Battletech New Era   The Battletech Relaunch Announcement

GenCon 2001, August 3rd, 2001.
WizKids Panel Members:
Jordan Weisman (Owner), Randall Bills (Battletech Line Developer),
Michael Stackpole (Writer / Game Designer), Janice Silverstein (Publications Manager)

(Jordan) We wanted to try to get together and do an announcement of what our intentions are and what we hope to be doing with Battletech. This'll be a relatively informal thing...first we'll do some introductions. My name is Jordan Weisman, and many many years ago I designed Battletech, and the story that went along with it. This is Mike Stackpole, who made that story much better over the many years, and Randall Bills who has been a Battletech developer for FASA for many years and heading up (the line) for the last couple. And Janice Silverstein, who's joined us as publications manager for WizKids, and will be heading up our entire novel publishing.

(Jordan) First off, let me thank all of you for your patience, as its taken us some time to try and figure out when we inherited these valuable intellectual properties of Battletech and Shadowrun, and figure out how we could best treat them and what the future for them held. I know that's been a long wait since February, and it's just been a process of being really overwhelmed, with WizKids growth as we went from four employees last November to about 45 now. It's been a period of rapid growth for us and trying to come to terms with the rocketship that Mage Knight is. That, simultaneously with the unexpected inheritance (effectively) of getting back the properties that I was involved with all those years ago. So those two things combined have taken us some time to deal with, to figure out the right teams and how we want to proceed forward with these things. So thank you for your patience in the months it's taken us to come to terms with those.

(Jordan) So what we're here today to announce is what I would hope would be greeted as good news. We are going to be doing a new version of Battletech, a collectible miniature version that'll be coming out next summer. This'll be using a more sophisticated of our combat-dial system that we've been using for Mage Knight. I'll get into more detail of what that all means and give you some sense of how the game works as we get a little farther into it. We are going to be working with fantasy productions (who are doing support for the Shadowrun product), who will continue to do support for the existing Battletech game. Obviously not at the same kind of volume of material that FASA was publishing, but I think hopefully it will be enough to keep that robust of a game universe for people who want to continue with the system that's been in existence now for going on twenty years. I'm going to back up a little bit and talk about some of the philosophy that we've been employing as we've been exploring and designing the new Battletech system. When we originally did Battletech all those years ago Battletech was designed to be a 'beer and pretzels' fast-play fun game. This as I say is almost twenty years ago, and in those days a four to five hour game was a fast-play game, because it was being compared to Squad Leader, Starfleet Battles and many others so four hours was 'nothing' (For playing time). Well, that's not true nowadays. A four-hour game is considered a pretty long game. And Battletech as a game system I think is a great game system, but this industry has changed a lot, and our player base has changed a lot, and the way that we play games has changed alot. And so, what we're trying to do with Battletech is to put into the same kind of psychodemographic it was when we first brought it out; back to a fast-playing game that has depth to it, but it's something that you can into and have a great game in an hour to an hour and a half, rather than the four or five hours that the current system is. And so that means that we wanted to try and apply some of the same thoughts that I did when doing with Mage Knight.

(Jordan) The goal there was to open up miniature gaming to a very wide audience, and I think one of the things we have to recognize is that if we want to continue to be able to enjoy the world of Battletech, we need to find ways to bring a lot more people into that world. Because otherwise we just have something that dwindles eventually down into too small of an audience to make it a viable business or to even find

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players to play with. Sot that is our major effort and goal that WizKids has been spending a lot of money on; to produce and market a version of Battletech that we can bring in a lot of new people to, and that hopefully makes it an experience that you can find players more readily, and get a more aggressive tournament & league structures that we can have that a 'big player' community gives us the opportunity to do. So that's our goal, and to do that we wanted to take away some of the barriers to entry. And barriers in a big miniatures game are typically one, the figures are very expensive. Building an army as you guys know costs a lot of money. And then of course it takes a lot of time to physically build and paint them, and again that builds a barrier to people who are intimidated by that or don't feel they have the skills to do that. There is that fact that the rules can be intimidating. The original Battletech rules have continued to evolve over time and for a brand-new player they can be very intimidating hurdle to get into the game. Play length, as we discussed is another factor. We want to try and bring it into a play length that allows it to be incorporated into our lives more readily than having to dedicate a day to it. And lastly I think is record keeping. One of the things that always bothered me about the original Battletech I designed (and similar games) is having a table littered all over the place with lots and lots of scraps of paper trying to keep track of everything. And that to me has always diminished the visual impact of the table and took time that I wanted to be thinking and playing rather than scratching boxes off of things. So those are the kind of things that we looked to solve and the system that we've come up with is related to Battletech.

(Promo cards and demo bases are passed around)

(Jordan) One of the things we were talking about, one of Battletech's great strengths is the fact that we've been writing great fiction on it for the last twenty years. But that is also one of it's intimidation factors. It's very hard to come into a story that's twenty years old and everybody wonders 'oh my God, how am I going to catch up on all that history enough to know at least a good chunk before I am able to appreciate the current stories. So our goal is not in any way to alienate or ignore our rich historical background, but to create a little bit of an easier entrance point for that. So Mike and I started working on this about four months ago, and (we were) trying to look for the kind of situation I wanted to set the game in, and Mike and I started talking about an entry point from a fictional standpoint that would be easier for new players to come and absorb as well. And so we're moving the Battletech fiction two generations into the future, and those two generations are unprecedented in Battletech history, because they were actually peaceful. And we'll start telling the stories of what happened in between the period of time that the current sets of novels and those novels will go through next summer. The current chain of novels will 'end up' next summer, and then the new chain of novels will kick off next fall. We will tell the stories of what happened during that period so people will have a sense of what's going on, but the new story is going to kick off two generations in the future and there's a short story up on the website that gives you a little bit of a sense of where we're at and where we're going. At the website is a little bit more depth of the game system and the program we're going to be putting together for Battletech that Randall wrote as well. We're going to be regularly updating the website with new images and new information over the next year as we move towards launching the game. Since we're going to lose Mike soon, I'm going to let him talk a little bit about the fictional setting that he's been working on, and then we can get back into game systems stuff.

(Michael) I remember getting the phone call from Jordan in April. It's one of those phone calls you remember because it's in the middle of the day and I'm actually working on something and I hear his voice (saying) 'Look's like I'm going to be having Battletech again. Wanna Play?' 'Yeah, cool!' As most of

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you know, I had some difficulties with FASA in terms of my ability to work for them, because I wasn't actually working for them; I wasn't getting paid for the work I was doing for them, and this created a little bit of a difficulty and so I had taken some time off. That time was also necessary for me to kind of 'recharge my batteries', so when Jordan came and said, 'look, this is what we're going to be doing. We need to be looking at kicking the universe forward.' All of a sudden, I've been given a job of taking the history that I've had a large part in shaping and looking at its influences going forward, back during the end all these different things we planned on putting into the universe, as well as reshaping the universe to provide us the kind of backdrop that we need for a lot of fun stories. Just from a writers standpoint, from a fictional standpoint, one of the difficulties we were having with the universe and one of the reasons we're kicking it forward is this. We had these grand, great-arching overall story arcs, and if you follow Victor's story, in about eight years Victors had about forty-five years worth of experiences. There's no human being alive that should have survived the stress that Victor's been under, and yet every year there had to be a new novel with Victor being stressed even more, and arising more heroically. We were getting to a point-"

(Jordan) Some of us kept trying to tell you to kill him off... (laughter)

(Michael) It was far too much fun torturing him, and then bring him back! So in looking at being able to move forward and setting up in essence a new universe, it's a lot of fun. You have all the old historical rivalries, you've got that rich history that we all know really well and we really enjoy, and yet we're going to have a situation where we've got different takes on it. We're also going to have a situation where it's going to be a lot easier to tell stories that are smaller and more intimate, as well as being able to get some of the strategic input. But we want to be able to put you guys and your characters into the stories in the state of going out and exploring this universe, and be discovering it at the same time you do. Writing this first piece of fiction for the website was a lot of fun, doing the history has been a lot of fun, and I'm about as juiced about working on this as I have been on doing pretty much anything I have in the past ten years. I realize that for a lot of you who remember the twenty year jump a long time ago, you're going like 'oh my God, no!'...the tag line back then was, 'don't think of your character as being old, think of it as their kids getting a job'...so now, doing think of your character as being old, think of their grand children's job security! I ask you to bear with us, because I really think the universe we're setting up is really dynamic, and it's going to be a lot of fun. You're going to sit there and go, 'you know, I didn't figure it was going to get here, but ya...cool'. It's going to be a fun place to explore.

(Jordan) Well, we'll refer to the card now, and I saw some murmurs (laughter) so we'll start with the front of the card, which has a couple of surprises on it. One, there's a 'Mech there with a big chainsaw in his arm. You'll notice that it says 'converted industrial 'Mech'. Well, industrial 'Mechs are going to play a very large part in this game. One of the things that happens in a unexpected break-out of prolonged peace is that there tends to be less weapons around, especially after the universe has gone through a very serious decommissioning process. This because we want to return the 'Mechs to being the kings of the battlefield, and as we've had a constant escalation in battletech fiction and game for many years, pretty much 'Mechs have pushed everything else off the battlefield. And the feel in fiction and in game play was all exclusively 'Mechs. It's very hard to be the king if everyone is exactly the same as you. Everybody comes down to being... 'Mech is the equivalent of infantry. We wanted to get back to the 'Mech being that 'oh my God' power on the battlefield, and to do that we need to be able to balance the field out and have a lot more vehicles and actual infantry. This game is going too much more of a 'combined arms' kind of situation than it is just purely 'Mechs exclusively. I think that makes it much

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more interesting, because you really get to see the difference between a 'Mech and a tank, or a 'Mech and an infantry squad, or other combinations with aerotech fighters and everything else.

(Jordan) What that means when we go from this period of peace to a sudden radical setback it chaos and conflict is the first 'Mechs that can be put back onto the line are ones that were up till recently serving industrial purposes. So this guy on the cover (refers to card) you can see in his unadulterated site on the back that he's a forestry 'Mech. His job was cutting down trees and hauling them. And he's designed specifically to do that. But fusion engines are very expensive and very rare, so you don't put one of those in there, you use an internal combustion engine, which is what he's wearing on his back and why you see there's smoke pouring out of his back. The BattleMech still exists, and they will reign over this guy like this guy reigns over infantry. And they have fusion engines. They are many of our favorites ones...they return. The Atlas, the Mad Cat, the Vulture, the Thor, all of our favorite 'Mechs are still going to be here. It's just that now we've put them in a kind of exalted position, where they are truly the kings of the battlefield. But you have this kind of 'lower class' of 'Mechs which we refer to as 'melee 'Mechs'. With Battletech, one of the things that I always thought was cool was that it dealt a lot with physical combat. We're going to get back to that and make it a little bit richer by giving these guys some cool tools to use in physical combat. And these guys who are...because they are half 'all the big high-tech' weaponry on them, (they are) only physical combat 'Mechs. It makes your strategy and tactics and playing differently in terms of 'these guys, I've gotta get up close enough to do damage' vs. everybody being a walking death platform and just stay off of long range and just lob stuff. You've got more diversity to the field. When also going to do is eventually have vehicles, and as vehicles we have everything from tanks of a lot of flavors from hover to tracked, to things like troop carriers, repair units, coolant trucks...heat plays a major factor in this game. Heat has always been a big factor for Battletech and will continue to be. If you look at the dials, which we passed around, the dial has a box put on the back of it, which we call a heat dial. That rotates, the idea being that the more you push that 'Mech and the more you have that 'Mech doing, instead of it taking physical damage you rotate the heat dial everytime you 'Mech do those actions. That modifies its movement, its fire, its output of damage, just like it did in the old days. The same kind of dynamics in terms of what heat effects, heat effects in this game. The record keeping now is incorporated into the base of the figure. You can dedicate actions to that 'Mech to cool it down or you can have a coolant truck come over and wash it down. The vehicles and the infantry squads all play different tactics, and we've got powered infantry as well. For instance, one of the things we do in this is capture other vehicles. The only way to capture other vehicles is with infantry. There's even specialized forms of infantry which are the only guys who can capture another guy's 'Mechs. So there are specialized purposes, just to use those as an example, with how different pieces of a combined arms battlefield interact. 'Mechwarriors have always played a very large role in battletech and they will continue to do so. Here, the 'Mechwarriors particular abilities get incorporated into the dial of that 'Mech. So you might have two Mad Cats, yet those two Mad Cats are going to have different performance through their characteristics based upon who's piloting. If they're from an elite unit they're going to be able to push that Mad Cat further than if they're from a rookie unit. And if it's a named 'Mechwarrior, one of the famous named 'Mechwarriors, then their going to be even more above, than an elite 'Mechwarrior. So it's the same kind of ways that a 'Mechwarrior influences the performance of a 'Mech before, except that we've taken the chore of having to add that every turn, and simply added it all ahead of time. It's the same concept as before, but the entire math has been done ahead of time so that you don't have to do it every turn. From a game system point of view, is there anything else that you wanted to handle?

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(Randall) "No, that's pretty much it. Again, for those of you who...I'm not sure how many of you might know a little bit about Mage Knight game, but in their they have a list of special abilities with different color codes that modify it. And so along the lines that Jordan was saying, we've tried to capture all the various flavors...the MASH trucks, the Command vehicles, and all the various things that for the longest time we talked about but never really even had rules for them...everyone had to make them up. We're trying to incorporate all of that into the game, so right out of the box you have a very dynamic set of all the different figures and how they interact...it really is a combined arms regimental combat team.

(Jordan) Even in the 'Mech. A lot of the things that we would have in the 'Mech design system such as the C3's and the ECM's and the double heat sinks and the myomers, all those things are built into the dial and viewed as special equipment with all the modifiers built in.

(Randall) It's basically the same universe, less math.

(Panel laughter, Jordan) We do the math, so you don't have to.

(Randall) That's right, exactly.

(Janice) To try to answer some of the questions about how things are going to end up with FASA Battletech novels, there are eight more novels expected in the series this year. The major storyline are going to be tied up next August. Everything's going to be coming to a head, in fact there's only one stand-alone novel, and the rest of the novels that are going to be published including two of the three 'Mechwarrior novels that are coming are all going to be tied into the major storyline that you've been following all this time. Everything's going to wrap up mid-summer. And the new history that Jordan and Mike were talking about will be picking up with the new novels, going forward from there. The plan right now is to publish six novels a year, including some of the novelists that your familiar with...we hope (looks at Michael, smiling) ...depending upon his schedule. We are looking to bring some new writers into the line. We haven't decided yet if we are going to continue with ROC yet although they have been very faithful to the Battletech line. They have brought you novels very regularly and we respect what they have done, and that's been great. There's the possibility of some Battletech short fiction, that's an idea that's still sort of being baked, and we're just going to try to bring you the best stories we can. That's going to be depending upon Mike a little panel (panel laughter).

(Michael) Just to note, Janet was my first editor at Bantam to learn that I was doing to Battletech novels, brought me into Bantam and got me the fantasy novels, got me the Star Wars novels and stuff like that. She is without a doubt one of the best editors I have ever worked with. She knows and has a good repoir with a lot of really good writers, and just some of the conversations we've had about possible talent to bring into the line, guys that I think would be really good, people that she think would be really good, we've suddenly got access to a lot of talent that we really haven't had before. So you're going to be able to see some really crackerjack writers coming in and getting to play in this universe. And it's a lot of fun. You already know that all of us know how to shape a story, know how to set the universe up and stuff like that, so that's when we say 'look guys, here's your forty acres. Knock yourself out.' You know, do whatever you want to. So we're going to be having really good writers with their interesting takes of what's going on, as well as having these stories incorporated within the whole universe as we always have been.

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(Jordan) Let me touch on one last thing in terms of the 'Mechs and the game. This version of Battletech is a true miniature version. There isn't any hex grid. It was designed from the beginning to be a tabletop miniature game. And one of the things that we settled on to help that is that we're going to do the 'Mechs in a much bigger scale. The whole universe is going to be done in a 1:160 scale, as opposed to the old version, which was roughly 1:285. So this means that physically the models are going to be much larger, because they're going to be exactly N scale. So that decorating your tabletop gets to be a lot easier by being able to buy inexpensive N scale products and not have to custom craft everything. So we were hoping that gives us the ability to create as players' rich playing environments much more easily.

(Michael runs out of time, and leaves the briefing)

(Jordan) Run before the nasty questions start! Speaking of nasty questions, why don't we start there...I was originally going to have them install a chain-link fence between us with security in case you threw things, but they didn't get that done. Yes?

(Question) One of my friends has over eleven hundred 'Mechs and over five hundred support units. Will he be able to bring any of these into the new game with hex bases that you could glue the existing 'Mechs?

(Jordan) I don't have a definitive answer for that yet. One of the reasons that we decided that we needed to continue support for the existing system was because people have substantial investments both emotionally and financially. So that the play value for those doesn't end. So they can continue playing the game that they've been playing and loving. In terms of being able to use those with the new game, I don't have a definitive answer on that yet. We're still exploring the dynamics of that and how it would work. We're going to have to wait and find out about that later.

(Question) I was just thinking about the main draw for Battletech for me was customizing 'Mechs. I'm wondering if the click-base system will get rid of that for the game?

(Jordan) Well, this version of Battletech becomes less about tweaking an individual 'Mech and more about tweaking a force. The original Battletech game was designed with each person being in control of one to two or three 'Mechs. Because after that it really tends to bog down. So that was a game about tweaking the dynamics of an individual vehicle. This one becomes more about tweaking dynamics in terms of your army force, which is envisioned to be maybe as many as five 'Mechs and thirty vehicles on the board. That's what we're probably looking at a standard person's force being. Somewhere in that neighborhood. It has the dynamics of trying to think about how do these things work together, and trying to tweak it out, but it's applying it to a different scale. Instead of an individual vehicle, we're applying it to the force.

(Question) Do you know if you're going to support a Mechwarrior RPG?

(Jordan) No we don't yet, this is something that Fan Pro did, they put out a Shadowrun piece and they've got the first Shadowrun book out here and I think that it's really great. And we've just talked to them about continuing Battletech, so there isn't a publication schedule yet and probably won't realistically be for awhile.

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(Question) Will they continue the existing line. How will what they push tie in with the new future that you guys are writing? Will it be expanding on the existing literature, or will it branch off kind of like what happened to Star Wars?

(Jordan) I think what we're looking at is effectively you have two games systems and two time eras. The Fan Pro will support the time era that all the 'Mechs in metal are for, and the game system for that period. The new system jumps into a new time era, with a different system.

(Question) I have never played Mage Knight and I have no idea of how the whole paradigm of the collectible figure thing works. If I'm going in to buy a Battletech collectible miniature, is the box marked? Is it a blank box in which I have no idea if I'm getting a 'Mech or a vehicle?

(Jordan) We're looking at what is similar to a Mage Knight booster is. Right now a Mage Knight booster is $7, and we're looking at probably $8 for a Battletech booster. Don't hold me to that yet until we get the final price, that'll be several months but that's the price we're shooting for. A Battletech booster what we're looking at would make sure it would come with a 'Mech...'Mech are really big, so they're expensive dudes...so it'd have one 'Mech with vehicles and infantry in each pack. Again, we're still pricing out but we're looking at hopefully two vehicles and one infantry with the 'Mech, or four figures for $8.

(Question) from the Mage Knight demo rep. to the audience) How many people here have not played Mage Knight?

(Virtually the entire room raises their hands. Laughter)

(Demo rep. encourages participation at a Mage Knight demo booth).

(Question) Mage Knight has released metal minis for some of their figures. Is that something you would do for Battletech as well?

(Jordan) I think we probably are having what you would call the 'artists series', and we would have that it apply toward Battletech, so that you could get them.

(Question) Could you use them for the game?

(Jordan) The problem there is there would be some things we're looking at that would be bases in the metal, but the majority wouldn't be. They'd be ones that you'd use by taking the plastic off the base and put the metal one the base.

(Question) Would you guys consider selling a larger boxed set, like an entire lance, maybe realm specific? For instance, a lance of all-Kurita 'Mechs?

(Jordan) Following the paradigms of what we're setting up...what we've set of for Mage Knight and conceiving for DC...those examples are for instance in Mage Knight there are chariots, dragons, and other large objects. For instance, for Battletech what we want to do is a Dropship in scale.

(Murmurs of approval)

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(Jordan) For DC we conceived of doing sets of figures, but they would be in limited quantities, and then they would be gone...that set would go away. Those would be adjuncts to the base sets, or the booster packs.

(Question) Will boosters come by different factions?

(Jordan) The fictional setting that we're in for (the new) Battletech would allow the players to create any kind of combination of factions they wish. You can build all Kurita, or you'll have enough fiction rational to build any mix of House or Clans and have it valid within the fiction. There will be advantages for either. It Mage Knight, there are advantages in terms of formations, that you get for building a faction based unit, but there are strengths and weaknesses. As in establishing the fiction, establishing the units that (for instance) Davion doesn't have.

(Question) Will you sell specific 'Mechs for individual sale?

(Jordan) For plastic ones, we won't but there are lots of individuals that do. I think that would be the case, that there would be both stores and Internet sites that offer them single.

(Question) Will you be able to increase a 'Mechwarriors skills for a specific 'Mech?

(Jordan) One of the things that were true about Battletech when I originally designed it was it was kind of a hybrid between an RPG and a board game. Even though the 'Mechwarrior only had two stats, there was an emotional investment in them and those two stats could get improved. The current design, (the 'Mechwarriors) are built in...so I don't have a mechanism at present for doing that. That still remains a goal to be found on how to do this, and we still have some time left because the game isn't going to be out until next summer. The idea of character growth is something I'd like to find a way to incorporate. We have in Mage Knight Dungeons we have hero characters who gain in experience levels and their statistic levels during the game. So there may be some similar kinds of mechanisms we can find for doing that and keeping that goal in the game.

(Question) Will sourcebooks still continue?

(Jordan) Well, that's something that Fan Pro will have the ability to do. So they will bring back into print as I sell out the existing warehouses things that make sense to do. That the volumes on them were high enough to make sense to keep them in print. Don't charge to them asking questions, because it's something very new that we've been discussing with them so it's going to take time for them to get up to speed on it.

(Janice) One of the things that we're exploring for the WizKids website is setting up a bookstore in concert with amazon.com to make sure that we can have sourcebooks and novels and all of that (out of print) available through our site. That's something we're exploring right now and it's not definite, but you may want to keep an eye out.

(Question) Are there going to be aliens in this universe?

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(Jordan) When I originally designed Battletech fiction, I designed it as a reaction to every sci-fi story at the time, which was so 'alien-heavy', that I kind of said 'what if we are unique'? We're not changing that.

(Applause)

(Question) Are all the factions represented?

(Jordan) It's only two generations, so as we've just seen in Eastern Europe and around the world it takes a lot more than two generations for anything nasty to die.

(Question) What will happen to the Marauders?

(Jordan) As you can tell the Warlord program we've put together for WizKids, they volunteer to go out and put on demonstration and run tournaments and leagues, and WizKids has been extremely proactive in doing that. The North American Warlord community is now 900 people. That's a really great army for going out there and exposing the people and helping to run tournaments and so on. The last tournament we ran for Mage Knight was run across 450 stores in one weekend. It's that kind of scale that we're hoping to be able to do again with Battletech.

(Question) Are you going to do sourcebooks at all?

(Jordan) We're still debating on how we're going to do that. Sourcebooks take a different role (with a straight miniature game). Up until now, you got the game stats and the background fiction. Well, the game stats are all built into the figures so that's not as necessary, but the richness of the world and the background fiction is still something that we think adds a lot to the world, so we're going to figure out how support that through novels and a modified version of tech readouts. Now how or where those tech readouts could come out from, from us or from Bantam or Random House or Fan Pro...don't know yet. But we feel that that those kind of products add a lot to our games.

(Question) Will there be conversions for 'Mechs between the new and old system?

(Jordan) I'm sure if we don't, you will. (laughter)

(Question) Are there going to be aerospace fighters and warships?

(Jordan) Yes. In stages. The first set will not have aerospace fighters in it, but expansion sets will.
(Questions) Will a correct scale McKenna class Dropship come with a complimentary boat trailer to haul it?

(Laughter)

(Randall) We'll see...?

(Question) Will there be a fixed, balanced generation system utilized to create the machines so that game balance is maintained?

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(Jordan) Well, this system is very point based. All of the attributes of an individual 'Mech are weighted into a factor that results in how many points it takes to put that 'Mech or vehicle or infantry unit into your army. We internally are going to be paying very high attention to those numbers. Those numbers will be reflected into the fiction about that vehicle, and the 'Mechwarrior. You'll get a sense of what went into that to result in a special ability or a special equipment that the machine has, like ECMs or double heat sinks or special myomers. Those are culled out in fiction and in the game system as you use the 'Mech, in the colored blocks behind the numbers. So you are aware of what they are and the modifiers that they give you on a per turn basis. At the moment we don't have a construction system to build your own 'Mech, as we said we're moving toward building a force as opposed to building an individual 'Mech. This is something that we're exploring bit by bit.

(Question) Will the "Unseen" 'Mechs return? (Groans from the crowd and the panel)

(Jordan) You guys have heard this story a million times, we licensed the original ones from Japan, and when that license ran out we stopped using them. We can't use those images. In terms of trying to capture what was fun about them, in terms of game play and balance, hopefully we succeed in that.

(Question) So you're going to recreate the images?

(Jordan) No, but we're going to bring a lot of 'Mechs from the past into this game and we're going to create a bunch of new ones. Our goal in all that is to create a sense of fun that the original sixteen 'Mechs that were in the very basic game had.

(Question) Will there be differences in which 'Mechs are rare?

(Jordan) Yes, there will be variances in rarities of different ('Mech) figures like we've done in Mage Knight.

(Question) Will any of the new game 'Mechs be produced in the old system size?

(Jordan) I...don't know, I haven't thought about that yet.

(Question) Will there be choices you can make with what specific weapons to fire with a 'Mech?

(Jordan) The special equipment mounted on the 'Mechs gives you some per turn choices.

(Question) Will the computer games take place in the new era?

(Jordan) It will take a generation (of computer games) or two...we're going to actually use software to telling part of the story of what happened during these years we're skipping so that they're going to be a couple stories told and then they'll actually move up to the new era.

(Question) How long before they catch up?

(Jordan) I think probably three or four years before they catch up.

Battletech New Era   The Battletech Relaunch Announcement

GenCon 2001, August 3rd, 2001.
WizKids Panel Members:
Jordan Weisman (Owner), Randall Bills (Battletech Line Developer),
Michael Stackpole (Writer / Game Designer), Janice Silverstein (Publications Manager)

(Question) Will the new material produced by Fan Pro merge into the new material produced by WizKids?

(Jordan) Yes. It is one coherent storyline. We're not trying in any way to invalidate or throw out any of the history that we've built. The Fan Pro will help bridge part of it (the gap), the software will help bridge part of it...however the specific parts of that story get told, they will get told and we've tried really hard to keep it in the same vein, the same tone with logical continuity.

(Janice) One of the things we're looking at is developing for the Battletech website in the future is an era we're tentatively calling the Battletech Chronicles. That is going to include (we hope) a timeline of the Battletech universe from the very beginning to where we are now. So you will see how the storyline intertwine, and what happens in that two generations and then the story moving forward. There is a very strong effort and there will continue to be a very strong effort to make it one strong history...of the future!

(Question) What's going on with the t.v. series?

(Jordan) We have the t.v. show in development with Tribune and Foundation, and like all things you don't know if it's coming out of development but it is in development and it's actually making progress. The way the real world works is will know March or April of next year, because that's after they've gone and tried to sell it, and it could die anytime between here and there. But as of this day it's alive and well and making progress.

(Question) I understand why you're making it more simplistic to attract more players, but for those of us who like the detail, could there be a Master rules type book with more detail for the game down the road?

(Jordan) Our goal for the system is much easier access, but no less depth of play. That's a high bar to jump...a tricky thing to do. We've gotten pretty far there with Mage Knight, in that it takes twenty minutes to learn, but the sophistication and depth of the system in how you're constantly evolving your strategies I think says that there's a lot of depth there. Our goal is to try and take that one step further with Battletech...it's a more sophisticated game than Mage Knight, and it's going to be a more complex game than Mage Knight. That having been said, we haven't explored yet any kind of 'Master rules' or a step to take to effectively bridge between where the new Battletech's going to be and where the old Battletech was. I don't know if we'll do something in that space yet...until we have this system really robustly implemented, I don't know what that system would need to be yet. It's something we'll find out more over the next year.

(End of review)