

Knife in the Dark

Scenario # 1: Stiletto

Until now, Jacob Bannson has enjoyed a *détente* with Duke Aaron Sandoval, one of the few people who could seriously threaten his ambition to eventually rule Prefecture IV. With Bannson's recent foray to Ozawa in Prefecture III, he decides now is the time to test Duke Sandoval and his Swordsworn, while the Duke believes that Bannson is fully occupied on Ozawa. Choosing a backwater world with no tactical or strategic importance to avoid riling the Duke too much, Bannson makes his move on New Rhodes III in a test of the Duke's determination to control all worlds in Prefecture IV.



Captain Bart Bradshaw
Mansion Pleasure Retreat
Near Macbeth, Tybalt
Prefecture IV, The Republic

"But New Rhodes III, sire?" Though he tried to hide it, Captain Bart Bradshaw could not help the confusion that crept into his voice. He hated to show any weakness in front of his liege—although Bannson did not have a drop of noble blood in him, his underlings quickly learned how they should address him—but Jacob's declaration had taken him completely by surprise.

"You sound shocked," the cultured voice responded. Jacob Bannson slowly turned away from the fireplace to face Bart. His short, stocky stature was accentuated by the flames dancing behind him, but the shadows cast by the fire swallowed his face. His sonorous voice sounded as if it were coming from the void, a pit that would swallow the unwary.

Bart nervously cleared his throat. Bannson encouraged his troops to think for themselves and even to question their orders occasionally. If he felt you were showing weakness, however, you could find a knife coming at you in the dark before you knew it. Jacob *hated* weakness. "I'm just not sure what there is to gain from New Rhodes III," he ventured. "It's a hot desert ball filled with dirty nomads and fat, rich people who want to gaze at colored rocks. What could we. . . ." Again he paused to swallow thickly; the room suddenly felt too hot. "What could you gain by taking New Rhodes III? What value does it have?"

"None." The whisper came as though a breeze were blowing through the room; Bart was too tongue-tied to respond.

A soft chuckle emanated from the darkness. Jacob's red hair, backlit by the fire, looked ablaze. "Nothing to say? Well, don't worry, captain. It's not the world that's important, but the fight. New Rhodes III is a backwater world, not worth defending, correct? That is the decision I will force Sandoval to make. Will he allow me to take a world in his domain, or will he spread out his forces too thinly in order to defend such a useless world? His response will speak volumes and allow me to put the next stage of my plans into motion." The laugh that followed his speech was full-throated, carrying an edge of danger.

Like all of his men, Bradshaw was well aware of his liege's propensity for theatrics, but for the first time he truly began to fear his machinations.

Captain Ben Geringer
Swordsworn Base
Near Xerxes, New Rhodes III
Prefecture IV, The Republic



The air was unbearably hot and dry, seemingly able to suck the moisture right out of his pores, evaporating it even before he'd sweated it out. Captain Ben Geringer sometimes wondered if he looked like an overheating 'Mech, with vapor pouring off his body. Of course, the locals had informed him that this was mild weather and that temperatures in the great desert on the continent of Minos regularly reached more than 60 degrees Celsius. The thought made him ache for a glacier bath on his homeworld of Ankaa, like a sailor longed for a woman after half a year in the void.

"Captain, I've got the final trajectory!" shouted a voice behind him. He turned his head but continued toward his *Panther*. His XO was running to catch up to him. *Fool*, he thought. You shouldn't run in this heat unless there's a 'Mech's foot about ready to come down on top of you. Nevertheless, he tossed Jeremy a half salute and continued slogging through the soft sand. Maybe he'd make it to his *Panther* before they actually grounded, he thought in exasperation.

After catching up to him, Jeremy paused to regain his breath before speaking. "It looks like they'll be grounding out in Sector 101C, near Jkonda Basin," he said, handing Ben a sheaf of papers, which included a map of the target area.

A cursory look told him nothing more than he'd already known. More important, it didn't answer any of his questions. Why New Rhodes III? And why the Jkonda Basin? It was in the middle of nowhere, without a hint of tactical or strategic importance. Of course, New Rhodes III as a whole also fell into that category.

Ben had thought he'd been sent into exile when Duke Sandoval posted him to this backwater world. Had the Duke known something he hadn't shared? Or was this simply a coincidence?

Ben felt a sudden relief from the heat as he passed under the shadow cast by his looming *Panther*. He gazed in satisfaction at the metal giant, but knew that it would be almost unbearably hot in the cockpit even before its reactor had been engaged. He shook his head. He didn't believe in coincidences. They made life too neat. Too simple. Life was anything but neat and simple. Large things were afoot, and it looked like he was the pawn. Nevertheless, he was Duke Sandoval's pawn, and he would defend this world even if he didn't know why.

MECHWARRIOR[®]

DARK AGE

Scenario # 1: Stiletto

Background

Because both the attacking and defending forces are relatively small and there are no significant targets, the attacking Raiders ground their Drop-Ships a scant hundred kilometers from Xerxes. Their first probing attack to feel out the defenses of New Rhodes III is a direct strike at Xerxes. Not wanting to damage the city, the defenders march out to meet them in a straight-up fight.

Objective

Each player aims to defeat the other, but the sand inhibits movement for all units except hovercraft.

Army Size: 2-player game; 300 points; 3 orders per turn

Time Limit: 60 minutes

Rules Set: MechWarrior: Dark Age

Preparing the Battlefield

Players prepare the battlefield as per the **MechWarrior: Dark Age** standard rules. Player 1 represents the Raiders. Player 1's battleforce must include at least 1 Raiders unit. Player 2 represents the Swordsworn. Player 2's battleforce must include at least 1 Swordsworn unit.

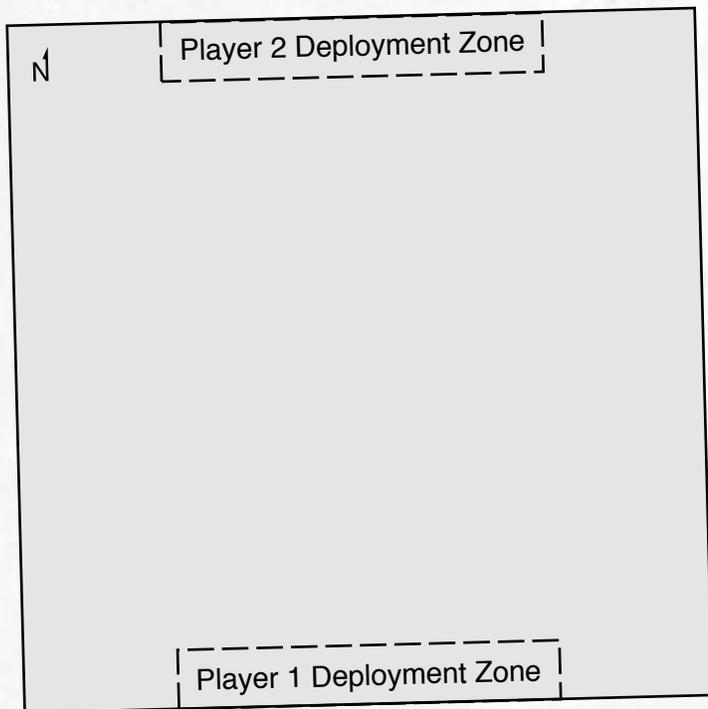
Special Rules

- 1) Unless it has speed mode hover, any unit with a speed value greater than 6 has a speed value of 6.
- 2) No water terrain may be placed. It's a desert!

Victory Conditions

Use standard **MechWarrior: Dark Age** victory conditions.

Battlefield Map



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Knife in the Dark

Scenario #2: Color of Night

After the initial attack on New Rhodes III, Captain Bradshaw pulls his forces back from Xerxes. He then appears to commit a classic strategic blunder—splitting his forces in the face of the enemy. But he plans to send the smaller force, masquerading as the majority of his forces, to strike at night against one side of Xerxes and then apparently be pushed back. He hopes that the defending Swordsworn will be unable to resist leaving their defensive position to pursue the “defeated” Raiders. His second, stronger force will then strike from the opposite direction, securing Xerxes.



Captain Bart Bradshaw
Near Xerxes
Crete, New Rhodes III
Prefecture IV, The Republic

Bart loved the dark. There was something strangely pleasurable about denying oneself the ability to use a sense—especially a sense that humans relied upon so heavily. It was as though he stood before the instinctive fear that humans have of the unknown and dared it to bring it on. The heightening of his other senses, especially hearing, was euphoric, as though he were suddenly imbued with superhuman abilities. It allowed him to step beyond himself, to reach new levels of achievement.

Such conditions were ideal for stalking prey. With his senses heightened, he could almost smell them, a sour odor that stank of helplessness and imminent death at his hands. At such moments he became a vengeful god who they prayed to keep at bay.

It was a high that no drug could surpass.

Of course, this night he'd not be stalking in a sneak suit, armed with only a bared stiletto. But grasping the controls of his *Arbalest* and setting it into motion held a power all its own. He clenched his teeth and opened up a comm line to his second in command.

“Raider Two, do you copy? I repeat, Raider Two, this is Raider One: do you copy?” He paused for a moment and suddenly leaned forward as his 'Mech hit a soft spot in the sand that almost sent his *Arbalest* tumbling backwards. Cursing, he managed to stay on his feet and reorient himself as his XO's voice responded.

“Raider One, this is Raider Two; I copy. Over.”

“What is the timetable like?” Bart asked.

“We are right on schedule,” his XO said. “Though two of my tracked vehicles became bogged down at one point, we were able to extricate them with the IndustrialMech's aid. At 0200 hours, the attack will proceed.”

“Excellent. Then I'll see you in Xerxes. Raider One out.”

He switched over to the general frequency. “All troops, this is Raider One,” he announced. “Color of Night is a go. Begin moving out immediately.”

Yes, these things were best done in the dark.

Captain Ben Geringer
Xerxes
Crete, New Rhodes III
Prefecture IV, The Republic



The solid tone informed Ben he had weapons lock, and he thumbed the trigger, sending eight short-range missiles streaking across the intervening space to slam into the Scimitar as it attempted to sideslip the incoming fire into a side street. The hellish energy of the particle projector cannon slung under his *Panther's* right forearm had already heavily damaged the Scimitar, and the missiles blasted away additional armor and tore a large hole in the hovercraft's air skirt. The front right end immediately plummeted to the ground, where sparks and flying metal told of the destruction of the front lift propeller; the back end of the craft leapt into the air and skewed hard to the left.

In a superhuman effort, its gunner tracked on the *Panther* with the turret despite his craft's antics, and let fly with his own four-pack of short-range missiles just as the vehicle slammed into the front of what had been a nice hotel, sending shattered glass and stone columns cascading into the street. Ben attempted to duck the return fire, but two of the missiles still found their mark, pulverizing the armor on his left arm.

As the street settled into that eerie calm that always follows the devastatingly quick action of combat, Ben relaxed his grip a bit. *Simply amazing*, he thought. He had to give the vehicle crew credit. He'd already dispatched two other vehicles and half a dozen battle armor squads, and this was the first real fight he'd gotten. Of course, he still hadn't seen any of their 'Mechs.

“Captain,” his XO said, sounding loud and agitated. “Captain, are you there? Over.”

“Aye, Leftenant,” Ben responded. “This is Captain Geringer, over.”

“Captain, most of the Raiders appear to have pulled back in a full retreat,” his XO reported. “Though I attempted to stop him, Leftenant Jaxon has led his troops after them.”

“What!” Ben generally didn't raise his voice, but if ever there was a time to shout, this was it. They'd been easily keeping the probing attacks at bay—and now this nonsense. He'd have them on latrine duty for months! “Why didn't I hear of this sooner?”

“The buildings appear to be blocking some of our communications, sir. Right now I'm in grid 33B.” Ben quickly toggled his secondary monitor until he located the correct map of the city.

“I'll be there in ten minutes. Out.” With that he got his *Panther* moving at top speed and again wondered where the enemy 'Mechs were hiding.

MECHWARRIOR[®] DARK AGE

Scenario #2: Color of Night

Background

By splitting his forces, the Raiders' commander hopes to lure the Swordsworn out of their defensive position by giving them an apparent opportunity to destroy a good portion of the Raiders' forces. Once the Swordsworn have moved out of position, the second, larger force will move to take Xerxes and then act as the anvil to the remaining Raiders' hammer.

Objective

The defending player is attempting to eliminate as many attacking units as possible.

Army Size: 300 points; 3 orders per turn

Time Limit: 60 minutes

Rules Set: MechWarrior: Dark Age

Preparing the Battlefield

Players prepare the battlefield as per the **MechWarrior: Dark Age** standard rules in addition to the terrain shown. Player 1 represents the Raiders. Player 1's battleforce must include at least 1 Raiders unit. Player 2 represents the Swordsworn. Player 2's battleforce must include at least 1 Swordsworn unit.

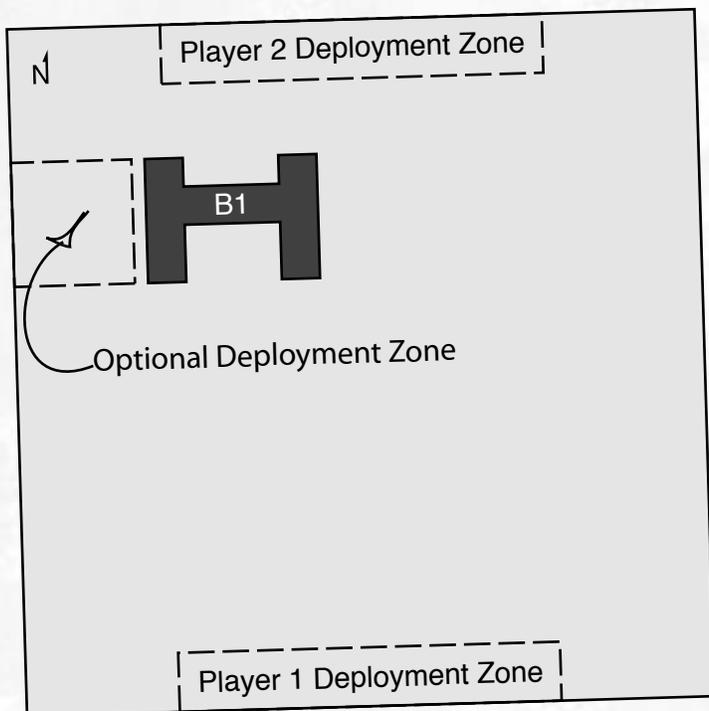
Special Rules

- 1) Player 1 may place up to 75 points' worth of units in the "Optional Deployment Zone."
- 2) No deep water may be placed.

Victory Conditions

Use standard **MechWarrior: Dark Age** victory conditions.

Battlefield Map



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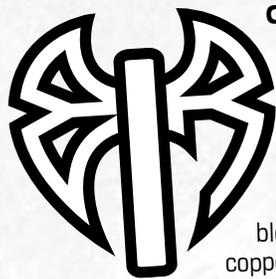
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Knife in the Dark

Scenario #3: Burning Sands

Following the assault on the city, a small portion of the remaining Raiders on the planet attempts to move toward their grounded DropShip, with which they've lost contact. With no accurate maps of the area and the endless "sameness" of a desert, however, the force becomes lost, and the terrible heat quickly begins to take its toll. The native nomad warriors, who have accepted the Swordsworn and pledged to help defeat the Raiders, guide a small contingent of their new Swordsworn allies to the lost Raiders. As the battle begins, the nomads, though no better equipped than a peasant company, join the fray and quickly prove that they deserve to be called warriors.



Captain Bart Bradshaw **Near Jkonda Basin** **Crete, New Rhodes III** **Prefecture IV, The Republic**

Cool water poured out of rough-hewn stone before him, just out of reach. Bart Bradshaw licked his bleeding, cracking lips and felt the coppery liquid coat his tongue, not the taste he longed for. He imagined the cool water cascading down his throat and tried several times to swallow.

He found a reserve of strength that allowed him to reach out again, but the waterfall was still just a little too far away. Shaking his head slowly, he wondered why it was proving so difficult to reach the water. Then he noticed for the first time that the liquid was not the dark, almost blue shade he was accustomed to but had greens, oranges, and reds, not to mention shades of a strange color he could not find a word for. Nevertheless, he needed a drink so badly he'd have swallowed a Kurita PPC at this point.

With one last effort, Bart lunged forward, knowing that this time he'd get to the water ... and his hand brushed up against stone. The mirage shattered, and suddenly he found himself back in the real world, just as lost and just as desperate for water. Shaking his head as though clearing away the cobwebs wrapped around his mind, he stood uncomprehendingly for several moments, staring at the rock before him. He tilted his head back and saw that the stone soared high overhead, the hammer blows of the sun setting the column sparkling with radiant hues.

The Colossii. The word surfaced from somewhere in his mind. The geological formations created by meteors from outside the galaxy. It was why the fat, rich people visited this hole.

He tried not to show any emotion about the mirage, but he couldn't help the shiver that ran down his spine. To die like this? He turned and looked over his shoulder at the ragged band of men and vehicles that followed him. His BattleMech had become too mired to extricate from the sands, so they'd locked it down and left it, continuing on to the DropShip. They'd left a trail of three more vehicles behind them, with only the hovercraft still keeping pace in this hellpit.

Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, he saw the unmistakable sign of missile fire cascading down on his troops. They were under attack! Jolted to full alert, Bart could only think of one thing as he watched his infantry comrades die under the metal rain: better to die fighting the enemy than to be sucked dry and mummified by this cursed place.

Captain Ben Geringer **Near Jkonda Basin** **Crete, New Rhodes III** **Prefecture IV, The Republic**



Ben hunkered down in the lee of the sand dune as he watched the nomad warriors descend. Even crouched down, the steady flow of hot air threatened to topple him, but the warriors moved with supple grace, instinctively timing their movements to fall between the gusts of wind. A particularly strong waft sent a torrent of sand into his face and he blinked heavily, allowing the tears in his eyes to remove the irritants; he'd learned quickly not to use his hands. By the time his vision cleared, the warriors stood before him.

Tall and willowy, but with whipcord strength and sun-seared skin that reminded him of old leather, the nomads that occupied the deserts of New Rhodes III were in their element; then again, he reminded himself, they'd been adapting to their home for some eight centuries. Though it had originally seemed suicidal to walk around fully clothed in this awful heat, they'd shown him that their loose, flowing robes kept the direct sun off the skin—which could kill a man in hours—and allowed the wind to act as a radiator, aerating the body. The dark browns and tans of their robes also blended in with the desert; when the nomads didn't want to be seen, he'd have about as much luck finding them as he would picking up a 'Mech barehanded.

The leader stepped forward and bowed with a flourish. "Daghe, we have found the ones you seek," he said. "Already the desert devours them. Would it not be best to allow her to take her spoils?" Ben was still unsure what the title they used for him meant. He paused, wondering if he shouldn't just let the Raiders die after all. As he gazed out at the unrelenting landscape, he idly wondered why men always applied a female gender to the most dangerous elements. After a moment, he made his decision.

"I beg your indulgence, Tuli, but though your mistress is a harsh taskmaster, we both know she can be fickle as well," he replied. "Those men cannot be allowed to make contact with their DropShip."

The other man looked over his veil at Ben with piercing eyes, and it seemed as if they actually filled with joy. "You are wise for a wetlander, Daghe," he said approvingly. "Perhaps we will join you."

"Join us?" He couldn't help but be surprised, and more than a little skeptical. What good would these warriors be against armored vehicles?

MECHWARRIOR[®]

DARK AGE

Scenario #3: Burning Sands

Background

After the sudden loss of communication with their DropShip, the Raiders send a small force to contact their ship. On the way, however, they become hopelessly lost. Their struggle is witnessed by the native nomad warriors, who lead a small contingent of Swordsworn to finish what the desert has begun. As the fight begins, the nomad warriors throw themselves into the battle alongside the Swordsworn.

Objective

Each player is attempting to defeat the other. In the area where the fighting takes place, the heat of the desert is particularly strong, and the effects of the shifting sands on movement are extremely inhibiting—except for the nomad warriors, who are immune.

Army Size: 300 points; 3 orders per turn

Time Limit: 60 minutes

Rules Set: MechWarrior: Dark Age

Preparing the Battlefield

Players prepare the battlefield as per the **MechWarrior: Dark Age** standard rules. Player 1 represents the Raiders. Player 1's battleforce must include at least 1 Raiders unit. Player 2 represents the Swordsworn. Player 2's battleforce must include at least 1 Swordsworn unit and at least 1 infantry unit.

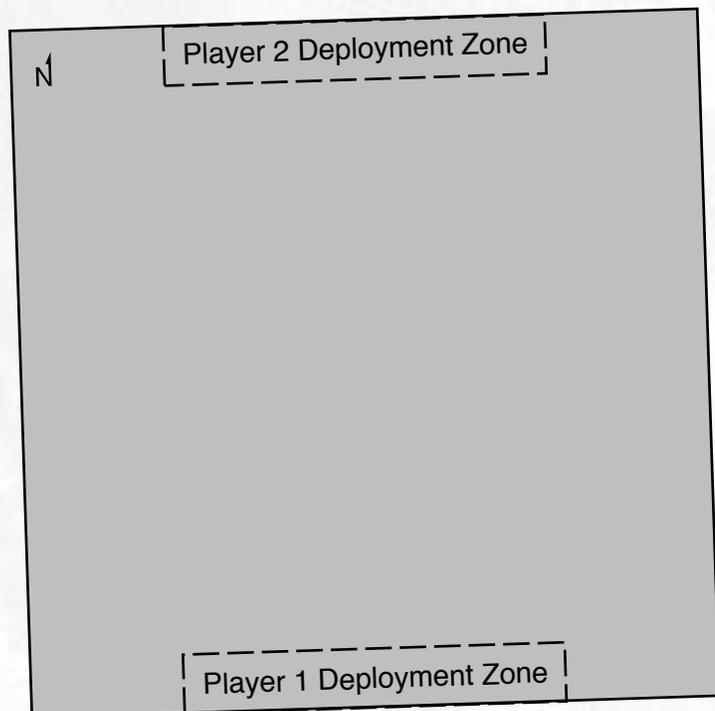
Special Rules

- 1) The entire battlefield is hindering terrain.
- 2) The movement of Player 2's Peasant units 001, 002, and 003 are not affected by hindering terrain in this battle.
- 3) No water terrain may be placed. It's a desert!

Victory Conditions

Use standard **MechWarrior: Dark Age** victory conditions.

Battlefield Map



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Knife in the Dark

Scenario #4: The Golden Egg

Having won the initiative against the Raiders, Captain Gerringe decides on an all-out push with his remaining forces in an effort to secure the Raiders' grounded DropShip. Once again, the heat and sand wreak havoc with his forces, not to mention the incredible offensive and defensive capabilities of a grounded DropShip. He believes, however, that he can take the ship and eliminate the Raiders' supply line, dooming them.



Captain Bart Bradshaw
Jkonda Basin
Crete, New Rhodes III
Prefecture IV, The Republic

Captain Bradshaw still felt drained. He'd survived the desperate battle near the Colossii and had escaped the desert, but she'd left her marks on him—marks he wasn't sure would ever heal. He had a constant tickle in the back of his throat that no amount of water could slake. Even worse was the hammering heat that swam as visual eddies through the cockpit of his *Arbalest*. He felt slightly nauseated and lightheaded . . . and the battle had barely begun.

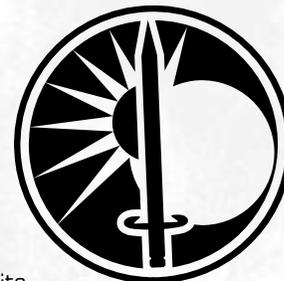
He clenched his fist, sending out a shower of long-range missiles at the attackers. An AgroMech stumbled in the sand. As the descending projectiles washed across its broad torso, blasting armor and knocking it off balance, it slipped to the side, folding like a puppet with its strings cut.

Another wave of heat pushed up through his feet, which felt as though they were catching on fire. A part of his mind realized that the heat was not nearly as terrible as he thought it was, that what had really traumatized him was his near-fatal experience in the Colossii. But he couldn't seem to snap out of it. He literally felt as though he were sitting in the middle of flames—the worst fear of any MechWarrior, to burn to death in an overheating 'Mech.

The sudden appearance of a lone Maxim Mk2 transport over a rise startled him as its twin turbine blades clawed through the air. He'd not known that the Swordsworn or veilers had such a craft—it looked like a Karnov UR Transport. His muddled brain struggled to decide whether this lone craft might be dangerous, and suddenly it hit him. It carried infantry—a squad of battle armor or a full platoon of standard infantry. It was almost impossible to think that the DropShip would be unable to swat the bug out of the air, but if there was the slightest possibility that it could get through. . . .

Suddenly galvanized, he opened a general comm line. "All Raiders, take down that transport," he rasped. "I repeat, take down that transport." These Fedrat wannabes would not defeat him. He would hand this world over to Bannson—or he would wish he hadn't made it out of the desert.

Captain Ben Gerringe
Jkonda Basin
Crete, New Rhodes III
Prefecture IV, The Republic



Though still kilometers distant, at ninety meters tall the Seeker-class DropShip reared above the featureless desert basin like a giant god-king surveying its domain. With its classic spheroid appearance and its metal plating burnished gold by the pounding sun, it reminded Ben of the fabled golden egg. He chuckled at the thought of the size of the goose that would be needed to lay such a monstrosity.

"You're in a good mood today," his XO said. He was startled until he realized he'd laughed loud enough for his voice-activated mic to pick it up.

"Not so much a good mood as a funny thought," he replied. He thought about describing the size of the goose that laid the *Golden Seeker* but decided it wouldn't sound as funny out loud. Some things were best left in your own head. "However, since today we'll push these pirates off New Rhodes, it is a good day."

"I hate to put a downer on your optimism, boss, but that's a DropShip. Even if we push through the Raiders' line, the ship will pound us into dust."

"First, that's *when* we push through. Second, you haven't done your homework on DropShips, have you?" There was a pause as his XO took the mild rebuke in stride.

"No, I'll admit my knowledge of DropShips is pretty poor," he said. "As far as I'm concerned, they're just big tin-can delivery trucks."

Ben laughed. "Big tin-can delivery trucks they may be," he acknowledged, "but knowing what they mount can be just as important as knowing what a BattleMech mounts or figuring out what weapons have been jury-rigged on a modified IndustrialMech. In the case of the *Seeker*, it's pretty undergunned for a vessel its size; most of its tonnage is devoted to carrying military vehicles. If we spread out enough, splitting up its fire so it can't concentrate on our forces, we'll win through. Of course, we've a few surprises to throw its way as well." Golden egg or not, the *Seeker* would be theirs before the sun hit the horizon.

MECHWARRIOR[®] DARK AGE

Scenario #4: The Golden Egg

Background

The Swordsworn are on the offensive, striving to capture or, if necessary, destroy the Raiders' grounded DropShip. The Raiders, their backs against the wall, must defend their base of supplies and operations or risk destruction.

Objective

The defending Raiders are attempting to eliminate the attackers; the attacking Swordsworn are attempting to capture the grounded DropShip. In the area where the fighting occurs, the heat of the desert is particularly strong, and the effects of the shifting sands on movement are extremely inhibiting.

Army Size: 300 points; 3 orders per turn

Time Limit: 60 minutes

Rules Set: MechWarrior: Dark Age

Preparing the Battlefield

Players prepare the battlefield as per the **MechWarrior: Dark Age** standard rules in addition to the terrain shown. Player 1 represents the Raiders. Player 1's battleforce must include at least 1 Raiders unit. Player 2 represents the Swordsworn. Player 2's battleforce must include at least 1 Swordsworn unit and at least 1 infantry unit.

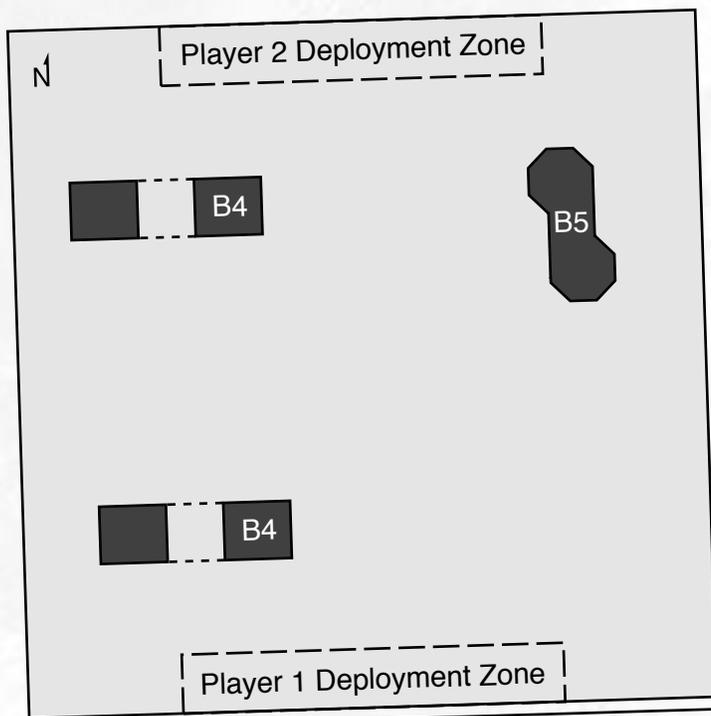
Special Rules

- 1) Any unit with a speed value greater than 8 has a speed value of 8, unless it has speed mode hover.
- 2) Victory Condition 3's point values are doubled for Player 2.
- 3) Player 1 receives 4 orders on turns 1 and 2.
- 4) No deep water may be placed.

Victory Conditions

Use standard **MechWarrior: Dark Age** victory conditions, modified by special rule 2.

Battlefield Map



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