



**BATTLETECH**<sup>TM</sup>

**A TIME OF WAR  
COMPANION**

• **CATALYST GAME LABS** •

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**ADVANCED GAMEPLAY**


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# MAN ~~VS~~ BOY

Jason Schmetzer

**NEAR ROSTRUM**  
**BLANTLEFF**  
**MARIAN HEGEMONY**  
**17 MARCH 3075**

The night shuddered as if it were unhappy its blanket of darkness was being broken. The low-hanging clouds reflected the actinic lights of far-off PPCs and the muddy orange burps of artillery tubes firing. Cabot Dayne lowered his binocs and watched the latest stonk land. The flashes lit up the clouds again. Cabot pretended he was close enough to see the air shiver with the shockwave, but it was too dark. Too far.

Movement next to him on the ridge alerted him, but he didn't move. Patton Rook slithered up next to him. Cabot saw his head move out of the corner of his eye. "They're getting pasted," Rook murmured. Cabot didn't bother to ask who "they" were. It didn't matter.

"It's good cover," Cabot murmured back. They were whispering. No throat mikes, no microburst transmitters. Nothing to be intercepted. The near-constant thunder of the artillery would smother nearby audio bugs. There'd have to be a guy with a boom mike five meters away to hear them.

Of course, a guy five meters away would have been dead ten minutes ago.

"We're going in, then?"

Cabot nodded.

"You think maybe we should get dressed, then?"

Cabot took another glance across the field and nodded again. Then he pushed himself backward with his elbows. The grainy rocks—like little clumps of sand that wouldn't break—dug at the sleeve of his jacket. Larger rocks would break down to pieces of about a millimeter across. Then they wouldn't. Something in the structure just spread the force out. It took a press to break them down further.

Once he was beneath the lip of the rise he stood up and brushed himself off. Rook stood beside him, wiping sand from his own knees and elbows. Rook was shorter than Cabot—maybe a meter-sixty-five or so. His hair had been dark blond. Had been. Before they'd left Bolan it'd started turning iron gray. He'd shaved it.

Three more men stood a few meters away. Vasquez, Richter and Newland. They watched Cabot and Rook come closer, all three of them with their arms crossed. Vasquez was senior—he watched with a raised eyebrow. Cabot nodded to him. Vasquez nodded back and spun around. Richter moved off to the east. Rook slapped Cabot on the arm and followed Vasquez. Cabot followed him.

Behind the whipwood grove were four suits of powered armor. Vasquez and Newland were already shedding their jackets. They wore form-fitting jumpsuits beneath. Vasquez and Newland walked up to the two largest, battered, black-painted Grenadiers. Rook moved toward a

scarred gray-and-black tiger-striped Void. Cabot's flat-black Tornado suit leaned against a whipwood next to Rook's battlesuit. Cabot stripped his jacket and stowed it in a pack around the Tornado's waist.

"Cab," Rook said. He was encased chest-high in the Void suit. He pointed back over Cabot's shoulder. "It's really time." Cabot looked. The flicker of battle was lessened from when he'd last looked. The Feds must have been pushing through the final Marian lines. Cabot grunted and keyed the Tornado open.

It wasn't an easy thing to "put on" a suit of light powered armor without help, but Cabot managed before the roar of drive fans blew the damned sand up around them. The reed-thin limbs of the whipwoods rattled like slender rapiers against the hovercraft's skirts, striking glaring streaks in the rust-streaked steel. Richter brought the neutered Harasser up between the trees and the four battlesuits climbed into the specially made cradles welded to the side armor. With one of its six-tube short-range missile launchers removed the tiny blower could carry the suits—barely—but it wouldn't be good to run into any opposition.

Not that they would. Not this night, with hell's own storm washing across the Circinian lines.

Richter gunned the drive fans as soon as each trooper had locked his claw—or hand, in Cabot's case—around the grip and slapped the thick armor with his free hand. The Harasser lurched into motion and rocketed down the arroyo toward where the artillery was falling. Toward where the Circinians and their "friends" were tearing through the Romans' lines.

Blantleff has been a Circinian world for years, until the Marian Hegemony—the Romans—had succeeded in taking it from the Circinus Federation in 3064. Then it had been the Romans—not the Feds—who were fighting with Word of Blake help. Now it was the Feds. The loyalty of the Word of Blake waxed and waned, apparently. Cabot grinned inside his suit, careful not to trigger any of the chin-pads. His loyalty waxed and waned, too. But he was a mercenary.

He was loyal so long as the contract was upheld. And then he wasn't.



The clatter of a full magazine hitting the polished floor of the squad bay was enough to set Legionnaire Edo Garand's teeth on edge. He blinked—he couldn't help it—but resisted looking down the line of infantrymen to see who had dropped it. Garand didn't want to know.

Not today.



The centurion's recorded face didn't notice the interruption, nor the half-seen shape of a Marian infantryman crouching to pick the magazine up. Instead it continued to drone on, reciting the long list of reasons why Blantleff was a Marian world. Right of conquest. Colonization. Because the Caesar said it was. All the usual hoo-ha. Garand tuned him out, listening instead for the thudding of the battle raging just a few kilometers away. *We should be there. Not stuck here guarding this group of eggheads.*

The centurion's address ended. Garand snapped his fist to his chest in salute in unison with the other troopers and held it until the holo dissolved into nothing. Then he stepped forward one pace and spun.

"Anybody drops another clip and I'll make sure you're on the lines against the Feds with nothing more than a plastic fork. See if I bloody don't, by all the gods above and below." He watched their faces, but none of the troopers looked at him. They kept their eyes straight, focused on the wall behind him. As they'd been trained.

As he'd bloody well beat into them with his swagger stick over the last two months.

A concussion shook the building hard enough that Garand felt the vibration through his boot soles. Two of the infantrymen—Alvarez and Giddons—looked toward the door. Garand ignored it. *At least they're paying attention.*

"Because there's a chance the Feds might have more out there than we think," Garand said, "we're going to maintain security while the fourth contubernia works with the staff on destroying the sensitive documents." He paused, running what he'd said through his mind. "A chance the Feds might have more out there than we think," really meant, "because there's a loser cohort between us and the gods-damned cybernetic zombies marching across the plains."

Not that he was going to tell these gutter-sweepings about the zombies. They'd shown the officers the video.

Garand wished he could un-see it.

There was a knock on the squad bay hatch, and Garand turned to see the senior researcher, Doctor Fielder, poke his head through the half-open doorway. He saw Garand and the soldiers standing there and sighed, as if the weight of the ages had just come off of his shoulders.

"Good," he said, "you're in here. Come with me, please."

"Doctor?" Garand said. He didn't move. "Come with you where, sir?"

"I need help moving some of my files from my lab to the burn room."

Garand frowned. "We're assigned to security, sir. You want to see Legionnaire Gates."

Fielder's face pinched in a half-frown. He stepped fully into the room. He wasn't a large man, maybe a meter-sixty-five or so, but he had to weigh more than 100 kilos. He smelled like sweat and reheated food.

Garand glanced down at the floor. There wasn't any chance he was letting his

soldiers go with the doctor, but he couldn't just snub the patrician researcher.

"I can't carry all the files and disks and samples, Legionnaire."

"Sir—"

"Listen, soldier—" The floor shook again. Fielder looked around at each of the soldiers and the ceiling in the span of about a half-second. Garand watched him watch the room, hiding his smirk. Rostrum was buried half in a mountain—until the walls started *falling*, they were pretty much safe.

"That noise," Garand said, flicking his eyes toward the ceiling, "is what we have to carry, Doctor." He gestured at the other infantrymen. "We have to go hold them back until you get all your burn files burned."

Fielder stared at him.

Garand pled inside his mind. *Ares or Mars, avatars both*, he prayed, *let there be just a little more thun*— The room shook again. Garand let an instant's grin shape his jaw and then stepped forward. A twitch of his shoulder swung his rifle around on its sling. He gripped it by the forestock and extended it toward the doctor.

"I'll carry yours, Doctor," Garand said, "if you'll take mine."



The Harrasser flew out of the arroyo at more than 150 kilometers per hour, dust and grit blowing into a rooster tail behind the speeding hovertank. The thin slit of land between the steel skirts and the ground was a constant blur. Cabot had an instant's worry about one of the ducted drive fans sucking up a rock, but chuckled. The people who designed such things had no doubt thought of that. He stopped looking at the ground and looked up instead, toward their objective.

The building was invisible in the dark, nestled as it was into the sheer facing of a cliff wall. The Tornado's optics could do a great deal to enhance, and the stabilization even at that distance was good, but Cabot didn't want to fixate on that when there was so much ground to cover. There could have been Marian pickets out, between the so-called secret station and the Harasser's line of approach.

A sharp-white strobe painted the speeding tank and its clutching passengers against the ground on Cabot's side for an instant. The Tornado's optics saved him from the flash but it was still startling. He listened, but there was no sound except the keening vibration of the Harasser's fans. Not even a fusion engine letting go could penetrate that.

"Still shooting," Richter commented. "Two minutes to initial."

Cabot clicked an acknowledgement. The Harasser had a specially wired contact radio that let the suits talk without broadcasting while they were attached. A small, three-centimeter screen in Cabot's helmet echoed the electronic warfare in Richter's cockpit, but it was too small to resolve too much detail. He was watching



for clear and not-clear: clear meant there weren't any broadcasting threats between them and the facility. Not-clear meant there was something big enough to mount active targeting in the way.

Not-clear was bad.

So far it was clear.

"One minute," Richter said.

Cabot envied the heavier battle armor their battle claws; the Tornado's armored gloves were good, but they lacked the simple lock-in-place setting that the claws offered. The other three had simply grabbed the bars and locked their claws in place; they could relax their hands. Cabot's hand shivered in time with the way the drive fans made the Harasser's hull vibrate. He wanted to flex his fingers but knew the Harasser's movements would fling him off.

He had no interest in seeing if a Tornado would skip like a stone on water at 160 kph.

A caret appeared on the Tornado's main display as it picked up the first flicker of thermal. The facility was set into the cliff face, but it had a large cleared area in front of it—vehicle parks and such—and there were several guard posts. Each post was little more than a six-meter-high light aluminum framework with a flatform and a pair of mounted binos. The look-see they'd done two days had put two men in each post, and they looked bored. With the main Marian lines getting pasted a kilometer to the north, they wouldn't be looking toward the wasteland. Not with Circinan 'Mechs—or worse, as the Marian rumor mill had it—breaking toward the cohort's lines.

One little Harasser wasn't a threat.

Unless these third-echelon legionaries had heard about the zombies.

Cabot shook his head inside the helmet. He wished he hadn't heard about the Word of Blake's latest "weapon."

"Thirty seconds," Richter said.

Cabot flexed his free and reached up to check the straps crossed over the Tornado's thick shoulders. He felt the bumps for three; all his weapons were still where they were supposed to be. He looked forward, ignoring the whipsaw-edged whipwood leaves slapping against his armor as Richter cut it a little too close to a corpse. The whipwood grew scarcely, with multi-meter long taproots driving through crevices and cracks to the deep-set water table. The glow of the guard posts grew on his display.

There was only a single man in each post, and from their lack of activity Cabot could tell they were looking the wrong way. If they were listening the Harasser's drive fans would alert them any moment. Richter was already slowing, bringing them to rest a half a kilometer out. Cabot, Newland and Vasquez dropped off the side of the hovertank and took a knee. Cabot felt the rock clumps shatter beneath the Tornado's knee.

"Newland, left," Cabot ordered. He unslung his laser and brought it to bear on the center guard post. "Vasquez, right." He looked at the chronometer display in his helmet. "At forty-five seconds," he said. The Maxell PL-10's familiar

grips were a comfort, and he toggled the control in the Tornado's arms that stabilized the aiming point. Vasquez and Newland were using the lasers integral to their battlesuits. He found his point of aim easily and held it there. He watched the clock climb up toward forty-five in his peripheral vision. Rook and Richter were watching the local security.

For the next few seconds, all that mattered to Cabot Dayne was his rifle and the aiming point that represented the Marian sentry.

The clock ticked from forty-four to forty-five. Cabot fired. The Maxell hummed and there was a crackle as air rushed in to replace the ionized track the three lasers had burned. He held his aim for a moment—lasers didn't have any recoil, after all—and watched. The sentry's body fell and didn't move. He stood.

Lasers were light speed weapons. By the time you knew one had been shot at you it had either hit or missed. And the three mercenaries didn't miss. Which meant the sentries had gone from watching the fireworks show to the north to dead without ever having known it.



Garand looked at the message and closed the file. Then he looked at the backs of Alvarez and Giddons, the two sentries beside the door to the secure section. "They're retreating," he whispered.

Alvarez half-turned. "The Feds?"

Garand shook his head.

Alvarez turned back. "Where's the DropShip, Leg?"

Garand grunted. He couldn't say out loud that there probably wasn't a DropShip berth for them; all the slots from Rostrum would be reserved for the scientists and the administrators and all the other gods-damned patrician bastards who'd be first in line in front of the common soldiers doing the bleeding and dying. He slapped Giddons on the thick armored shoulder of his body armor and jerked his chin toward the hatch. "Get out front and check the door."

Giddons frowned. "That's Gates' section, Leg," he started. "You know how he is—"

"I'll take the heat," Garand said. "Just go. I don't trust those worthless Pompeii gutter sweepings to keep an eye on the approaches." Gates' maniple wasn't the best in the cohort, not by a long shot, but Garand hadn't wanted any of his boys outside when the hammer came down. Inside they had a chance; they could hunker down or concentrate their fire. Even powered armor—or the underworld-spawned zombies—would find it difficult advancing down a meter-and-a-half of space against ten rifles.

"They have radios," Giddons grumbled, but he was already adjusting the strap on his rifle.

"Hold on," Garand said. He toggled the radio built into his helmet. "Post Two," he said, "report." There was only silence. He tried again, with the same result.

Alvarez snorted. "Probably too entranced with the show," he muttered.

"Post Three," Garand said, trying one of the other elevated guard shacks. Those shacks offered the best view of the battle, true. But if it had been his boys on the ramparts they'd have been watching their sectors, or they'd have his stick up their asses.

"Post One," he tried. Silence.

"Maybe it's jamming?" Alvarez offered.

"We'd hear it," Garand said offhand. His mind was going over half-glimpsed rosters, trying to remember the names of Gates' boys on the shacks tonight. He drew a blank. "Get going," he said to Giddons. Then he toggled a different channel. "Gates," he said.

"What do you want, Legionnaire?" The other legionnaire's was clipped and precise, a product of his grammarian's stern instruction at that expensive school on Alphard. *Patrician bastard*. Never mind that Garand had him by date of rank by almost six months. Garand's father was a consumer electrician. Gates' old man was Senator Gates.

"Your posts outside aren't responding," Garand said tightly. He omitted the "sir" that custom—but not regulation—demanded he offer his so-called social better.

"They're watching the show," Gates said.

"They're not on their radios."

"Then you bloody well check it out," Gates snapped. "I've got the centurion's personal gear here, and I'm getting it to the DropShip."

Garand closed his eyes. He wanted to rub the bridge of his nose, to knead at the headache he knew was brewing behind his eyes. Instead he opened his eyes and glared at Alvarez.

"Roger that, sir," he said. "Clear." He toggled the channel closed and sighed.

"Leg?" Alvarez asked.

Garand opened his mouth to answer but the alert signal on his helmet beeped. He slapped the toggle.

"—suits, I don't know how many, and they're *inside the wall!*" Giddons was shouting.

Garand grabbed for Alvarez's shoulder and took off running toward the front. "Giddons! Say again—"

"Jupiter's balls, get back," Giddons snarled, no longer talking on his radio, and there was the hammer of a big combat shotgun. A moment later Garand heard the sound echo down the thick hallway.

"Giddons!"

There was no reply.



Cabot climbed back into his slot and clutched the handhold. He slung the Maxell around behind him and chinned a com line open. "Let's go, Richter." The Harasser shivered as the drive fans spun up again and then lurched into motion, sliding toward the gate. It was an antipersonnel gate, so Richter drove right through it.

"No reaction," Newland said. He was best at reading the take from his Grenadier's sensors, and they'd retrofitted in a radio-frequency scanner. "What I'm hearing is 'oh gods, they're coming, burn your files,' and the like."

"We better not be too late," Vasquez rumbled.

"We're not," Rook said.

"We're here to get the goods," Vasquez said. "If they're purging their files and burning the records, all the samples will be in the flash bins." His Grenadier clumped to the ground as the Harasser fishtailed to stop in front of the main entrance. Cabot was half-a-step behind him, already searching the windows and ports for eyes and heat. There should have been a sentry at the door—any rational military post would have a door guard—but there wasn't one. They were all inside, watching the remote feeds of the battle.

"Head's up," Newland said. "Somebody's calling for 'Post Three.'"

"Time's up," Rook muttered. His Void took a knee in front of the main access door. "Front door?"

"Go," Cabot said. He swung his Maxell around and brought it bear on the slit window nearest the door.

The Void's big PPC swung into line with the door and fired in one smooth motion. The support PPC was a weapon meant to hit and hurt even a BattleMech's armor; against the door it was devastating. The heavy steel—common steel, not diamond-weave combat armor—drank in the energy and exploded, tearing the top hinges free and blasting the door open in reaction. It whipped open, the bottom edge spitting sparks as it skidded. Smoke billowed out of the small room just inside, revealing another door. Rook rose, took two steps forward, and crouched down again.

Cabot lowered the Maxell and brought around the big automatic shotgun he favored for door-to-door. The big, nineteen-round drum magazine was loaded with small grenade rounds to start, designed to blast a tightly packed group of defenders. Or a door. He held it up a little higher and clicked an interrogative at Rook.

"I got it," the Void trooper said. He adjusted his aim and fired again, with similar results. A moment later the smoke cleared and Rook's arm waved him forward. "We're in."

Cabot leapt to his feet, careful to let his leg muscles relax and the Tornado's actuators do the sudden movement. He led with the shotgun, helmet sensors alive. Smoke billowed down the hallway behind the second door, a narrow affair. The Tornado's sensors measured the distance and displayed it automatically; Cabot grunted. "Newland. Vasquez. You're too big. Rook, with me." He gestured down the hallway. "Phase Two, gentlemen."

"We'll keep 'em stirred up," Vasquez said. His big Grenadier clumped around and fired the big anti-armor laser Vasquez favored at a target Cabot didn't see. "In and out, Cab."

"In and out," Cab said. A new blast of wind sent smoke and dust and loose papers billowing down the hallway

ahead of him as Richter spun up the Harasser's fans. They all had tasks to complete outside, and all those tasks were predicated on one mission: keep the Romans from realizing Cabot and Rook were inside the facility.

"Movement," Rook called, but Cabot had already seen it. The shotgun swung around, toward a flimsy interior door with a faceplate set head-high. A helmeted head was visible, its mouth moving. *Talking to the squad behind you or on the radio*, Cabot wondered. He didn't wait to find out. The shotgun bucked in his hand, spitting two rounds a second. The first disintegrated the door.

The second did the same to the infantryman.

The third and fourth disappeared into the sudden smoke.

"Let's go," Cabot said, stepping over—through—what was left of the Marian infantryman.



Garand let Alvarez lead, but his heart wasn't in it. Nor his head, but neither of those things affected his duty. His gods-be-damned, Lethe-flavored duty. Right then, if he could have gone back, he'd have strangled his father for teaching him about honor and duty and all the things that made a man—a *man*, not a *pleb* or a *patrician*—a man. Because he was running toward his death, and he knew it.

But he didn't stop.

"Look for the joints," he shouted as they ran. Alvarez led, but Garand was second behind him with the other seven men of his contubernia following. All of them had their weapons ready. "We'll lead with grenades, and hope the shock slows them down enough for aimed fire."

"And if that doesn't work," one of the men behind him panted, "what then?"

*Then we die*, Garand didn't say. "It will work."

"If it's really battlesuits—" Alvarez said, stopping at an intersection.

"Giddons wouldn't have gotten it wrong," Garand said.

"Then we're dead."

Garand looked at the younger man's face. It was calm—tight, white with exertion and shining with sweat—and even. Garand nodded once at him, short and sharp. Then he clapped him on the shoulder. "Maybe," he said.

"Dis take this," a voice behind Garand said. He looked back and saw the rearmost man drop his rifle. "I'm sorry, Legionnaire, but I didn't come to this dustball to die."

"Pick that up, *Miles*," Garand said quietly.

The infantryman backed up slowly, hands held up empty in front of him. "We can still make the DropShip," he said. His eyes flicked toward the others in the contubernia. "Come on—"

Garand shot him, center mass. The jacketed bullet tore right through chest of his body armor, dropping him. The dead man—and he *was* dead, though he might not know it for a moment or two—writhed, gasping pink-frothed bubbles from his nostrils.

The men nearest the dead man stepped away, eyes flicking back and forth between the dead man and the smoking muzzle of Garand's rifle. Garand met each of their eyes as they did. Then he spun around. Alvarez was looking at him. His face was still calm.

"Let's go," Garand said. His voice was steady, and he didn't think anyone would notice how his fingers were trembling. He nodded at Alvarez, then jerked his chin toward the turn. "You lead, Alvarez."

"Sir," Alvarez said, and spun.

Behind him the dead man gasped, aspirating blood.

Garand ignored it.

He wouldn't be alive to write the letter to the dead man's parents anyway.



Cabot stopped and dropped to his knee, his shoulder automatically snuggling against the wall, at the sound of the shot. It echoed down the corridor, but it was close. He swept the shotgun back and forth across the area in front of him, listening, but there was only the one.

"A sentry?" Rook whispered.

"No," Cabot said. His mind was whipping through scenarios, letting twenty years of infantry experience filter through the scene. "A suicide, maybe. Or discipline." His fingers squeezed and relaxed against the foregrip of the shotgun. "Probably discipline. Somebody tried to run."

"Then they're coming," Rook said. The Void took several steps past Cabot's Tornado, standing in the middle of the hallway. The support PPC was scraping the ceiling, knocking acoustic tiles loose, but the battlesuit's musculature made short work of the formed aluminum frames. "Let me take it."

Cabot leaned to his left so the shotgun's barrel protruded around the protection of the Void's armor. "What if they've got something heavy?"

Rook laughed. "In here?" He spread the Void's hands, palms down, back and forth in front of him—battlesuit jargon for a shrug. "Grenades, maybe. My armor will take it."

"Force is force, Patton," Cabot said. Armor was proof against shrapnel and bullets, and it absorbed the force of an explosion quite well, but force was force. Not even diamond-weave could negate inertia, and the blast wave from high explosive would pulp him against the inside of the Void just as easily as it would outside.

"Then make sure you shoot straight," Rook said. Then the corridor was filled with the actinic blue-white light of the PPC firing, and the air snarled as the ionized track burned through the air. The concussion nudged Cabot more tightly against the wall.

He was already firing.

# INTRODUCTION

The *A Time of War Companion* is a supplemental rulebook for use with *A Time of War: The BattleTech RPG (AToW)*. As an expansion to the basic rules, this volume provides additional rules, options, and equipment for players who already have access to the *A Time of War* rules and are familiar with its mechanisms. Whether you're a gamemaster or a player, the contents of this book will further enhance your role-playing experience in the BattleTech universe from character creation and beyond.



As with *A Time of War*, this book incorporates a running story designed to demonstrate many of the rules expansions found here. While this story is set during the recently ended Word of Blake Jihad, it is important to remember that the BattleTech universe is vast and ever-changing, with engaging adventure opportunities extending as far back as the Age of War and the Star League, to future ages as yet undescribed. Though the contents of this book flow from the perspective of the universe's present time—around the year 3085—most (if not all) of these rules can be applied to any era of play desired.

The *Advanced Gameplay* chapter of this companion presents expanded game rules for playing *A Time of War* adventures in combat and non-combat situations alike. Included in this chapter are advanced actions characters may perform, including a special Edge Save rule, advanced tier personal combat skills, and Bundled-Skill Checks. Additional expanded rules, such as “Hero Mode” gameplay and enhanced wounding rules, are also provided. Other rules found in this chapter will offer further options for character Traits, including both new ways to use existing Traits (such as Title, Rank, Wealth, and Equipped), as well as an all-new Trait (Mutation).



The desert rain cools warrior and BattleMech alike.

In the next chapter, *Advanced Tactical Combat*, expanded tactical rules are presented, including new Special Pilot Abilities, and enhanced options for using battle armor and ProtoMechs in combat on the role-playing level.

The *Advanced Character Generation* chapter provides additional guides for creating characters in the BattleTech universe, including handy design templates for players interested in building a character with the Life Modules in *A Time of War*, as well as a selection of pre-built generic character templates created via the optional Points-Only system—a handy tool for creating player characters and NPCs alike in a time crunch. Also found in this chapter are optional character creation rules, including conversion guides from previous editions of the BattleTech RPG, and the special Life Event Randomizer rules.

The *Advanced Creatures* section provides a more detailed expansion of the basic creature rules found in *A Time of War*, including the introduction of creature traits, advanced creature skills, and guidelines for creating new creatures for use in role-playing adventures. A short bestiary then demonstrates many of these new rules by showing off some of the more interesting examples of alien fauna found across the Inner Sphere.

*Basic World Building* is a handy section for gamemasters in particular, as it provides a basic set of guidelines for creating and detailing the many worlds of the Inner Sphere that have never been described to the players before. Indeed, of the over two-thousand worlds found in the Inner Sphere of the 3080s, scarcely two hundred have ever seen much more than a sidebar description, leaving plenty of room for gamemasters to shape a setting that fits any adventure, great or small.

The *Advanced Equipment* section provides additional rules and personal gear for BattleTech characters to wield in their adventures. In addition to providing full role-playing stats for items not found in the *A Time of War* rulebook, this chapter also features rules for customizing personal equipment, and even converting personal weapons for use on the tactical scale as infantry armament.

The *Role-Playing Campaigns* chapter is mainly aimed at gamemasters, though players may find inspirations within its pages as well. Loaded with adventure seeds and rules of thumb for several popular story types—whether they be mercenary-themed campaigns, or the wonders of deep space exploration—this section has a little something for everyone.

As a final section, *High Power Players* provides rules and guidelines to manage characters (or create NPCs) whose power and influence can be felt on the interstellar stage. After all, while many adventures may take place on the battlefields and in the streets of the Inner Sphere's many worlds, it is often the machinations of noble rulers, military warlords, corporate magnates, and criminal bosses that create these crises to begin with. Included in this chapter are basic guidelines for creating high-powered characters, expansions on the various rank and title structures found throughout the Inner Sphere, and rules for managing landholds in the neo-feudal societies that dominate the worlds of the BattleTech universe.

## ABBREVIATIONS

From time to time, this companion will reference other products from the core line of BattleTech rulebooks. These core books are abbreviated as follows: *A Time of War (AToW)*, *Total Warfare (TW)*, *TechManual (TM)*, *Tactical Operations (TO)*, *Strategic Operations (SO)*.

The advanced rules in this chapter are designed to enhance gameplay options in both combat and non-combat scenarios. Like all of the rules in this book, they are designed to mesh with those found in the *A Time of War* core book, and thus presume that the players and gamemaster are already familiar with the basic game system. Gamemasters and players should agree on which of these optional rules are appropriate for any given situation.

## BASIC ACTIONS

The following advanced rules largely introduce special actions characters may make in basic gameplay. While these rules apply mainly to situation outside of combat, players and game masters may find cause to use them in combat situations.

### EDGE SAVE RULE

*“Better to be lucky than good, eh?”*

The Edge Attribute is one of the most powerful tools any character may have in a game of *A Time of War*. With it, victory can be snatched from the jaws of defeat, or an enemy’s lucky strike can become a miss at the last moment. Gamemasters can even use a character’s Edge as a means of determining his overall success in situations where intangible luck may be the sole determining factor of the outcome (such as at a non-rigged slot machine, or even when taking part in a high-stakes round of Revolver Roulette).

The standard rules for using Edge in gameplay are defined in the core rules for *A Time of War* (see pp. 42-43, *AToW*), where—to avoid rampant abuse of the stat, and thus reduce gameplay to an endless series of rerolls, nudged modifiers, and blind luck—its use is limited solely to the maximum limit of the character’s Edge Attribute level. After that, no matter how dire circumstances become, the character’s luck is literally run out until it replenishes...or is paid for in XP.

The Edge Save Rule offers an alternative use of Edge as a means of affecting a character’s fate in a given situation *without* “burning” Edge points in gameplay. Using this rule thus spares the character from any XP costs to recover Edge

if (or when) he finds himself no longer able to wait for his “karmic realignment”. In an Edge Save roll, the character makes a standard Single Attribute Check against his Edge Attribute score—applying no modifiers to the result—to change the outcome of any dice roll that personally (and directly) affects the character in an undesired fashion.

Like the standard Edge burn, the Edge Save may only be applied to one Action Check roll at a time, though the character’s margin of success with the Edge Save may force other random side effects of the action to change as well. When using the Edge Save Rule, the Edge Attribute Check roll must *always* be made after the outcome of the undesired action is known—including any applicable damage effects and hit locations—but before any other actions are made. In combat, the Edge Save does not count toward the character’s normal action limits (not even as an Incidental Action). The Edge Save rule cannot be used together with any form of Edge “burning” on a single roll (especially that of the Edge Save itself).

The outcome of an Edge Save roll is heavily dependent on the character’s Margin of Success, and uses its own unique Margin of Success Table. Because the undesirable circumstances can vary wildly, gamemasters should use their best judgment when determining the potential outcomes of an Edge Save effect. The Edge Save Table below includes examples and suggested effects only as a guide.

### Unlucky Trait and Edge Saves

If a character using the Edge Save rule also possesses the Unlucky Trait (see p. 128, *AToW*), the following rules changes apply:

- First, the Fumble effect of an Edge Save now occurs on any roll result equal to or less than 1 plus the number of “Unlucky Points” the character possesses. (So, a character with a -5 TP Unlucky Trait—who thus has 3 Unlucky Points—will Fumble his Edge Save on a roll of (1 + 3 = 4) or less.
- Second, the successful use of an Edge Save against the gamemaster’s attempt to use the character’s Unlucky Trait against him automatically regenerates 1 point of “burned” Edge (if any).

### EDGE SAVE TABLE

Roll Result	Outcome (Description)	Example (Gunshot to the Head)
Fumble	<i>Devastating Failure!</i> (Double all negative effects)	That AP/BD: 3B/4 hit to the head now becomes a 6B/8 hit to the head.
MoS 1+	<i>Failure!</i> (No change to original outcome)	That AP/BD: 3B/4 hit to the head is still a 3B/4 hit to the head.
MoS 0	<i>Near Failure!</i> (Reduce effects just enough to survive)	That certainly lethal shot to the head miraculously leaves the character 1 damage point shy of death.
MoS 1	<i>Glancing Blow</i> (Halve any negative effects)	That AP/BD: 3B/4 bullet to the head becomes a 2B/2 hit instead.
MoS 2-3	<i>Destiny Blinks</i> (Offset negative effects randomly)	That AP/BD: 3B/4 shot to the head still hits, but the location is rerolled and now it hits the character’s armored vest.
MoS 4-5	<i>Just a Scratch!</i> (Offset and halve negative effects)	That AP/BD: 3B/4 hit to the head is now a 2B/2 hit, and rerolls to hit the character’s armored vest.
MoS 6+	<i>WHAT Danger?</i> (The original outcome is negated.)	That AP/BD: 3B/4 hit to the head...missed.

ADVANCED  
GAMEPLAY

ADVANCED  
TACTICAL  
COMBAT

CHARACTER  
CREATION

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## BUNDLING SKILLS

*"Listen, bud. It takes more than a pilot's license and 200 hours in a simulator to fly an Overlord."*

A great many complex tasks in the BattleTech universe draw upon multiple Skills that a character must perform in a particular sequence to ensure success. For actions within combat, the outcome of each and every roll may be critical to the character's survival, but for larger actions, extended over minutes, hours or even days, rolling on each Skill Check in the process can become tedious. Examples of this might be spacecraft landing operations, extensive repairs to a battle-damaged 'Mech, or scavenging for supplies through the black market.

The Bundling Skills rule reduces the number of dice rolls needed to resolve complex tasks involving several skills, thus speeding up the overall task resolution. Instead of making a Skill Check for each and every step in the process, a single Bundled Skill Check is made instead, to determine the outcome for the entire sequence.

The minimum number of skill checks required to use this rule is three, but the maximum number of skills a character can bundle together for one check is equal to the character's INT Attribute score. (If the character's INT is less than 3, the character may not use the Bundling Skills rule.) Regardless of the complexity of the actions being performed individually, all Bundled Skill Checks are treated as a Complex Action that lasts until the completion of the final step in their sequence. Because of this, it is generally inadvisable for a character to attempt the use of a Bundled Skill Check in combat, as any interruptions that occur during combat will automatically disrupt the entire process and cause it to fail.

The Bundled Skill Check follows the same rules as a standard Skill Check (see p. 38, *AToW*), but has a set TN of 8 (7 if all of the Bundled Skills are part of a Clan Field Aptitude the character possesses), despite being considered a Complex-Advanced Action. The character may not apply any Link Attribute modifiers to the roll's result, but other modifiers may apply to the Bundled Skill Check at the gamemaster's discretion per normal rules. The Skill Modifier used for the Bundled Skill Check is equal to the average of the skills involved in the check (rounded up). The Natural Aptitude Trait does not modify the mechanics of the Bundled Skill Check, but if one or more of the skills in a Bundled Skill Check is a Natural Aptitude, a single, non-cumulative modifier of +1 will apply to the roll result.

A Bundled Skill Check is resolved before the combined actions begin, but the outcome is not revealed until the bundled actions are either interrupted, or fully completed. When precise timing for completion of the task is required—such as during combat—the time taken (in 5-second combat turns, if applicable) should be determined before the Check roll is made. While Bundled Skill Checks may be executed during combat, combat actions cannot be bundled, because the fluid nature of combat renders it impossible to anticipate whether each and every involved action will apply from start to finish.

If a Bundled Skill Check succeeds, the entire sequence of tasks succeeds (with the same MoS applied to each action). If the Bundled Skill Check fails, determine which skill in the sequence failed by counting backward from the final Skill in the sequence by 1 action for every 2 points of MoF (or fraction thereof), and treat all Skill Checks in the sequence prior to that as having a MoS of 0. (If the Bundled Skill Check fumbled, or if the MoF indicates more

actions failed than were attempted, the entire sequence failed from the start.) Thus, if a Bundled Skill Check of 5 Skills succeeds by a MoS of 3, all five Skill Checks are treated as if they scored a MoS of 3; but if the same Bundled Skill Check failed by a MoF of 3, the failure is determined to have occurred at the second to last Skill in the sequence ( $3 \div 2 = 1.5$ , round to 2). If the failure is a fumble, then the first action of the sequence suffers the effects of a fumble; otherwise, the MoF at the point of failure is considered to be 1.

*Rebecca is a smuggler pilot preparing to execute an unscheduled manual landing of her unregistered DropShip at a local spaceport during an overcast night (thanks to an on-board emergency). The gamemaster has determined that the process of identifying, locating, and communicating with a suitable spaceport—coupled with manually landing her ship to avoid tying into the spaceport's instrument landing system and possibly drawing undue attention—will require several rolls. Rebecca decides to resolve this action as a Bundled Skill Check. Her relevant attributes, traits, and skills are as follows:*

Attribute	Score	Link		
INT	6	+0		
Skill	Links	TN/C	Level	
Acting	CHA (+1)	8/CB	+2	
Career/DropShip Pilot	INT (+0)	7/SB	+3	
Comms/Conventional	INT (+0)	7/SB	+2	
Navigation/Space	INT (+0)	7/SB	+2	
Piloting/Spacecraft	RFL+			
	DEX (+1)	8/SA	+3*	
Sensor Operations	INT+			
	WIL (+0)	8/SA	+1	

### Traits

*\*Natural Aptitude/Piloting/Spacecraft*

*Using standard Skill checks, Rebecca learns that needs to make five Skill Checks to successfully land: Career/DropShip Pilot (to identify relevant spaceport information), Comms/Conventional (to communicate with the spaceport's air-traffic control), Acting (to put on a convincing act as a humble merchant whose ILS guidance system is non-functional), Navigation/Space (to set course using local GPS satellites and other appropriate indicators), and Piloting/Spacecraft (to execute the landing). Because her INT Score allows her to bundle up to six Skill Actions together, she also decides to add in a Sensor Operations Check, to sweep the local airspace for any signs of interceptors.*

*Her Bundled Skill Check reduces this sequence to a single 2D6 roll with a TN of 8. The whole process will take roughly a few hours as she makes her approach, according to the gamemaster. Because there is no combat underway, there is no need to determine any more specific timeframe than that, though the GM warns Rebecca that a failed roll might raise alarm among the local authorities. The Skill Modifier for this action will be +4 ( $[+2+3+2+2+3+1] \div 6 = 2.17$  average Skill modifier, round up to +3; +1 for her Natural Aptitude in Pilot/Spacecraft.  $+3 +1 = +4$ ). To reflect an only mildly inquisitive*

spaceport control, and the slightly reduced visibility over the landing zone, the GM adds a -1 modifier.

Rebecca makes the roll, applying the Skill Modifier of +4 noted above. She cannot use either of the +1 Link Attribute Modifiers she has in her Acting or Piloting/Spacecraft Skills, because she has elected to make a Bundled Skill Check. The GM's conditional modifier of -1 also applies. The roll is 4, which means Rebecca has failed the Bundled Skill Check by a MoF of 1 (Roll of 4 +4 -1 = 7). This means, however, that she only failed the final check of the sequence—the Sensor Operations sweep—after already succeeding in locating a suitable spaceport, bluffing her way through a manual landing, and delivering her ship safely to the ground. The GM secretly decides that what Rebecca's sensor sweep missed—or, rather, dismissed out of hand—was a passing conventional fighter used by the local militia to note unexpected arrivals like hers. (Whether this means the planetary authorities know there is a smuggler in their midst is another matter entirely, but for the time being Rebecca doesn't realize her ship's arrival has been spotted by local muscle.)

## TIERED SKILLS

*"They're still using DIS-3K Millennial for an operating system? How eight-bit can you get?"*

In *A Time of War*, a number of special skills exist that are learnable by anyone in a basic form, but cannot be mastered beyond a certain level of proficiency without much more dedicated study. Reflecting a difference between rudimentary or freestyle disciplines and sophisticated mastery and talent, these "Tiered Skills" include: Art, Computers, Interest, Martial Arts, Melee Weapons, and Prestidigitation.

In *A Time of War*, the primary distinction between basic-level tiered skills and advanced-level tiered skills is the change in the skill's TN and the addition of a second linked attribute upon reaching a skill level of 4. The following offers additional options gamemasters and players can use to add more flavor to the use of tiered skills in gameplay.

### Non-Combat Tiered Skills

For characters with advanced, non-combat tiered skills (Art, Computers, Interest, and Prestidigitation), their breakthrough into the ranks of the higher tiers means that they have truly mastered the fundamentals of their craft—though this will only become truly apparent after completing their initial level of advanced training.

To reflect this concept, characters with a skill level of 5+ in a non-combat tiered skill can execute basic-level actions with automatic success unless the GM determines that extraordinary conditions apply to create modifiers. For example, a character with an advanced-tier Art/Drawing or Art/Painting skill can sketch out a detailed map or draw a crude image of a distinctive BattleMech or insignia from memory, while a character with advanced-tier Computers skill can easily install and run any software package out of the box or perform basic troubleshooting on a malfunctioning system. Advanced-tier Interest skills can vary wildly, but characters with such levels of development should be able to describe the fundamentals of

their Interest by heart, such as recapping the history of the Lyran Commonwealth—without dates and referencing only the most famous Archons—through use of an advanced-tier Interest/Lyran History skill. For Prestidigitation, advanced-tier skill levels should enable a character to easily palm any small object not secured in a closed container without anyone noticing—or can even allow the character to quick draw a Pistol or handheld knife as an Incidental Action in combat.

### Combat Tiered Skills

Because combat is a condition with far less certainty, advanced-tier combat skills (Martial Arts and Melee Weapons) do not have the same success guarantee for basic-level actions that the non-combat tiered skills offer. Instead, the access to advanced-tier combat skills offers a wealth of special moves and actions. These capabilities are detailed in the Combat section (see pp. 16-21).

## COMBAT ACTIONS

The personal combat rules described in *A Time of War* (see pp. 164-195, *AToW*) are intended to allow players and GMs to swiftly resolve combat between opposing characters and NPCs in a fairly abstracted fashion. For melee combat, the mechanism of a single roll per five-second turn is intended to simulate an exchange of attacks and defensive moves between two combatants, while the damage is likewise intended to reflect the consequences of a series of successful blows, rather than a single hit.

Players who want more details and options to resolve combat may find what they seek in the rules presented here. Of course, as with any such optional rules, resolving these special actions will prove more time-consuming than it would in standard personal combat. Thus, these are not recommended for handling large engagements between many player characters and NPCs.

Unless otherwise noted, the following rules are designed to work within the same framework as standard personal combat system found in *A Time of War*. This means that melee combat attacks, for example, are still considered to be Simple actions, with two such actions permitted per 5-second combat turn. Likewise, the various melee defense rolls are considered Incidental actions, as per the normal Melee Combat Limits rules (see p. 175, *AToW*).

### SNAP SHOOTING (RANGED COMBAT ONLY)

*"Ah! What the hell! So many bullets!"*

Snap shooting is a special ranged-combat attack in which the Attacker using most forms of self-loading weapons (including revolvers and semi-automatics) may fire such weapons as quickly as they can pull the trigger. Because the focus is on firing as fast as quickly at the target, rather than on accuracy, snap shooting is far less precise.

Only weapons that are not One-Shot, and which do not require a Simple or Complex Action to reload can be snap shot. Burst-capable weapons can be used to fire snap shots, but because snap shooting fires one shot per trigger pull,

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Burst fire and Suppression fire cannot be combined with snap shot attacks. Snap shooting also cannot be performed in melee combat, combined with Careful Aim, or used to execute Aimed Shots.

When snap shooting, the character makes multiple attacks with the weapon against the same target, counting this as a Simple Action. Each snap shot attack suffers a -3 roll modifier, and is resolved separately. The maximum number of attacks per Simple Action is equal to the Attacker's RFL score, the weapon's Burst rating, or the remaining shots in the weapon's magazine—whichever is lower. (If a weapon does not indicate a Burst rating, it may fire no more than 3 shots when snap shooting.)

### FLURRY COMBAT (MELEE COMBAT ONLY)

*"Your blows are as the puns of a bad comedian--annoying, but easily silenced by my fists."*

Under the Flurry Combat rule, the combatants involved make multiple attack and defense rolls, rather than one apiece. This method reflects individual blows in melee combat (whether using unarmed Martial Arts skills or Melee Weapons). Although this rule is designed for striking and blocking melee combat, it can also be used for resolving grapple actions.

In Flurry Combat, each combatant makes a number of melee rolls equal to his RFL score (or, if possessing advanced-tier melee skills, his DEX score; whichever is higher). All applicable modifiers to the standard melee attack rolls will apply to each Flurry Combat roll as well. The Defender in the melee resolves all of his melee defense rolls first, after which the Attacker then makes his attack rolls, and matches up each attack roll in sequence to any one made by the Defender.

If the Attacker receives more attack rolls than the Defender (because of higher attributes) he can elect to replace prior melee roll results with the newer ones. If the Attacker receives fewer rolls, however, he must match all of his attack rolls with the highest defense rolls made by the Defender. Any excess melee roll results are discarded.

To determine the final success of the action, total up the final margins of success (or failure) from each melee pair for each combatant. This sum becomes the final Margin of Success (or Failure) for that melee combat round. Resolve this final damage using the Standard Melee Attack Damage rules in *A Time of War* (see p. 180, *AToW*), applying this final Margin of Success to the damage result.

*Brian is engaging his ancient enemy, Ben. Brian has a RFL of 5, a STR of 6 and a (basic-tier) Martial Arts Skill of +3. Ben has a RFL of 4, a DEX of 7, a STR of 5, and an advanced-tier Martial Arts Skill of +4.*

*Brian has lost Initiative this turn. Ben immediately attacks Brian. Because of his RFL score, Brian gets to roll five times, with results of 11, 7, 8, 3 and 4.*

*While his RFL only provides 4 rolls, Ben's advanced-tier Martial Arts allows him to use his higher DEX score of 7 instead. Ben thus gets to roll 7 times, and apply his results immediately. He rolls a 3, matching it with Brian's 3. He rolls a 5, matching it with Brian's 4. He rolls a 9, matching it with Brian's 8. He rolls a 6, matching it with Brian's 7. And he rolls a 4, matching it with Brian's 11. He can roll 2 more times, using the results to replace prior rolls. He rolls an 8, and replaces his 4 that's opposing Brian's 11. He next rolls a 10. While he could have swapped out*

*the 8 he has opposing Brian's 11, he instead swaps out his 3 that opposes Brian's 3.*

*This means that Brian's rolls generated the following Margins of Success: 7, 3, 4, -1 and 0.*

*Ben has generated the following Margins opposing each of those results: 4, 2, 5, 6, and 1.*

*This means Ben's total attack has generated a MoS of 18 ( $4 + 2 + 5 + 6 + 1 = 18$ ) versus Brian's defensive MoS of 13 ( $7 + 3 + 4 - 1 + 0 = 13$ ). As the higher total MoS, Ben wins, with a final MoS of 5 ( $18 - 13 = 5$ ). As Ben's STR provides 2 damage points ( $5 \div 4 = 1.25$ , round up to 2), his MoS adds another 2 points ( $0.25 \times \text{MoS } 5 = 1.25$ , round up to 2). Ben thus dishes out 4 Damage points ( $2 + 2 = 4$ ) in his melee with Brian.*

*Ben elected to not finish off Brian that day, but soon comes to regret that oversight when Brian returns for a rematch soon afterward. All of their relevant stats remain unchanged.*

*Fortunately for Brian, he wins initiative this time, and attacks Ben.*

*Because of his DEX score, Ben gets to roll 7 times for defense, and achieves the following results: 3, 5, 9, 4, 6, 7 and 8.*

*Brian, who has fully recovered since the previous encounter, rolls 5 times. This means he automatically ignores Ben's two lowest results (3 and 4) and must match his results to Ben's remaining 5 immediately.*

*He rolls a 10 and matches it with Ben's 5. He rolls an 11 which he matches with Ben's 9. He matches a 4 to Ben's 6, an 8 with Ben's 7, and another 10 with Ben's 8.*

*This means Ben has generated the following Margins of Success: 1, 5, 2, 3 and 4.*

*Brian has generated the following Margins to oppose each of those results: 6, 7, 0, 4, and 6.*

*This means Brian has a net MoS of 23 ( $6 + 7 + 0 + 4 + 6 = 23$ ) across all exchanges, while Ben's total MoS is only 15 ( $1 + 5 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 15$ ). Brian's MoS exceeds Ben's by 8, and with his STR of 6, that means this time, it's Brian beating 4 damage into Ben ( $\text{STR } 6 \div 4 = 1.5$ , round up to 2;  $\text{MoS } 8 \times 0.25 = 2$ ;  $2 + 2 = 4$ ).*

### SPECIAL MARTIAL ARTS MANEUVERS (MELEE COMBAT)

*"Did you see what that guy just did to Cal? Screw this! I'm leaving, and not coming back until I find a big gun."*

Another abstraction of the standard melee combat rules is one of combat style. In focusing only on determining which combatant sustains damage (and how much), the exact nature of the maneuvers involved are left up to the players' imaginations and the gamemaster's adjudication.

If the GM approves, the following special Martial Arts maneuvers can be used to add more flavor and options to melee combat. As all of these would likely slow down combat resolution, they are not recommended for large engagements with many combatants, but can add more drama and character to a struggle between individuals.

Each special maneuver below indicates whether it can be used while attacking or defending (or in grappling situations) in a melee. Also indicated is the special maneuver's Minimum Skill rating, which may be Untrained, Basic (Martial Arts Skill level 0 to +3) or Advanced (Martial Arts Skill level +4 and up).