basically, we've got ourselves a wannabe 'Mech jock who knows which end of the rifle goes where and is most likely to succeed as a battlefield casualty when the crap hits the fan," he said to the empty office.

"Wonderful."



Corporal Franz Logan pressed his face against the unyielding surface of the observation deck's massive, armored window, looking



down on the planet below. One hand pressed against the glass above his head, the other clutched a nearly full bulb of raspberry juice.

He still couldn't believe he was finally seeing this place in the flesh: *Hesperus II*.

Home to one of the largest BattleMech manufacturing centers in the Lyran Alliance, if not the entire Inner Sphere!

Franz drank in the planet's details as his DropShip drew ever closer. Once upon a time, he'd memorized every detail about this place; to him, it was the seat of the gods of war. He smiled as the DropShip turned slightly, bringing the gigantic Myoo Mountains into view. The massive mountain chain was easily visible even from high orbit.

It was like visiting Mecca. *More like, 'Mecha'*, he thought to himself. He snorted loudly at the joke in his head.

"Find something amusing?" came a voice next to him.

Startled from his planetary worship, Franz gave a small cry and involuntarily squeezed his hands.

Including the juice bulb in his right.

Horrified, he turned quickly. "Watch out—"

Too late! The stream of juice shot forth from the bulb's opening and struck the voice's owner dead-on, slashing a red stain across her otherwise pristine and nondescript gray jumpsuit.

Franz felt the blood drain from his face. He stared, slack-jawed, through the haze of remaining raspberry droplets as the red-haired woman looked down at her jumpsuit in bemused shock.

"I'm..." he stammered. "Oh, my God...I'm so..."

The woman chuckled softly. "Quite all right, Corporal," she said. With a light touch off the window, she drifted away from the remaining juice mist. "I should know better than to disturb someone intent on merging with an observation window."

Franz noticed how the woman's blue eyes sparkled as she spoke. He felt his face go from cold to hot as he blushed. He broke eye contact and looked around the deck.

"Ma'am," he croaked. *It figured*, he thought. *The first beautiful woman I've seen since that miserable night with Jenny right before boot camp, and I say hello by squirting her with raspberry juice.*

The woman smiled again, obviously amused by his awkwardness. "We'll be on final approach in fifteen minutes," she said. "You may want to clean up that mess before we get gravity back. I don't think the purser would appreciate stains on his carpet."

"N-n-no, I don't think he would," he mumbled. He glanced down at his feet, noting with horror that the toes of his regulation boots were scuffed. *Again.*

Steeling his spine, he looked up and blurted out, "Would you like to watch the landing with..." It took a moment for Franz to realize the room was empty.

"...me?"



"Cigarette?" Ethan Naoko asked absently, shrugging the pack from his pocket and gesturing to Buzzy.

The larger man shook his head. "Nah. Trying to quit."

Ethan shrugged. "Suit yourself." He fished one out and stuck the pale yellow stick in his mouth. He gazed up into the Hesperan sky.

Buzzy caught the older man's gaze and looked up himself. "Getting busy up there again." His eyes tracked the multiple lights crossing the sky. Most were headed toward the nearby temporary town outside Maria's Elegy.

"Yeah. Good to see, I think. Means the reconstruction's going forward again."

Buzzy nodded. He looked over at Naoko. "Did you ever think you'd be involved in combat again? I mean, getting pulled back into the fray from a desk job..."

"And three months from retirement," Ethan finished for him. He looked down, chewing thoughtfully on the unlit cigarette. "Tell the truth, no," he said quietly.

A Warrior VTOL screamed across the sky, running low to the ground. Its passage kicked up dust and grit, but added a sudden welcome breeze to an otherwise dry afternoon in Hesperus' so-called "temperate zone". The thumping rhythm of the craft's rotors echoed long after it disappeared.

"Thirty-plus years I've put in, Buzzy," Ethan said, shoving his hands into his pockets and walking slowly toward the barracks entrance a short distance away. "I've run the gamut of war, I think. 'Mech jock, infantryman, prisoner of war, desk jockey. Even ended up going from one army to another, thanks to the vagaries of what flag's flying when."

"Wait, what? I never knew that!"

Ethan looked over at the bigger man. "Yep. Did my time in the DCMS and was a civvie when the Feddies showed up on Breed back in '63. Conscripted a bunch of us for grunt work. Somehow, we got loaded up and shipped off with the rest of the Feddie army back to Robinson as fresh AFFS recruits." He spat out the mangled cigarette.

"You're so full of shit."

The older man stopped and looked at Buzzy for a moment, then laughed. Wiping his eyes, he slapped Buzzy on the shoulder, releasing another small cloud of Hesperan dust. "Had you going for moment, though," he rasped.

Buzzy shook his head, then looked up. "Sell it to the greenie, Ethan." The distant rumble of a DropShip's fusion engines were audible. Both men turned toward the makeshift drop pad to the east, where the ovoid craft now settled on a descending column of fire.

"New shipment's arrived," Buzzy said.

Naoko nodded. "Maybe this one's got our orders."

"That'd be nice. Bein' a glorified cargo grunt isn't my idea of fun."

"This is the army, Buzzy. What the hell did you expect?"

"Fame, fortune, women?" Buzzy suggested with a smirk. "And guns, of course. Always the guns."



Luella adjusted her headphones to no avail; the heavy thrum from the massive GM 520-OR drive train permeated everything around her. If she concentrated long enough, she was sure she could feel her bones vibrate from the Defiance E-class ground tug's inexorable crawl towards the *Duquesne*.

Despite the noise, it was the first few moments of rest she'd had all week.

She'd been assigned to Recon Squad Four, part of the "Stone's Lament" regiment, after the horrendous losses to her squad on Coventry. Her reassignment came as part of some agreement the Alliance had with Devlin Stone. She didn't understand it, but didn't have to; her superiors ordered her, and here she was.

Along with her came new operational orders; the unit was being resupplied and prepared for action somewhere along the Blake Protectorate border. Where that would be, she surmised, would come soon enough—the briefing officer, along with additional supplies for the squad and the squad's final member, were all on the DropShip now looming over the makeshift drop pad.

Not all of the *Duquesne's* cargo was for the squad. Far from it. The massive *Excalibur*-class carried an enormous amount of cargo, if not BattleMechs. This one, according to the data file currently showing on Luella's small screen, was full mostly of construction supplies and material for the rebuilding project going on in Maria's Elegy. The city had been virtually razed in the brutal

fighting against the dug-in Blakist occupiers, and every week brought new shipments of construction supplies from the Lyran Alliance and beyond.

Luella looked again at the *Duquesne*, its massive egg shape still growing in the tug's windscreen. Hopefully, she mused, she would be able to collect Logan and the rest of the squad's equipment quickly amid all that other material. There was still much to do, and very little time left.



Franz decided to disembark from the *Duquesne* through one of the large 'Mech bays. He'd discovered the lance of BattleMechs being transported by the DropShip early in the voyage from the star's nadir point and made it a point to visit them every single day. He actually spent a lot of the trip just sitting in the bay, admiring the gigantic war machines and drinking in their details. He knew them all by heart; leaving through the bay was more to a chance to say goodbye to his silent companions than anything else.

As the 'Mech bay doors ground open and the harsh light from the Hesperan sun exploded into the bay, Franz noticed a small group of men and women clustered near one of the larger 'Mechs, a *Victor*. He did a quick double take when he spotted a shock of red hair; it was the woman from earlier that morning, the one he'd sprayed with raspberry juice.

He felt himself blush again.

He dared not approach them, as they seemed deep in conversation. All of them were dressed in familiar garb: t-shirts, cooling vests, shorts and heavy combat boots. One even wore a Trinity-style cowboy hat, though he also carried a bulky helmet under his arm. All bore a manner of unmistakable confidence. Franz knew the attire and the attitude well—and what they represented.

To many, MechWarriors were the "gods" of war, the specialized elite who commanded mighty BattleMechs—titanic knights in shining armor.

It was a group that Franz didn't belong to, and could never belong to. Horrible scores and failure to pass the tests back on Skye saw to that. He stood off at a distance, in the shadows of a cargo pallet, unwilling to approach.

Ashamed.

Yet unable to tear his eyes away from those who lived his shattered dreams.

After a few minutes, the four warriors broke up. Each went toward a different 'Mech. Franz thought the woman would move toward the smaller *Phoenix Hawk*, but was surprised when she turned and scrambled up the side of the *Victor*, the heaviest 'Mech in the bay.

His watch beeped, a subtle reminder of his looming appointment with his new superiors, but Franz didn't hear it. Instead he continued to stare as each 'Mech thundered out of its gantry and trooped down the DropShip's ramp to the ferrocrete pad below.

From the top of the ramp, Franz watched the lance form up and move off, tromping their way across the tarmac—deftly avoiding an approaching ground tug as they went. The retreating metal titans headed off toward the nearest Defiance complex entrance, rumbling the earth with every footstep.

An eternity later, Franz became aware of someone shouting at him. She was a short, lithe woman in a standard, olive drab jumpsuit. She wore an expectant look as she stalked up the ramp.

Franz immediately noticed the dual arrows sewn into her fatigue collar—the insignia of a Lyran "lieutenant"—and the nametag "Hildebrand" stitched over her left breast. Dropping his duffel, he snapped to attention and saluted.

Hildebrand stopped, looked at the datapad in her hand, and—with obvious annoyance—asked, "Corporal Franz Logan?"

"Sir, yes sir!"

Hildebrand returned his salute and barked, "At ease, soldier. I am Lieutenant Luella Hildebrand. You can quit land-gazing, grab your gear, and help me load up that half-track behind you. Then, *maybe*, I'll forget your inattentiveness."

Logan relaxed a bit and snatched up his dropped bag as the Leutnant—no, "Lieutenant"—stepped past him. He noticed the half-track strapped on the pallet as the cargo bay laborers began unstrapping it from the floor mounts. "This one, ma'am?"

Hildebrand half-turned and nodded. "That's correct, Corporal. All those crates on the next pallet over need to be loaded into the squad bay in the rear. Once you're done, we'll travel back to barracks and get things started. We're behind schedule."

"Yes ma'am. The *Duquesne* had some plant issues halfway through our travel from the nadir. Or so the Captain said." Logan tossed his duffel into the small space behind the driver's seat and flipped the switch to drop the rear ramp.

"Regardless, step it up. We don't have all day. Be done when I get back," she snapped and moved farther into the bay, heading toward the interior lift.

Logan didn't bother to reply. He rolled up his sleeves and started grabbing crates.



Ethan dropped heavily into the chair opposite Buzzy, his tray clattering onto the table and sloshing the gray paste that passed for soup around its shallow brim. Flecks of soup splashed onto the lacquered surface in front of Buzzy.

"Hey man, trying to be neat here!"

"Sorry," Ethan replied. He grabbed a biscuit and dug into the vast array of food arranged on his tray.

The two ate in companionable silence, despite the normal mess hall noise. As they were finishing up, a woman in tan fatigues with a stethoscope dangling around her neck pulled out a chair beside them and sat down with a cup of coffee. Doctor Grace Luther wrapped her hands around the mug as if to warm herself and sighed.

"What's up, doc?" Ethan piped up, chuckling.

Grace moaned. "Doesn't that ever get old with you?"

"Naoko defines old, Doc," Buzzy smiled. "You know that."

"I suppose so. And don't call me 'Doc,' Busby. It's Grace."

"Sorry."

Ethan stuffed the last of his shortbread into his mouth and mumbled.

"Man, talking with your mouth full is no way to talk to the lady," Buzzy said, kicking his friend under the table.

The older man swallowed hard and wiped his mouth on his sleeve. "Sorry, Doc—I mean, Grace."

"It's okay, Ethan. I'm too tired to really care about you two and your pathetic attempts to date me." She ran her fingers through her dirty blonde hair, tucking the stray strands back over her ear.

Buzzy laughed. "Not me, Grace. You know I have a girl back home." He pushed his tray away from him. "It's ol' Ethan here you've got to watch out for. Sly as a fox, that one."

Ethan colored slightly and mumbled under his breath.

"What, no answer?" Grace smiled. "You're losing your wit, old man."

The three of them laughed lightly, breaking the building tension. Grace took a long sip of her coffee, then looked at her two companions. "They're pushing harder to finish the preps," she said. "Any idea what this mission's all about?"

The two men glanced at each other, then at the doctor. "No clue," Ethan admitted. "Just that the ElTee's been like a wolverine getting

all our supplies together. Scuttlebutt says some big honcho came down on the latest supply dropper; most likely we'll know at the meeting in a couple of hours."

"That's what I've heard, too," Grace sighed. "Can't say I'm terribly happy about it."

Buzzy lightly punched the woman on the shoulder. "What, anxious to leave our good company so soon?" He noticed her face darkened and the corners of her mouth turned down. "Oh, wait—your request for transfer failed?"

She nodded. "Captain denied it."

Ethan leaned forward, sympathetic. "Sorry to hear it, Grace. I know it's been tough since the Elegy."

Grace nodded once. Staring at the table, she clutched her mug as if it were a lifeline. "I still have nightmares about that night. I really don't think I'm an asset to the team—you guys need someone who can operate under pressure, not some 'fraidy cat pacifist' like me."

"Nonsense!" Buzzy retorted. "What happened to Jamison wasn't your fault! It was those damned Blakists and you know it. *They* did that to him; you did everything you could to save him."

"It just wasn't enough..."

"Bullshit," Ethan chimed in. "Look, Gracie, you're a damned fine field doctor. You have your principles to adhere to—we all do. That's what separates us from those demon-spawned Wordies. The fact that you feel like this proves it."

"He's right," Buzzy said. "I mean, it doesn't happen a lot, but in this, he's dead-on."

Grace smiled at the jibe, but it was a weak smile. "Maybe..."

Ethan leaned back. "No 'maybe' about it! Just let us shoot 'em, Doc, and be there to patch us up when we take the bullets."

Grace winced and her eyes narrowed suddenly. She set her cup down, hard enough to make Buzzy blink.

"I've got work to do," she said, coldly. "I'll see you guys at the briefing."

She stood up quickly and hurried away.

Buzzy kicked Ethan again under the table. "*Durak!*"

"What?" cried the older man.

"Sometimes—no, most times? You say the stupidest shit."



Jared looked up from the podium as the door opened. With a quick salute, Luella stepped into the room and threaded her way through the short row of chairs to where the Captain stood.

"I take it we have no problems?"

"None, sir." She handed over a small stack of flimsies. "The half-track is in decent condition, though it's the Taurian model. So we've got less armor than a Lyran design."

Jared nodded. "Not surprised. I'd heard rumors these were heavy on the merc market; looks like Alliance suppliers grabbed a stack."

"Likely the case. Anyway, we've got full ammo loads, a new portable comms package, and additional spare parts. And Corporal Logan has arrived as well."

"Impressions?"

"He was too busy ogling the lance of 'Mechs that disembarked from the *Duquesne*—he almost missed my arrival."

The captain grunted softly, flipping through the stack of flimsies.

"Good worker, otherwise. Had the half-track loaded after I signed off with the cargo master." She paused, glancing around the tiny briefing room.

Jared looked up from his reading. "Obviously you have something to say, Lieutenant, so out with it."

"Permission to speak freely?"

The captain sighed. "Look, Luella, I know you're a stickler for rules and regs. But believe me, you'll be on my good side if you toned down the rigidity with me when we're in private."

Luella appeared to contemplate this for a moment, then nodded. "Sir, there is something on my mind."

"So I can tell." He set the stack down and looked her in the eyes. "Speak."

"Sir, I know...I mean, I've heard that Lieutenant Jamison was close to you..."

Jared nodded. "We served together nearly ten years. He was my XO for six and was there with me on Kittery."

She looked around, casting for the words. "I'm...I'm really sorry about what happened to him. And I'm not sure I can live up to his reputation around here."

The captain looked at his new executive officer thoughtfully, pursing his lips. "Is that what's been bugging you, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir. I feel as if you don't trust me to do my job," she said, her eyes locking back on his. "Sir."

Jared smiled slightly. "You're right," he replied, noting the small shock in her eyes at his response. "But it's not because of you, nor is it because of Lieutenant Jamison's death."

"It's simply because until we fight as a unit and I see what you're capable of under the stress of combat, I can't trust you."

Luella opened her mouth to reply but Jared cut her off.

"That's not to say I don't think you'll do a great job. But in all honesty, what concerns me is your record."

"Sir?"

Jared fixed her with a hard stare. "You're noble-born, Luella," he said. "You got your position through your family's name, not by your merits."

Luella's eyes widened, and her mouth hung open. Her fists clenched and she looked ready to leap at her commanding officer. "How—*how dare you?*" she seethed.

"*Attention!*" Jared snapped.

Luella froze and assumed a rigid stance, her face flushed and mouth stretched into a thin frown.

"Now," Jared continued. "This is my personal impulse and direct opinion. It is also your chance to prove me wrong."

"You want to know what killed Richie and Donald? Oh, it was the Blakists—they pulled the triggers, after all. But if it wasn't for some blue-blooded half-wit minor noble from some back-assed Lyran planet, they wouldn't have been in that position to start with."

"See, this half-wit's family had some type of 'summer home' here on Hesperus. When we arrived with Stone, it was still standing and miraculously untouched. So our General Hogarth—the aforementioned half-wit—orders us to hold our position and guard the house. Not because of some strategic value, but because it held some worthless art that his family didn't want to see destroyed."

Luella's jaw relaxed and understanding began to dawn in her eyes.

"So we got caught by a Blakist battle armor advance, with poor cover. All of that house's precious art couldn't stop the laser beams and machine gun rounds that ended up taking Richie and Don's lives. Hogarth ends up with a medal and commendation; we end up with two friends needlessly dead and not even an apology."

"So pardon me if I seem a bit leery of you for now, Lieutenant. Your family name isn't unknown to me and I'm fairly sure you got transferred over to this unit because up until last week, we were

assigned as a garrison force. So, yes, you're going to have to *prove* yourself to me; yelling isn't going to make things any easier."

Luella nodded curtly. Her eyes fixed on the tri-vid projection screen behind Jared and she coldly intoned, "Is that all, sir?"

Captain Travis sighed deeply. "Yes, Lieutenant. Carry on."

The executive officer snapped a rigid salute and with parade-ground precision, wheeled about and exited the room.

Jared watched her go and sank into one of the briefing chairs. His eyes clouded as he bowed his head and wept quietly.



Corporal Franz Logan stepped into the briefing room at 1950, ten minutes early. Three other people were already present: Doctor Grace Luther, who'd given him a quick exam and declared him fit for duty, and two other men—one large enough to be an Elemental, and another, smaller and older man. Judging by their fatigues, he guessed them to be other members of his new unit, but neither the good-looking exec nor the Captain was present.

Franz approached the larger of the two men and stuck out his hand. "Corporal Franz Logan, LAAF."

The larger man looked at the proffered hand and then at Franz's face with an unreadable expression. "Problem with your arm, son?" he asked, his Russian accent heavy.

Reddening, Logan snapped a quick salute just as the smaller, older man burst out laughing. "Geez, Buzzy, give the kid a break, will you?"

The older man turned to Franz and stuck out his own hand. "Sergeant Ethan Naoko," he said. "This here's Corporal Busby Matvey, but we all call him 'Buzzy'."

Franz breathed a sigh of relief and seized Ethan's hand, pumping it vigorously. "Pleased to meet you both. Um...are these new recon squads all this casual?"

Buzzy laughed. "Heck no, just us. But from the looks of it, don't try to get casual with the El-Tee. She's more liable to rip your spine out and replace it with the nearest rifle barrel."

"Yeah, I got that impression when I met her earlier today on the flight line."

Ethan chuckled. "So, Franz. You came in on the *Duquesne*?"

"Yeah."

Buzzy slipped into a chair and stretched. "Did you meet the General?"

Both men took chairs on either side of the larger man.

"General? I...I don't think so. Didn't really see anyone of note, except..." Franz's voice trailed off.

"Except who?" prodded Ethan.

"Yeah, who?" echoed Buzzy.

"Well, there was this hot fox that I ran into on the way down. Red hair, blue eyes, body that'd probably wrap you up in a pretzel and you'd enjoy the experience—"

A heavy sigh came from the far corner of the room, suddenly reminding Franz of the doctor's presence. Grace hadn't said a word since he entered, and remained otherwise silent in her chair, studying a datapad.

"She was one of the MechWarriors that arrived," he finished, his voice lowered.

"Nice!" Ethan whistled. "What's she pilot?"

"Victor."

"Assault-class jock? And to die for? Damn, what I'd give to be back in the cockpit again."

Franz looked at Ethan as the door behind them opened. "You were a MechWarrior?"

A deep voice rumbled behind them all. "He was, a long time ago. Don't let him fool you, though—he drove a *Stinger*."

Ethan and Buzzy jumped to immediate attention upon hearing Captain Travis' voice; Franz instinctively followed his new teammates' lead. Trailing in the big, dark-skinned man's wake was the petite Lieutenant Luella Hildebrand.

"At ease," the Captain said, nodding to Luella who stepped over to the tri-vid system. The doctor slid into the seat beside Ethan as the team got comfortable.

"Glad to see you're all here. I assume we've all made our introductions?" Jared looked at Franz, who nodded affirmatively. "Good. So you all know we've been assigned to an upcoming operation; until today, we didn't know what that exactly entailed." Jared looked at the four of them, then at Luella.

"Now we do." He tapped a command on the podium. The lights dimmed and the tri-vid lit up with a slowly revolving planetary image. "This is the primary planet in the Rochelle system. I've already downloaded the planetary informational file into your personal datapads; it's been appended with information we've received from Alys Rousset-Marik's resistance group." The rotating image flashed in spots, with small data windows opening up.

The four seated team members shifted in their seats and Buzzy raised his hand.

"Yes, Corporal?"

"Is this a large-scale op or are we going point for a small force?"

Captain Travis tapped his podium again and the tri-vid image shifted to a system view. "I'll let the commander of that operation answer it for you. *Atten-shun!*"

The room immediately snapped to attention as the door admitted a striking, red-haired woman with flashing blue eyes and wearing the standard green jumpsuit with a general's diamond cluster on each collar.

Franz's heart froze and ice shot through his veins. *The woman from the observation deck! The MechWarrior who drove the Victor!*

He'd sprayed a general with common fruit juice!

It was all he could do to remain standing.

Buzzy glanced at the now-green corporal standing next to him and then at the general. He elbowed Ethan, who stole a look and shook his head with a grin.

"At ease," she commanded. The room relaxed and they all settled back into the room's rigid chairs.

Captain Travis's stomach squirmed slightly at the sight of the General, but kept his face passive. *She definitely commands a room*, he thought. "General Belle Lee, commander of Stone's Lament. General, this is Recon Squad Four, at your service."

Belle returned Jared's salute and turned to face the team. "Good evening, everyone. We'll put aside pleasantries for now," she began, then looked at Franz directly. "We've got a mission to attend to; there will be time for drinks later."

At that, Corporal Franz Logan fell out of his chair.

As the room devolved into controlled pandemonium, Ethan looked at Buzzy and winked. "At least the kid has good taste."

Inner Sphere: General term used to describe a region of space roughly one thousand light-years across, composed of more than two thousand populated planets, with Terra (Earth) at the center. This area is further divided into geopolitical regions, where one power or another holds sway. For most of the centuries since humankind took to the stars, the vast majority of these worlds have belonged to one of the five Great Houses. Smaller powers have come and gone over this same time period. Any world or geopolitical power outside the Inner Sphere is said to lie in the Periphery, considered the frontier of the known universe.

— *Encyclopedia Galactica*

CLAN WOLF (IN-EXILE)

RULER	Khan Phelan Kell		
GOVERNMENT	Clan (Caste-driven, Warrior-dominant hierarchy)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Wolf City, Arc-Royal		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official)		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	None		
INHABITED WORLDS	N/A	FOUNDING YEAR	3057
		CURRENCY	Kerensky

CLAN

CLAN DIAMOND SHARK

RULER	Khan Barbara Sennet		
GOVERNMENT	Clan (Caste-driven, Warrior-dominant hierarchy with mercantile stylings)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Brasilia, Itabaiana		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official)		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	None		
INHABITED WORLDS	3	FOUNDING YEAR	3067
		CURRENCY	Kerensky

CLAN

CLAN JADE FALCON OCCUPATION ZONE

RULER	Khan Marthe Pryde		
GOVERNMENT	Clan (Caste-driven, Warrior-dominant hierarchy)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Hammarr, Sudeten		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official)		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	None		
INHABITED WORLDS	52	FOUNDING YEAR	3050
		CURRENCY	Kerensky

CLAN

HOUSE STEINER (LYRAN ALLIANCE)

RULER	Archon Adam Steiner		
GOVERNMENT	Constitutional Monarchy (with German feudal stylings)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Tharkad City, Tharkad		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English and German (official), Scottish Gaelic, Italian, French		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	Christianity (Protestant), Judaism, Islam		
INHABITED WORLDS	330	FOUNDING YEAR	2341
		CURRENCY	Kroner

GREAT HOUSE

HOUSE MARIK (FREE WORLDS LEAGUE)

RULER	Captain-General Corinne Marik (contested)		
GOVERNMENT	Parliamentary Confederacy (operating under military rule)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Atreus City, Atreus		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official), Spanish, Greek, Romanian, Urdu		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	Christianity (Catholic), Judaism, Islam		
INHABITED WORLDS	308	FOUNDING YEAR	2271
		CURRENCY	Eagle

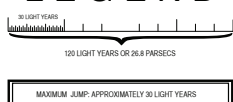
GREAT HOUSE

MAGISTRACY OF CANOPUS

RULER	Magesrix Naomi Centrella-Liao		
GOVERNMENT	Monarchy (Matriarchal)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Crimson, Canopus IV		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official), Spanish, Greek, Romanian, Chinese (Mandarin)		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	Buddhism, Christianity, Wicca, Judaism		
INHABITED WORLDS	44	FOUNDING YEAR	2530
		CURRENCY	Dollar

PERIPHERY STATE

LEGEND



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GHOST BEAR DOMINION

RULER	Khan Aløtha Kabrinski		
GOVERNMENT	Clan (Caste-driven, Warrior-dominant hierarchy)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Silverdale, Alshain and Erinyes, Orestes		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official), Swedish, Japanese, German, Swedenese		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	None		
INHABITED WORLDS	60	FOUNDING YEAR	3050
		CURRENCY	Kerensky



CLAN

CLAN NOVA CAT

RULER	Khan Santin West		
GOVERNMENT	Clan (Caste-driven, Warrior-dominant hierarchy)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	New Barcella, Irece		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official)		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	None		
INHABITED WORLDS	13 IN STEWARDSHIP	FOUNDING YEAR	3060
		CURRENCY	Combine Ryu



CLAN

HOUSE KURITA (DRACONIS COMBINE)

RULER	Coordinator Hohiro Kurita		
GOVERNMENT	Autocracy (Japanese feudal stylings)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Yamashiro, New Samarkand		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	Japanese (official), Arabic, English		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	Shinto (official), Buddhism, Islam		
INHABITED WORLDS	267	FOUNDING YEAR	2319
		CURRENCY	Ryu



GREAT HOUSE

CLAN WOLF OCCUPATION ZONE

RULER	Khan Vlad Ward		
GOVERNMENT	Clan (Caste-driven, Warrior-dominant hierarchy)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Essen, Weingarten		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official), Russian, German, Swedenese		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	None		
INHABITED WORLDS	49	FOUNDING YEAR	3050
		CURRENCY	Kerensky



CLAN

CLAN SNOW RAVEN

RULER	Khan Lynn McKenna		
GOVERNMENT	Clan (Caste-driven, Warrior-dominant hierarchy)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	None		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official)		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	None		
INHABITED WORLDS	3	FOUNDING YEAR	3064
		CURRENCY	Kerensky



CLAN

HOUSE DAVION (FEDERATED SUNS)

RULER	Princess-Regent Yvonne Steiner-Davion		
GOVERNMENT	Constitutional Aristocracy (Western European feudal stylings)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	New Avalon City, New Avalon		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official), French, German		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	Christianity (Catholic), Buddhism, Judaism		
INHABITED WORLDS	432	FOUNDING YEAR	2317
		CURRENCY	Pound



GREAT HOUSE

HOUSE LIAO (CAPELLAN CONFEDERATION)

RULER	Chancellor Sun-Tzu Liao		
GOVERNMENT	Dictatorship (Chinese feudal stylings)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Zi-Jin Cheng (Forbidden City), Sian		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	Chinese (Mandarin, official), Chinese (Cantonese), Russian, English, Hindi		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism		
INHABITED WORLDS	160	FOUNDING YEAR	2366
		CURRENCY	Yuan



GREAT HOUSE

CALDERON PROTECTORATE

RULER	President Eric Martens-Calderon		
GOVERNMENT	Constitutional Monarch (currently under military regency)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	New Taurus, Erod's Escape		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official), Spanish, French		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	Deism (official), Christianity (Catholic), Judaism, Islam		
INHABITED WORLDS	6	FOUNDING YEAR	3066
		CURRENCY	Protectorate Bull

MINOR PERIPHERY/STATE

THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE

RULER	The Council of Merchants		
GOVERNMENT	Mercantile Alliance (with German feudal stylings)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Commerce, Bremen		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	German (official), English, Spanish		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	Christianity (Protestant), Judaism		
INHABITED WORLDS	24 (EST)	FOUNDING YEAR	2891
		CURRENCY	None (Barter)

DEEP PERIPHERY STATE

NUEVA CASTILE

UMMAYYAD CALIPHATE (C) & CASTILIAN PRINCIPALITIES (P)

RULER	Caliph Lise Burrill (C) King Joseph Noye (P)		
GOVERNMENT	Feudal Monarchy (C) Monarchy (with Spanish stylings, P)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Granada (C) Asturias (P)		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	Arabic, English, Russian (C) Spanish, German (P)		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	Islam (C), Christianity (P)		
INHABITED WORLDS	2 (C) 7 (P)	FOUNDING YEAR	2830 (C) 2392 (P)
		CURRENCY	None (Barter)

DEEP PERIPHERY STATE

RIM COLLECTION

RULER	President Elian Whitney		
GOVERNMENT	Democracy		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	New Promise, Gillfillan's Gold		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English, German, Scottish Gaelic, Italian, Greek		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	Christianity (Protestant), Judaism, Islam		
INHABITED WORLDS	6	FOUNDING YEAR	3048
		CURRENCY	Lyran Kroner

MINOR PERIPHERY STATE

CIRCINUS FEDERATION

RULER	President Calvin McIntyre		
GOVERNMENT	Military Dictatorship		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Clayborne Remembered, Circinus		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English, German, Spanish, Greek		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	Christianity, Judaism, Islam		
INHABITED WORLDS	8	FOUNDING YEAR	c. 2775
		CURRENCY	Skull

MINOR PERIPHERY STATE

MARIAN HEGEMONY

RULER	Caesar Cassius O'Reilly		
GOVERNMENT	Dictatorship (with Romanesque republican stylings)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Nova Roma, Alphard		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English and Latin (official) German, Spanish, Greek		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	Christianity (Lutheran), Judaism, Islam		
INHABITED WORLDS	26	FOUNDING YEAR	2920
		CURRENCY	Talent

PERIPHERY STATE

RIM COMMONALITY

RULER	Chairman Ardal Thomasson		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Zletovo, Lesnovo		
INHABITED WORLDS	5	FOUNDING YEAR	3075

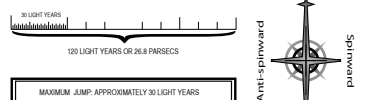
MINOR

FRONC REACHES

RULER	President Carver Trondel		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Freedom's Ring, Fronc		
INHABITED WORLDS	8	FOUNDING YEAR	3066

MINOR

LEGEND



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CLAN HELL'S HORSES

RULER	Khan James Cobb		
GOVERNMENT	Clan (Caste-driven, Warrior-dominant hierarchy)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Szrged, Csesztreg		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official)		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	None		
INHABITED WORLDS	45	FOUNDING YEAR	3071
		CURRENCY	Kerensky



CLAN

COMSTAR

RULER	Primus Gavin Dow		
GOVERNMENT	Corporate (with reformed mystical trappings)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Arc-Royal		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official), others by realm of birth		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	None		
INHABITED WORLDS	N/A	FOUNDING YEAR	2785
		CURRENCY	C-Bill



MAJOR POWER

BROTHERHOOD OF THE AZAMI

RULER	Caliph Sahalli Odessa		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Algiers, Algedi		
INHABITED WORLDS	5	FOUNDING YEAR	3072

MINOR



OUTWORLDS ALLIANCE

RULER	President Mitchell Avellar		
GOVERNMENT	Parliamentary Confederacy		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Famindas, Alpheratz		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official), Japanese, French		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	Christianity (Gregorian), Islam, Agnostic, Shinto		
INHABITED WORLDS	41	FOUNDING YEAR	2417
		CURRENCY	Escudo

PERIPHERY STATE

WORD OF BLAKE

RULER	"The Master"		
GOVERNMENT	Corporate Confederacy (with mystical trappings)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Hilton Head Island, Terra		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official), others by realm of birth		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	Word of Blake		
INHABITED WORLDS	143	FOUNDING YEAR	3052
		CURRENCY	C-Bill



MAJOR POWER

FILTVELT COALITION

RULER	Coalition Council		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Undredal, Filtvelt		
INHABITED WORLDS	21	FOUNDING YEAR	3072

MINOR

KITTERY PREFECTURE

RULER	Devlin Stone/David Lear		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	CanFu City, Kittery		
INHABITED WORLDS	4	FOUNDING YEAR	3072

MINOR

TAURIAN CONCORDAT

RULER	Protector Boris Tharn		
GOVERNMENT	Constitutional Monarchy (under martial law)		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Samantha, Taurus		
DOMINANT LANGUAGE(S)	English (official), Spanish, French		
DOMINANT RELIGION(S)	Deism (official), Christianity (Catholic), Judaism, Islam		
INHABITED WORLDS	57	FOUNDING YEAR	2335
		CURRENCY	Bull



PERIPHERY STATE

MALAGROTTA COOPERATIVE

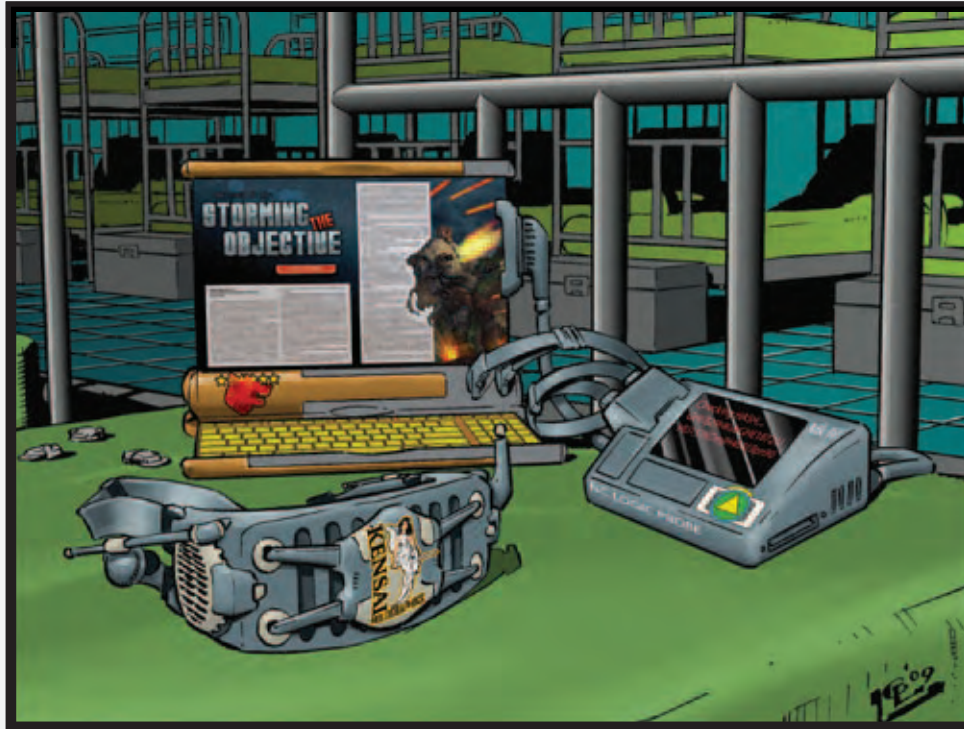
RULER	Voorzitter Gary Tiquahme		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Torida, Malagrotta		
INHABITED WORLDS	7	FOUNDING YEAR	3073

MINOR

TORTUGA DOMINIONS

RULER	Gary Tiquahme		
CAPITAL (CITY, WORLD)	Raiders Roost, Tortuga Prime		
INHABITED WORLDS	6	FOUNDING YEAR	c. 2593

MINOR



"This is the Inner Sphere, thousands of planets colonized by humankind. Once, it was united under the Star League, but for the last three hundred years, it has been consumed by savage wars...."

WELCOME TO THE BATTLETECH UNIVERSE!

It is a universe at war. Even as humankind reached out to command the stars, the human lust for conflict and conquest could not be overcome as easily as the distances of light years. Driven by the dream of one day ruling all of humanity, mighty empires formed, fell, and rose again. From the chaos of war arose the Star League, the pinnacle of human civilization, a Golden Age where a lasting peace and time of prosperity seemed possible at last. But greed, ambition, and treachery combined to tear it all down once more, plunging all the worlds humans called home into centuries of simmering conflict.

Power over billions now rests in the hands of those who can claim noble blood, or the heritage of elite warriors. Generations of soldiers have done battle across countless worlds, fighting for a dream long dead, perpetuating the cycle until few could imagine any other way. The most elite among these men and women—like modern-day knights in the neo-feudal realms that now hold sway—are the MechWarriors, those who command the mightiest war machines of the thirty-first century: BattleMechs.

The *BattleTech* universe is a realm of perpetual war between interstellar dynasties and feuding Clans. It is a realm where humankind's greatest enemy is itself, rather than alien invaders. It is a universe where flags and governments change with regularity

on the border worlds, and high-minded ideals like "honor," "glory", and "freedom" are the catchphrases of warlords.

It is a universe where life is cheap, but BattleMechs are not.

STARTING OUT

A Time of War: The BattleTech RPG (BTRPG) is a role-playing game set in a distant future where ongoing warfare and neo-feudalism are the norm. Humanity has settled thousands of worlds and forged mighty empires, but remains bitterly divided. Warring factions struggle endlessly for dominance, each devoted to their own vision of restoring a long-lost Golden Age. Fighting for these massive empires, interstellar conglomerates, and feuding noble families are warriors, mercenaries, pirates and spies.

WHAT IS A ROLEPLAYING GAME?

If you have ever read a book, seen a movie, or watched a television show where, upon finding a character saying or doing something really dangerous or foolish, you thought, "I wouldn't have said/done *that!*" then you have a good idea of what makes up the core premise of a role-playing game. While the actions of a character in a book, movie, or television program may be beyond your control, in a role-playing game, *you* control the actions of your character, effectively determining the character's fate through decisions and actions whose outcomes can range from spectacular success to tragic failure.

A role-playing game (RPG, for short) is essentially an improvisational theater: part storytelling, and part game. A single player (called the gamemaster, or GM) directs the game for a group of players that assume the roles of characters in a fictitious setting. This setting could be a mystery adventure set



In this war-torn universe, one moment of inattention can prove lethal.

- THE UNIVERSE BEFORE YOU
- BASIC GAMEPLAY
- CHARACTER CREATION
- TRAITS
- SKILLS
- COMBAT
- TACTICAL COMBAT ADDENDUM
- SPECIAL CASE RULES
- EQUIPMENT
- GAMEMASTERING GUIDE
- INDEX

in the 1930s where the characters travel the globe in search of treasure and intrigue, or a fantasy realm inhabited by dragons, trolls and sword-wielding barbarians, or even a science fiction setting complete with aliens, spaceships and world-crushing weaponry. The players pick a setting that they find cool and want to play in. The players then craft their own characters, providing a detailed history and personality to bring each to life. These characters have a set of statistics—typically numerical values that represent skills, attributes, and other abilities. The gamemaster then explains the situation in which the characters find themselves. The players, through their characters, interact with the storyline and each other's characters, acting out the plot. As the players role-play through some scenarios, the gamemaster will likely ask a given player to roll dice, and determine the success or failure of a character's attempted action based on the roll's result, using the rules of the game as a guide.

Together, the players control the storyline (the adventures), which evolves much like any movie or book, but within the flexible plot directed by the gamemaster. This gamemaster's plot provides a framework and ideas for potential courses of action and outcomes, but is simply an outline of what might happen; nothing is concrete until the players become involved. If you don't want your character to walk down those darkened stairs, your character doesn't. If you think you can talk yourself out of a situation in place of pulling a gun, then try to make it happen. Only the story into which the players are immersed is scripted; their reactions to it are not. And so the story can be changed based on the characters' actions and their responses to the events of the story, creating a constantly evolving adventure.

The best part is that there is no "right" or "wrong" way to play an RPG. Some games may involve more combat and dice rolling-related situations, where other games may involve more storytelling and improvised dialogue to resolve a situation. Each group of players decides for themselves the type and style of game they enjoy playing!

WHAT'S NEEDED TO PLAY

- To play a game of *A Time of War*, you need the following.
- A group of players and a place to meet (in "real life" or online)

- One player to act as the gamemaster
- The contents of this book
- Something for everyone to take notes with
- Three 6-sided dice per player (or a digital equivalent)
- Imagination

A Group of Players and a Place to Meet

While role-playing games are flexible enough to allow any number of people, most gaming groups number around four to eight players. This number of people brings a good mix of personalities to the table and ensures great cooperative play without getting too chaotic or too focused on just one or two characters.

Once a group of players have determined to play *A Time of War*, they'll need to designate someone as the gamemaster (see below), and work out a time and place to meet.

While most role-playing groups meet locally and regularly, each group is different and should determine where, when, and how often they'll play. One group may decide they can only get together once a week, at a friend's house, library, or college common room for four-hour sessions, while another group might have to meet "virtually" via internet chat rooms, syncing up their schedules for a once-a-month six-hour gaming marathon.

As long as the player group can meet with regularity, and includes a gamemaster and at least one or two character-controlling players, all the makings of a good role-playing game campaign are present.

Starting Players: When playing groups meet for the first time, the players should use this first session to generate their characters (as opposed to generating them outside of the group). This will make it far easier for the gamemaster to coordinate the party's creation and tailor it to the needs of the planned campaign, while avoiding any possible clashes that can result from players accidentally making characters that are too different—or, worse, too *similar*—to each other. It also allows the more experienced role-players in the group a chance to help out those who may be newer to role-playing.

One Player to Act as the Gamemaster

Once a group has been determined, one player in a role-playing game must step up and take the reins of the



Startled by an unsuspecting crewman, Mayamba—a veteran JumpShip pirate—lets his gun do all the talking.

gamemaster. Many role-playing groups maintain a single gamemaster who runs all of their gaming sessions month after month. Other groups may rotate the player who acts as gamemaster, with each gamemaster controlling a given portion of the unfolding story for several sessions before handing off control to another player. Once again, the approach taken to selecting a gamemaster is ultimately up to the player group's style. Some groups may have the perfect person who loves the work involved and is more than willing to run session after session, while other groups may decide that they all want to take turns as the gamemaster and as players.

The gamemaster controls the story. This player keeps track of what is supposed to happen and when, describes events as they occur so that the players (as characters) can react to them, and keeps track of other characters in the game (referred to as non-player characters, or NPCs). The gamemaster is also the official judge of the rules for the campaign, and helps the players resolve their characters' actions based on the situation and the suggested rules that may cover them.

The gamemaster describes the world as the characters see it, functioning as their eyes, ears, and other senses. Gamemastering may not be easy, but the thrill of creating an adventure that engages the other players' imaginations, testing their gaming skills and their characters' abilities in the game world, can make the entire experience worthwhile. While supplements and sourcebooks produced by Catalyst Game Labs will follow to support *A Time of War* with a wealth of gamemaster and player support, gamemasters can always adapt the game universe to suit their own styles.

The Contents of This Book

Whether you have purchased the print or electronic version, this book is specifically organized to present the information needed to start your own adventures in the universe of *BattleTech*. Below you'll find a summation of each chapter of this rulebook.

The Universe Before You: An introduction to gaming and a short review of the *BattleTech* setting described and covered by *A Time of War*.

Basic Game Play: The core rules and game mechanics are

covered in this section, describing the general rules governing the characters' use of skills, attributes, and traits.

Character Creation: This chapter covers the character design process, enabling players to create a unique persona to face the challenges in *A Time of War*.

Traits: Traits are special capabilities a character may have that go beyond training and attributes. The rules for these special capabilities are found in this chapter.

Skills: The character's skills represent trained abilities that are often at the core of virtually everything the character does in the course of his or her adventures. Skills determine what the character knows how to do (and how well the character can do it).

Combat: The heart of any role-playing game set in a universe of war, the *Combat* chapter provides rules for handling game play when negotiations break down and the only solution left is violence.

Tactical Combat Addendum: Set in a universe where combat is often resolved using armored battlefield units, this chapter provides rules specifically designed to mesh the role-playing experience with the tabletop wargame described in *Total Warfare*, *Tactical Operations*, and *Strategic Operations* (see *The BattleTech Universe*, p. 31, for more information).

Special Case Rules: Whether it be the alien environs of a thousand distant worlds, or the perilous flora and fauna that often come with them, this chapter covers the special cases dealing with game play events beyond the normal interactions between human beings and their weapons of war.

Equipment: Also known as the player-character's toy box, this chapter covers a wide range of personal gear a character might want (or need), ranging from mundane gadgets like personal computers and communicators, to powerful support weapons, explosives, and even cybernetic implants.

Character Advancement: The evolution of a character from game session to game session can come in many forms, be it improved skills and attributes based on experience, or improved wealth and power from a rise in rank or title. This chapter covers those elements of the game.

The GM's Toolkit: This chapter is a veritable how-to manual for gamemasters, providing a guide for when and how to use



GAME TERMS



The following terms are commonly used when playing games set in the *BattleTech* universe:

- Action Check** Any time a character must complete an action whose outcome is in doubt (such as the use of a Skill or the test of an Attribute), it requires a dice roll. This roll is referred to as the Action Check.
- Attribute** A feature that measures raw physical or mental capabilities.
- Attribute Check** Any Action Check that tests a character's Attribute is referred to as the Attribute Check.
- Burning Edge** The act of using a character's Edge Attribute to change an Action Check outcome or otherwise "cheat fate" is referred to as "burning Edge".
- Dice/Die (D6)** Dice are used to resolve Action Checks. A Time of War uses six-sided dice (often abbreviated as D6).
- Experience (XP)** The measure of a character's advancement is accomplished by the accumulation and distribution of Experience (XP) points.
- Gamemaster (GM)** In a role-playing game, the gamemaster (GM for short) is the one who controls all the non-player characters, tells the story, and sets up challenges for the player characters.
- Margin of Failure (MoF)** The difference between a target number and a modified roll result that falls below that number is referred to as the roll's Margin of Failure (or MoF, for short).
- Margin of Success (MoS)** The difference between a target number and a modified roll result that equals or exceeds that number is referred to as the roll's Margin of Success (or MoS, for short).
- Modified Roll** The result of a dice roll after all modifiers are applied is referred to as a Modified Roll.
- Modifiers** Any number that is added to (or subtracted from) a dice roll, a target number, or a damage value is referred to as a modifier. Modifiers that apply to a target number are called TN modifiers. Modifiers that apply to the dice roll result are referred to as roll modifiers. Modifiers that apply to a damage result are referred to as damage modifiers. Modifiers may be added or subtracted as appropriate (positive modifiers will increase a roll result; negative modifiers will decrease it).
- Multipliers** Multipliers are special modifiers that require the player to *multiply* a roll result, target number, or damage value instead of adding or subtracting.
- Net Margin of Success (Net MoS)** In any Opposed Action Check, the Net Margin of Success (Net MoS) is defined as the sum of the winning character's MoS plus the losing character's MoF. If neither character failed in the roll, the character with the higher MoS wins, and subtracts the opposing character's MoS to find the Net MoS. If neither character made a successful roll, there is no Net MoS.
- Non-Player Character (NPC)** Any characters not controlled by the players in a role-playing game are referred to as non-player characters (NPCs for short).
- Opposed Action Check** A special Action Check that pits one character's roll against another's is referred to as an Opposed Action Check.
- Party** A common term for a group of player characters.
- Player Character (PC)** Any player-controlled characters in a role-playing game are referred to as player characters (PCs for short).
- Skill** Any trained ability a character possesses is referred to as a Skill. Skills vary in complexity, and the character's proficiency in them is identified by a Skill Level. A character that does not possess a given Skill is said to be Untrained in that skill.
- Skill Check** Any Action Check that tests a character's Skill is referred to as a Skill Check.
- Target Number (TN)** The base number that a dice roll must equal or exceed to achieve a successful result. A target number may also occasionally be referred to as a to-hit roll.
- Trait** Additional features a character may possess that are not quantified by Attributes and Skills are referred to as Traits, and may be positive or negative.

THE UNIVERSE BEFORE YOU

BASIC GAMEPLAY

CHARACTER CREATION

TRAITS

SKILLS

COMBAT

TACTICAL COMBAT ADDENDUM

SPECIAL CASE RULES

EQUIPMENT

GAMEMASTERING GUIDE

INDEX





When a mission goes awry, apologies are not enough for some liege lords.

the rules, and a wealth of easy-to-use resources for generating unexpected campaign events and encounters to keep a player group guessing.

Something for Everyone to Take Notes With

Role-playing can get pretty in-depth over time. Each character the players and gamemaster control has a number of statistics and other resources that must be tracked over time to maintain continuity in the game. For this reason, character record sheets are provided at the back of this book, and may be photocopied as needed to facilitate easy record keeping for characters. In addition, notepads (or word processing programs) may be used to record any other information the players or gamemaster deem important throughout the course of a session.

Additionally, some groups enjoy a synopsis of each session that can be compiled and read at a later time in order to enjoy and share their exploits. This can be particularly useful if a player is unable to attend a given session, providing a quick re-cap that can be quickly read before the next gaming session begins and avoiding any bog-down that could occur as the player tries to catch up on current events. The session scribe can be a shared responsibility or assigned, all based on what a given playing group finds works best for them.

Three Six-Sided Dice Per Player (or a Digital Equivalent)

As will be described in the *Basic Game Play* section (p. 34), three six-sided dice (3D6) are required to play *A Time of War*. Dice are used to help resolve actions the characters may perform where the possibility of success or failure exists. For players gaming through an on-line medium, such as chatrooms, dice-rolling programs (often referred to as “dicebots”) are a common and easily accessible equivalent, providing similar randomized results to the clattering of physical dice across a gaming table.

Imagination

Last, but by no means least, a role-playing game requires imagination. All too often, it's easy for someone looking at a pencil-and-paper based RPG to be intimidated by the rulebooks and the numbers. But at the core, the focus is to have fun, to delve into a fictional reality where control over the characters' actions—the characters' fates—lies in the hands of the players controlling them. The imagination—more than the game rules—is what truly brings the player into the game; without it, a role-playing game would merely be an exercise in mindless dice-rolling.

The need for imagination goes for the gamemaster, too. A large part of the gamemaster's job is to tell a good story, a story the players can dive into. Inspiration can be drawn for this effort from film, television, or even a good book. Pay attention to how the story is put together, how the characters are built, and how the plot unfolds, and find ways to use these ideas in your own game, adding plots and subplots that perhaps you didn't notice were there before. The players, too, can aid in constructing this story, both by their own reactions to the events the gamemaster constructs, and by telling a part of the story themselves as they execute their actions.

For further inspiration, players and gamemasters can even explore the wealth of sourcebooks, rulebooks, and stories written for the *BattleTech* universe, many of which are described later in *The BattleTech Universe* (see p. 31). Finally, a wealth of resources exists online for any player interested in the *BattleTech* universe, from the forums and official product information provided by classicbattletech.com, to the quality fiction provided by battlecorps.com.