

BattleTech 2.0 – The Next Second Coming Generation of the Quickening

by Adam Abou-Youssef and Daniel Ferro

BattleTech is a game that many of us knows comes with a rich meta. The universe and setting are strong and open to exploration. It takes hard sci-fi, Mad Max dystopia, and even fantasy elements and blends them into a game that has defied most trends and stuck around for over three decades. And personally I think the game itself is stronger than many give it credit for. However, I would be remiss if I said it didn't need tweaks.

The strengths of the game is that it really conveys the feel of large, semi-humanoid machines blasting away at each other. As damage mounts, combat capabilities are reduced. A lucky hit may take down a unit completely. There are plenty of nail-biting moments waiting to see if your opponent's dice rolls against your 'mech that is more holes than 'mech are going to take it down or if your rolls hit that ammo bin. If it is a close game, it can be intense; it has grit. On the flip side, we have all been there when the game seems to drag. Admittedly, it can take a long time to play and the nature of the modifiers to attack rolls do not help. And if you want to play a game larger than lance against lance, you better have the whole day off.

The advent of Alpha Strike helped some of these problems in many regards. It certainly made larger games viable. The game play is quick and does have many of those elements of the old game that makes it BattleTech. Yet, Alpha Strike lacks the grit of the original. Maintaining that would be not only preferable, but if you are using characters in an ongoing story or campaign then the survivability is needed. Enter these rules tweaks that we have been working on for the past half year.

The goal of our BattleTech 2.0 is to improve game play and speed by simplifying where needed, adjusting where needed, and altering the overall meta. Changes should feel significant without needing to throw away older resources or trashing the stats of the game. If a change is there, it is there for a reason and not just to feel as though we did something. An example would be the many attempts to change the cluster hits table. Some players feel it is a time suck; however, I find the cluster table to be incredibly powerful. Those dice roll can have serious impacts on the game. A Commando can ruin your day with accumulated head hits or floating crits or finding locations stripped of armor. It seems most attempts to alter this mechanic don't actually reduce the number of dice rolls and only weakens the meta of cluster weapons on the game. Those aren't the kinds of changes we want.

The closest equivalent I can think of in explaining our approach would be that of the modern fighting game. The idea is that moves are balanced in ways that offset their strengths and force the player to make decisions based on situation, opponent, and spacing. Some moves may be fast and have short recovery, do little damage or have short reach. The opposite is also true. Many of us are familiar with the Dragon Punch or Shoryuken: a fast, high damage, 1-frame of start up, invincible reversal. But if blocked or avoided there are some 30 seconds of recovery allowing the opponent to devastatingly punish it. Finally, a move might be perfect all around in terms of damage, speed, reach, and recovery; however, it might take a limited resource to use. Not only do such mechanics force the player into making smart choices, I personally think it is much more interesting of a game.

Hopefully the above helps you the reader get into my mindset and understand where we are coming from. What follows are the proposed rules changes and explanations for them. Even more hopefully you will play and try them as well. In our play tests we have found that they provide the changes we want and – what's more – they feel good. On average, we have noticed that a standard game takes 25-33% less time to play. Currently our rules are geared toward the 3025 era of the game. Figuring out how to do more with the later tech and changing how things like ECM and Active Probe work are being thought out.

I. New ranges brackets

Ranges are now based on absolute hexes. The traditional long ranges of weapons are now their

maximum reach. The distance the target is governs the overall modifier. Minimum ranges still work as they have previously.

- Short: 6 (+0 modifier)
- Medium: 7 to 12 (+2 modifier)
- Long: 13 to 24 (+4 modifier)
- Extreme: 25+ (+6 modifier)

This has been the biggest and most rewarding change for the game. A lot of the number crunching for each individual weapon could really slow down the game. If you pilot a 'mech that has a compliment of weapons with differing range brackets, keeping track of where it is a +2 or +4 can be tedious. Now as long as minimum range isn't a factor and the weapon can reach, the to-hit is going to be the same. For those who are familiar with Alpha Strike this might seem familiar as well; however, pay note to the short range. Rather than a 3 hex short range, it was decided that 6 hexes would be better. Not only does the math appear more elegant here with each range being double the previous, but this prevents BattleTech from devolving into the knife fight that it tends to. Distance and maneuvering benefit and no weapon really loses out here either. The best example would be a stock Zeus firing at a unit 11 hexes away. So now its AC/5, LRM-15, and large laser all generate the same to-hit number.

As a side note, I am sure there is someone out there still complaining about how poor ranges are in BattleTech compared to real life. Naturally this is a game so whatever. Yet I did want to point out that the total range of these weapons have been stated to be greater, but what we have are effective ranges. There is a video on YouTube titled “Advanced Combat Rifle 1990 US Army; Search for M16 Replacement” that details the M16 and was produced by the US Army. Under static conditions, the M16 can fire quite far with accuracy, but under combat conditions that drops dramatically. So keep that in mind. Sure, modern tanks are able to fire far as well, but modern tanks don't have to deal with fusion-powered electronic counter measures either.

II. Movement modifiers and TMM

- TMM works similarly to Alpha Strike where a moving unit generates max movement modifier
- Walking generates a +0 modifier to-hit
- Running units are not able to fire while moving, but add +1 to their TMM
- Jumping units generate a +2 for to-hit, add a +1 to TMM, and always generate full heat
- Standing still gives a -1 to-hit bonus, but generates no TMM
- One hexside facing changes no longer cost a movement point. 2 or 3 faces cost 1 MP. This encourages the use of backwards movement (a consideration not in Alpha Strike)
- Water reduces TMM by 1 to a minimum of 0 in addition to their movement reduction and increased cover bonuses. This reduction is for units that at any point enter a water hex during their movement phase, but not for leaving a water hex. Jumping units are exempt from this.

Calculating movement modifiers and remembering how far a unit moved is another big factor in slowing down gameplay. While on the face, I agree that how and far a unit moves should affect how easy it is to be hit. That makes sense in a military environment. Unfortunately, I cannot deny what it means for gameplay. But this has other benefits besides reducing calculations: it makes lighter 'mechs more viable on smaller maps, which is something that they always had trouble with in translating their use in the fiction to the game.

Other things that seem to be controversial in past discussions you can also see here. The changes to how a unit moves comes back to my point of forcing a player to make choices. Since a jumping unit gets its full TMM, then as a consequence that unit should pay for that. Ergo, full heat generation. Running units cannot fire, but this serves two rolls: running is reserved for getting to cover or closing ground; it reduces to-hit calculations for the attacker and means less missing of shots.

Finally, the other major benefit here is that it shifts to-hit modifiers down by 1. On a 2D6 bell curve, this means a lot. If you can reduce a to-hit from 8 to 7, you've increased your chance on connecting an attack from below 50% to above.

III. Physical Attacks

- Punching, kicking, and clubbing all give a -1 to-hit bonus
- Clubbing attacks now force a PSR when they hit
- Kicking and clubbing attacks against vehicles on the same elevation level as the attacking 'mech delivers x2 damage due to the height and leverage of 'mechs.

The above changes nerf the overpowered kick while boosting the clubbing attack (including hatchets and swords). Many have recognized the benefits to the kick far outweigh the benefits of other physicals and so we wanted to change that. A missed kick still causes the attacker to make a PSR to avoid falling. The PSR for a successful clubbing attack makes it more viable as it can deliver kick damage to the torso. Personally, I would argue that a BattleMech should only throw one punch, but that was not an argument I could win.

IV. Terrain

- Skidding is removed!
- Partial cover generates a +2 modifier on to-hit. Roll as normal on 2D6 hit-location, but leg hits are re-rolled.
- Woods work normally for line of sight, but do not affect to-hit for missiles. Rather woods affect the cluster hits value to a minimum of 2. For example, an intervening heavy woods hex would generate a +2 on to-hit for direct fire weapons, but a -2 on the cluster hits for how many missiles connect for an LRM.
- Level 1 water now sinks significantly more heat. Each submerged leg sinks 2 more points of heat plus for any heat sinks placed there. For example, an RLF-3N would now sink an additional 5 points of heat if standing in water. This is a big boon for quad 'mechs as well, but offset by all shots to the limbs being re-rolled to the torsos/head.

Skidding is the obvious change. I don't think anyone enjoys dealing with that rule. The partial cover change is a compromise between the old and new rules. We like them. The woods changes provide an interesting meta change for the game. It might seem odd at first, but so far it seems pretty cool and provides a bit of extra flavor to missile weapons. Finally, the boost to water is in line with the fiction. It makes water risky to occupy due to the location rolls and risk of breaching with falling damage, but the potential increase in damage output is a nice form of balancing.

V. Combat Changes

- For attacks using the side location table, change the location of the opposite torso to the rear location. For example, with an attack to the left side a roll of 9 would actually strike the right torso rear rather than right torso front.
- Vehicles use the new Total Warfare crit table, but the classic Compendium hit location and motive damage tables.

- For the 2 column on the cluster hits table, a roll of 7+ get you 2 hits rather than a roll of 8+.

These rules are slight changes, but have a big effect – or at least that is how it feels. The changes to the side attacks has more than once almost downed a unit with a single hit by threatening an ammo bin. Vehicles are now softer targets than currently without being the paper bags they were before Total Warfare (eg. a fresh Demolisher tank being taken out by a medium laser). The change to the 2 column on the cluster hits is not game-breaking in the way some feared (eg. Wanting to strip out SRM-4s and -6s for just multiple SRM-2s), but definitely help. My desire for this was that all cluster weapons cross 50% damage at a roll of 7. This becomes a big help to Ultra ACs. And even if someone wanted to remove an SRM-6 and put in three SRM-2s, that player would still need to hit with all three racks to equal the damage.

VI. Weapons

- Flamers deal both 2 points of damage and 3 points of heat. Historically flamers only did damage and seemed to be there mostly for flavor. Then it could be an either/or proposition. Due to its weight and heat output for the attacker, it seemed more than fair for this buff.
- Machine Guns gets a +1 to determining critical hit rolls. This is due to the rapid fire nature of the weapon and provides a nice quirk beyond the infantry damage.

Autocannons have always been a bit of a problem area. They weren't terrible in the original game setting, but they weren't great either. By the time you hit TRO:2750, you're in trouble if you use one. Some players want to dramatically boost them. We took more of a light touch with buffing them and trying to have them compete with their nearest “neighbor”. What we found is a relatively comfortable spot that doesn't make them overpowered, but makes their presence noticeable. An AC/5 makes a solid main gun on a lot of 'mechs now and the Jagermech can put a lot of firepower downrange.

Conveniently, autocannon names/classifications can remain as is since each class fires the same percentage of a ton of ammunition in one round. For example, a ton of AC/10 ammo carries 10 shots. Each shot consumes 10% of a ton or 100kg. Happy accident.

| Class | Damage | Heat | Minimum | Range | Weight | Crits | Shot/Ton | Special |
|-------|--------|------|---------|-------|--------|-------|----------|--|
| AC/2 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 24 | 6 | 1 | 45 | -1 to-hit bonus against flying targets |
| AC/5 | 8 | 1 | 3 | 18 | 8 | 4 | 20 | -1 to-hit bonus against flying targets |
| AC/10 | 12 | 3 | 0 | 15 | 12 | 7 | 10 | |
| AC/20 | 22 | 7 | 0 | 9 | 14 | 10 | 5 | |

Things to make note of:

- The lower class autocannons are given bonuses against flying targets, which matches the fiction. They are said to be good anti-aircraft weapons. I would let this stack with the -1 bonus for cluster hits from LB-X cannons.
- The AC/2, 5, and 10 now compete well with their nearest weapon counterparts, but not in ways normally thought. The AC/2 looks like it can compete next to the LRM-5; the AC/5 is solid next to the large laser; and the AC/10 a good competitor to the PPC. They still mean the unit carries ammo that can explode, but after the first 10 heat sinks that are integral to the engine, they can be sufficiently efficient compared to energy weapons. For example, if you were up to it you could create an Awesome variant with four AC/5s

and it would still be a viable machine.

- The AC/10 is now a headcapper, which is huge for introtech gameplay.
- For LB-X cluster hits, we decided to leave the damage as it was before (ie. An LB-5X would roll on the 5 column). Cluster hits are very powerful as is and I have taken down a few 'mechs with floating crits with an LB-20X.