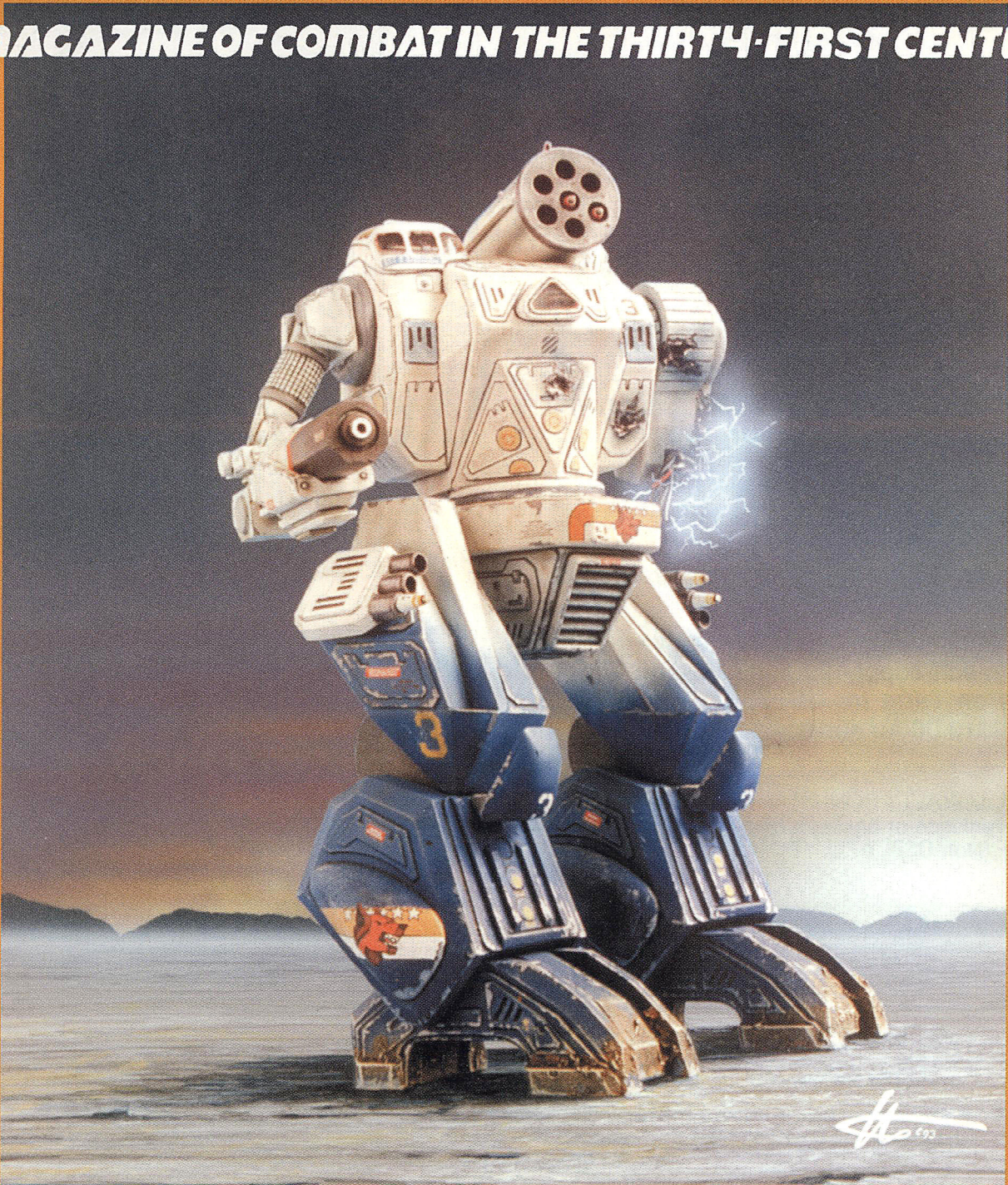


Issue # 21

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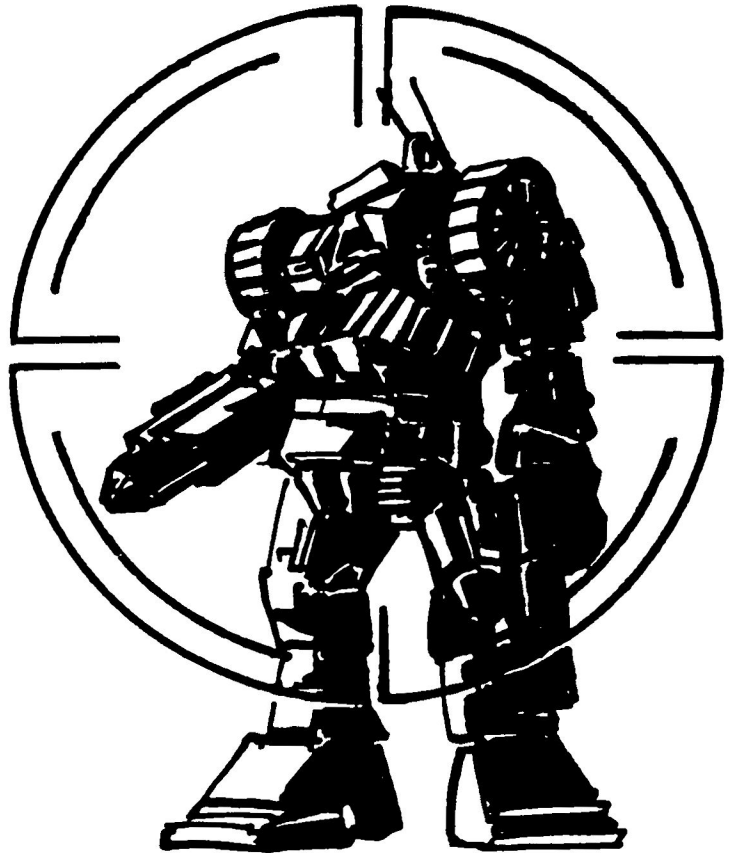
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art for 3054 ads
by James Greeson
art for Target of Opportunity
by Aaron Froke
Art for Repel Boarders if You Can
by Angela Hyatt and Johannes Huber
Map for What Now, MechWarrior
by Richard Falkner
art for Snake Dance
by John Gammon
Thornhill Arms Items
by Bryce Nakagawa
Opening Shots
by William H Keith Jr

Writing in this issue:
Table of Organization, Thornhill Arms
and What Now, MechWarrior
by Glen L. Mitchell
A Leg to Stand On, Special Forces, personal ads
by Stephen Hess
Repel Boarders if You Can
by Gerald Hall
Snake Dance, Rattlesnake, Snake Rattle & Roll
by Craig Reed and Robert Madson
Avatar
by John Gannon
Kincaid Furey's Reply, The Lighter Side
by Craig Harris
All Other Writing
By Hilary Ayer

About The Cover

Steve Venters managed to get a picture of this OmniMech during a recent raid across the Steiner-Ghost Bear border.

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Opening Shots

Cartago Delenda Est

The funny language in the title is Latin, the language of the ancient Roman Empire of Terra. It means "Carthage should be destroyed." Seems this public official called Cato the Censor was of the opinion that a major trade rival was gunning up to destroy Roma, and he felt that his nation-state should strike first. His fellow senators or whatever were tired of hearing him on the subject, so they'd passed a resolution that Cato couldn't introduce any more resolutions on the subject. He was an effective orator, especially important back in those days before statistical analyses, and his party often used him as a spokesman. So there he'd be, making a speech about the budget, or old veteran's farms, or relocating the temple of somebody minor, and he'd bring it all to a thundering finish. Then, just before debate began, Cato would say quietly, "This is my opinion, and it is also my opinion that Carthage should be destroyed."

Eventually they did attack Carthage, which is why students of ancient military history are aware that there are only two Punic Wars to study.

Captain Benjamin Gaunt of the mercenary unit Lancaster's Rose lectured at the Nagelring last spring. He gave a talk on the role and composition of special forces which is reprinted here for our readers. He ended it with his version of 'Cartago Delenda Est', ie, 'The Clans must be opposed!'. He encouraged resistance movements on conquered planets.

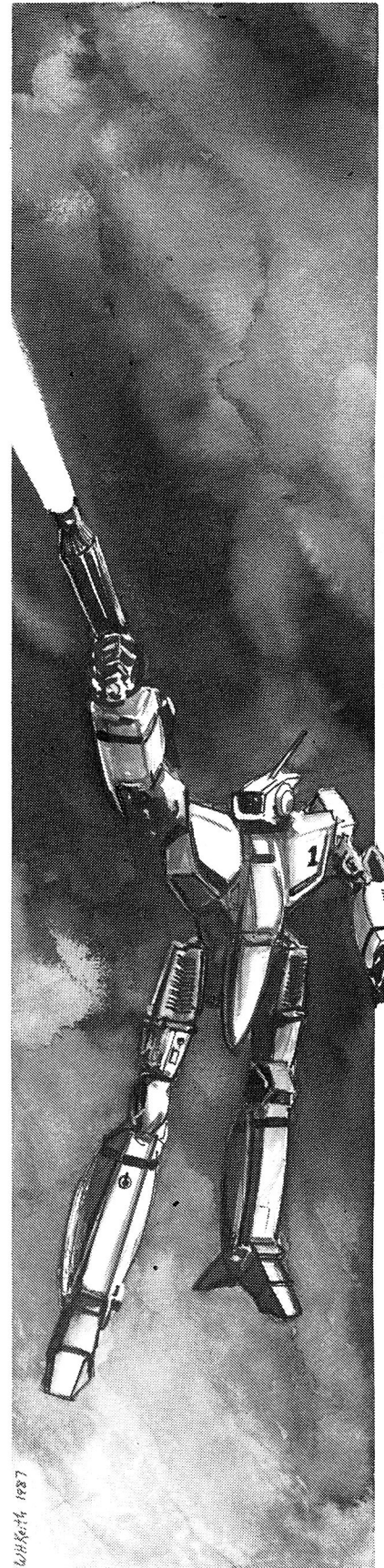
We have a sobering analysis of Clan psychology to counter this proposal.

We're not saying not to fight the Clans. Please do, early and often, up to the point where you break the truce compact. Not beyond that point, 'cause we just ain't ready yet! Read the analysis to understand why such underground fighting will be met with savage reprisals. To the Clans, resistance fighters are bondsmen going back on their implied bond, traitors.

People deciding to join resistance movements should do so only if they know the cost of capture, and are willing to weigh each action against the possible reprisals. Don't do this lightly, and don't do it ineffectually.

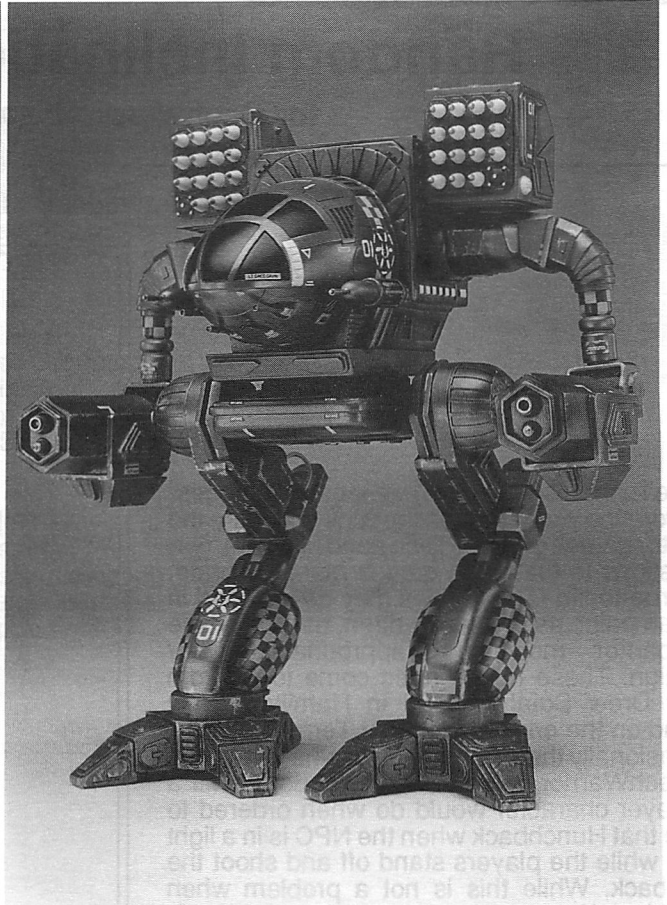
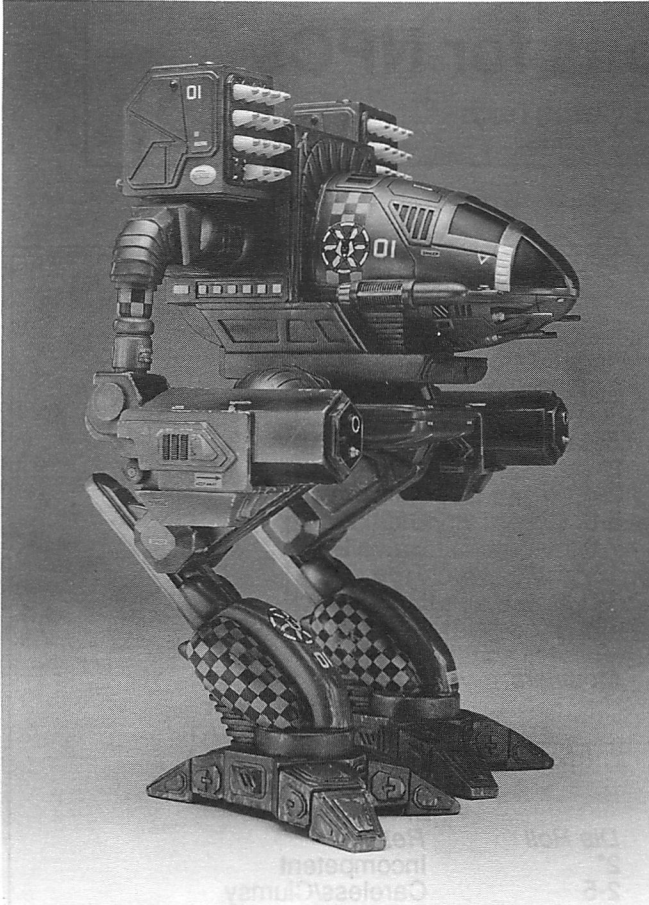
What use to oppose Carthage if you destroy Roma in the process?

Hilary Ayer,
Clermont, Federated Commonwealth



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The Warring Dragoons

Wolf Dragoons' Generation Gap

Harlech, Outreach, October 25, 3054

Since the occasion (BattleTechnology #17) when Wolf's Dragoons asked us to rerun two articles they had originally censored, BattleTechnology's staff have been doing some thinking and some digging. The articles mention first a number of children orphaned by the Fourth Succession War who were adopted by the Dragoons, and then another, much higher number of children being raised by the Dragoons a few years later.

Much of Outreach is off limits to offworlders. But Harlech is the center of administration for the planet, while Wolf City is the site of the Mercenary Review Board, the Mercenary Hiring Hall, and the Central HQ for the Dragoons' own regiments. Agents who spend a long time in Wolf City or Harlech hear the civilian vs military complaints, the current scandals about review cases, the sins of recent ex-employers, who's hiring, and the Dragoons' official communiques. The Dragoons hide their differences from strangers. The agents learn to watch age groups and factions when they show distaste for each other in bars, to listen with a keen ear to the very insults they use. It's not just the 'old-warriors-who-know-how-it's-done' versus the 'young pups'. It's deeper and stranger than that.

When one of the Dragoon-raised young warriors, the so-called 'Wolf Pack', referred to another with the Clans insult 'Freebirth!', our hypothesis was confirmed. Many — though not all — of the children raised by the Dragoons are Clans-type clones raised in sibkos. By official Dragoon policy, *all* of the younger generation have equal opportunities. Yet the cadets who remember homes and family, and being treated as individuals differ significantly from the sibko-bred Dragoons. These latter refer to their unit as 'The Wolf Dragoons' and consider themselves a Clan. Not Clan Wolf, but *Clan Wolf Dragoon*. Their teachers were Clan-bred; many of these people exhibit an arrogance and inflexibility when dealing with other social institutions that remind us irresistibly of Clans MechWarriors.

These sibko-bred MechWarriors ally themselves with a strange group; a minority group of former MechWarriors from Clan Nova Cat and Clan Smoke Jaguar captured in the Battle of Luthien who became bondsmen to Clan Wolf Dragoon, loyal now to them. Several of these, including one Major Elson, new member of the Council of Officers of the Dragoons, carry clout with the sibko-bred as 'true' Clans Warriors. 'True Warriors' as opposed even to long-

time Dragoons recruited from the Inner Sphere 'spheroids.' They are gaining a significant political base. Wolf-watchers see the resurgence of the Dragoon custom of wearing patches from an old unit as significant — especially as the unit involved is the Nova Cats, and some of the wearers never served with the Cats.

Yes, the Wolves are involved in politics again. More significantly, Colonel Jaime Wolf, the only officer who commands the loyalty of all factions, is getting old. He was in his fifties at the end of the Fourth Succession War; that was more than thirty years ago. He is not a product of genetic breeding, but a 'Freebirth'; even if his parents were Clans-bred (and we don't have any data about them), his genes were not selected for long life and health, as the Clone-tank children were. It's unlikely that he will remain the prime-condition warrior for as long as a decade more. The death earlier this year of his only remaining child, Mackenzie Wolf of the Black Widows, has left the succession open. Strangely enough, the 'True Warriors' seem to be gathering behind a freebirth, Mackenzie Wolf's son Alpin, a callow and forgettable person. To command Wolf's Dragoons (or The Wolf Dragoons) demands forceful personal charisma as well as proven ability as leader and MechWarrior. None of the available candidates have all of these qualifications.

Wolf's Family Mourns

Outreach, October 20, 3054

As Colonel Jaime Wolf and his staff returned today from Luthien by command circuit, his family waited to greet him. Present were Wolf's wife, Marisha Dandridge, his son's wife Katherine and her daughter Shauna, and his grandchildren Rachel and Joshua. His other grandson, Mackenzie's son Alpin, was among the honor guard. His son Mackenzie Wolf, former hero of the Black Widows, was nowhere to be seen. An honor guard of Kuritan MechWarriors, former Ryuken and Dragoons, had returned with Jaime Wolf.

This was the moment when the Dragoons made public Mackenzie Wolf's death in battle last month at the hands of a bandit unit. The Dragoons are holding a private ceremony this evening; MechWarriors from other systems who remember the hard-fighting Black Widow Second 'Darnell Winningham' (Mackenzie's nom de guerre) will mourn him in their hearts.

Dissention Among Dragons

Outreach, November 3, 3054

Ominous events of the last week:

Monday — All business involving members of Wolf's Dragons comes to a screeching halt as appointments are cancelled without explanation. The Mercenary Hiring Hall opens as usual, but without the Dragoon representative. Mercenary affairs continue, with Dragons are everywhere replaced by civilians. The Outreach police force (civilian) cancels all leaves.

Tuesday — A Dragoon High Council is held. Some sort of duel is fought. Given the Dragons' Clan heritage, it is not too much to suppose that it is a sort of trial by combat.

Wednesday — The Dragons are told that they have a new commander, 'Khan' Alpin Wolf, Jaime's grandson. Alpin is a young MechWarrior, brave in action, basically unproven. The press corps begins investigations to find out who is behind Alpin, pulling his strings.

Thursday — In an early morning sortie, Jaime Wolf escapes the city, with a large group of MechWarriors to aid him. The Kuritan honor guard goes with him.

Friday — Wolf is somewhere out there. Units are deserting their posts to join him. Dragoon MPs wearing the Nova Cat badge on their black and red uniforms are everywhere. We see several arrests and one street-to-street firefight.

Saturday — our senior correspondent Rueben Timinieri disappears, leaving a note that he 'will report in from the hills' when Wolf allows it.

BattleTechnology will keep you informed of new developments.

Special Wolf Information Officer Robert N Charrette has published a book on the events of this Dragoon coup. The book is called *Wolf Pack*.

PSYCHOLOGY & THE CLANS

Smoke Jaguar Khan Speaks His Mind

I, Kincaid Furey of the Smoke Jaguar Clan, do take this opportunity to respond to your accusations, in the January 3052 issue of your magazine.

I must first state that were you of the lower castes of the Clan, I would order you and your children killed for your effrontery. We are not answerable to you for our actions in the glorious liberation of the Inner Sphere.

The actions of the bandits infesting Edo City left us no choice but to exterminate them like the surats, I mean the rats, they were. They had no honor, even the debased sort we have sometimes seen during our Homecoming. If they had possessed the courage to face us in honorable combat, we should have accommodated them gladly. Instead they chose assassin's tools: bombs, sniping from distance, poisons, etc. Thus they showed their true colors, and paid the price for it. I have no remorse, nor does any of my warriors.

As regards the snivelling cowards who call themselves mercenaries, they will serve no lord for loyalty, substituting money for honor. In our crusade to restore the Star League, we will not tolerate the presence of these vermin. Whenever we defeat them, we will at least take their equipment; they are fortunate to be left with their lives.

We will fight wherever you challenge us — in cities, on plains, in mountains. It is not our concern that you whine in defeat; that is your deficiency, not ours.

Using these so-called chemical/biological horrors on us would be the last mistake your forces would make. To date in this liberation, we have attempted to use as light a force as possible, giving you a fair chance to possibly win battles against our forces. Your 'victories' have been accomplished through the vilest treachery imaginable. Again, if the commanders of your respective forces had been of the Clans, they would have met the fate of all incompetent commanders: death.

The Ares Conventions were a noble set of rules governing warfare, and we use them when we fight warriors. The distinction here is that so few of you have shown that you are true warriors. Some that have shown honor are Kai Allard-Liao and, to a lesser extent, Victor Steiner Davion and Hohiro Kurita. Even Khan Phelan Ward of the Wolf Clan is a fine warrior in spite of his origins.

We make no excuse or promise to you. We are what we are: the ultimate warriors. As such, your slanders do not touch us. We hold no one hostage; the new members of our various Clans go about their daily affairs unharmed or hindered, unless they disrupt the new order.

In sum, I care not greatly whether you trust us or not. We have given our pledges to our leaders to obey them, not to behave as you would have us do. I enjoy your use of the term 'barbarians' regarding us, for which of our cultures has tirelessly repeated the same errors time after time in the so-called Succession Wars instead of uniting against outside threats?

From a ComStar Psych briefing on the Clans before the Battle of Tukayyid. "The Smoke Jaguars were horrified by the resistance at Turtle Bay. They felt that they were forced to set an example of sternness they would rather not have used. They were confused when civilians refused to surrender; civilians do not fight in their worldview. Their laws are very strict, with strict penalties. They do not expect to have to carry out those penalties very often. How many times a century do you see the Inner Sphere equivalent, a trial for high treason? They have a warrior code, but the civilians of Turtle Bay did not fit into that code; they were not warriors. The closest equivalent we would find in our legal system is the precedent for killing mad dogs."

From the Outreach briefing to Inner Sphere leaders. "The Clans do not have the concept of 'the citizen', an independent being who groups with other independent beings to form a political association they call a state. They are a group of people who see themselves as a very extended family. The senior members are the only ones with any say on group policies, internal and external. The junior members have the guidance and protection of strict law and custom. The pressure to behave as a proper Clans member of your station is continual and pervasive. Clans men and women literally have no idea that there is any other way to think and act. The pressure valve of this system is the Trial. There are ritual ways that a member of the society may challenge the fate assigned to him, or demand that her voice be heard. These challenges are invariably settled by combat. Once that combat is over, the issue is decided, not to be re-opened."

"The only way a non-warrior may escape the life decreed for him is to learn to fight and win a place in a combat unit. The emotions a non-warrior feels for the work she does, the soil he tills, are not part of Clans psychosocial makeup. The Smoke Jaguars had no understanding, indeed no basis for understanding how a citizen feels about his rights, and how a free person feels about her homeplace."

"In all fairness, I must defend the Smoke Jaguars against charges of barbarism in the bombing of Edo. I agree that they committed an atrocity in the atomic bombing of the city from orbit. But to them, it was not an act of reasonless mayhem. It was a horrified reaction to what seemed to them a city full of the violently insane."

NAIS Professor of Xenopsychology Ariadne Pantali, in her paper at the 3054 Robinson Conference, explained, "When the population of Turtle Bay surrendered, they became Smoke Jaguars, in the eyes of the Smoke Jaguars. They were bondsmen, but still part of the Jaguars, expected to change loyalty, to become part of the 'body' of the Clan. When part of your body acts irrationally, such as developing cancer, you have it cut out so the body can heal."

"When we of the Known Sphere conquer a system, we expect a period of pacification and reeducation. We expect that even after the military efforts of the system prove fruitless, the ordinary citizens will resent the changes a conqueror makes. We expect a period of pacification as a planetary population 'learns the new rules.' We are prepared to combat a strong underground or resistance movement, which may last over several generations before eroding into a token force. We have tried and true tactics for dealing with these groups. Whether you call them dissident elements or patriots, we feel, depends entirely on your point of view."

"When a Clan conquers the territory of another Clan, the people in that territory either flee, die, or become zero-level members of the new Clan. That's what the so-called 'bondsmen' are, not slaves. They have the usual unenviable duties of the lowest level of any hierarchy, but they have the potential right to become members of the ruling group. These bondsmen are expected to be loyal to their new Clan, just as adopted children become members of a new family."

"The Inner Sphere contains multitudes of very different societies. If a conqueror does not understand why a planetary society does not act according to his expectations, he will get in a team of experts to explain them to him, and another team of propagandists to explain to the populace what he expects of them. The Clans have very similar societies, differing in details of execution rather than in essence. When a planetary society does not act as they expect, they consider it a society of crazy people, irrational and dangerous. If it is dangerous enough, they destroy it."

New Mercs On The Block

The Inner Sphere is used to seeing mercenary units formed out of the remnants of two or three old units, seasoned with discharged veterans from Successor House units or merchant security forces. To form a unit of MechWarriors, you need to get the MechWarriors from somewhere as well as the BattleMechs, the Techs to maintain them, the support personnel, the money to pay training costs for two to six months, command staff, and a place to train. Most of these factors have been affected by the war with the Clans, as has the last ingredient in a mercenary unit's success, its employers.

More MechWarriors than 'Mechs have survived the invasion. In most engagements, the Clans allowed refugee ships to leave the system as long as their essential weapons systems had been disabled. Regular troops were allowed to retain their 'Mechs in retreat. Mercenary BattleMechs were confiscated. Mercenary DropShips and JumpShips which were not crammed to the bulkheads with escaping refugees were often confiscated as well. So we have Dispossession on an unprecedented scale.

As system after system was taken over by the Clans, more and more 'Mechs were lost — and almost none were salvaged from the Clans. The Clans took over many of the factories that would have been making new 'Mechs (see the true account *Table of Organization*, this issue). Indeed, Rasalhague has no BattleMech factories left at all. So it's a seller's market for BattleMechs — high prices and low availability. Regular House units purchase the majority of the new-production 'Mechs, while mercenaries scabble for the salvage. Solaris continues to do a brisk trade as the novelty-crazy arena forces second rank fighters to change 'Mechs again and again. Outreach BattleMech brokers offer a continual supply. Yet even here, the cost of BattleMechs is up by an average of 10% over 3050.

Of the other factors, techs don't work cheap; money is

as scarce as ever. Command staff — now there's a brighter picture. If a unit has a nucleus of trained officers and MechWarriors, the number of units fragmented after the Clans invasions gives a wide selection of candidates to fill in any specialist vacancy.

Places to train? If you've got money, you can rent field facilities; if you have less, it's the simulators for you. Some units forming on backwater planets just head for the boonies where they can practice with blanks and zero-charged weapons. Units forming at the mercenary hiring hall on Outreach have several grades of training facilities available to them: the five Simulator Halls, the mountain courses behind Harlech, and the CityScape just outside Wolf City.

BattleTechnology decided to follow three of such units as they attempt to become viable in the changing economic climate of 3054.

The Black Thorns have suffered more foul ups than most. The mere fact that they have survived as long as they have makes them look like a lucky unit after all. Three Northwind MechWarriors, forbidden to form their own unit, decided to buy 'Mechs on Solaris and recruit MechWarriors on Outreach. A Jump Coil failure made the ship buyer arrive on Solaris almost too late to buy anything at all, while an encounter with inebriated Dragoon troops almost destroyed the unit before it had formed in a lance-to-lance duel. The Black Thorns have accepted a contract for garrison duty on Borghese. Signs of our times! The Black Thorns' CO, Jeremiah Rose, is a former ComStar MechWarrior who chose to join neither side in the ComStar split. BattleTechnology wishes the unit well.

By contrast, Balanon's Brawlers, a unit formed from the remnants of Las Calaveras, mercenaries formerly attached to the Albiero planetary garrison and the Yamataro security force, fell into a seeming sweetheart contract. The MechWarriors had landed on Macksburg as refugees just

after the worst outbreak of Elloran Fever in half a century. The planetary garrison had rejoiced in the possession of four BattleMechs found in a Star League cache: a Highlander, a Titan, a Ventilator, and a Rifleman. Together with the recon and fire lances the Brawlers had already assembled, these 'Mechs would make a strong company. Two Yamataro Shillone fighters, badly battered in the Clans takeover of Albiero, completed the unit. Macksburg could supply maintenance, battle repairs and salvage, and a well-built training ground at the site of a former munitions test facility whose owners went broke when the family-kin suppliers who had given them such low prices were trapped behind Clans lines. The problem was money. Pay is in kind for the first three years. The unit will not own the Star League 'Mechs for fifteen years. They are locked into a fifteen year contract. Thirteen years from now, Macksburg is quite possibly on the Nova Cats' invasion path.

A promising newcomer, the Doomsayers, an overstrength company, made up exclusively of MechWarriors born in the Free Worlds League, disbanded in November, at the end of their preliminary two year contract in the Dixie system. Ten of the fifteen MechWarriors of the company cited 'family reasons' and a need to return

home to the Free Worlds League. The other five did not part friends with their mates, but looked around quickly for a way to keep their contract.

That contract was snapped up by the Down & Dirty, the remains of a security force who had pooled their funds to go mercenary. The decision was made during R&R on Kooken's Pleasure Pit; the unit's funds were just about exhausted, but they'd kept in training by staging mock battles and charging admission to the jaded pleasure seekers who flock to The Pit. Just in time to pay their repair bill before BattleTechnic sold their 'Mechs, the D&Ders got the contract from the Dixie system, who needed a garrison at a month's notice. The fact that Jenner pilot Armando Cabrerias, former Doomsayer, was a schoolmate of Julius Ostrocsky, XO of the D&D, has nothing to do with it, of course. Yet the D&Ders' strength was increased by five before the contract was signed...

One unit down, three new ones formed. Which of these will be the next generation's legendary heroes, which will fall to financial trouble or bandit raids, and which will end in obscurity?

Black Thorns in Training near Wolf City



The Lighter Side: The Mocking Cossacks

In these trying times, it is rare to laugh, particularly when reading news from the Clan front. Even though there is a cease-fire, won by the Com Guards, low-level hostilities continue. In an effort to bring a smile to your faces, at least temporarily, we bring you this offering.

Military formations have all manner of traditions, most of them for very formal occasions. Not all, however, are meant to be taken seriously. Take, for example, the Khorsahov's Cossacks' tradition of a 'mock dress parade'. The Cossacks are known in some circles for their unusual sense of humor. 'Sick', 'perverted', and 'oxymoronic' are terms sometimes used in description of their humor. It is never dull.

Research indicates that this tradition evolved during the American Civil War of 1861-65. It involved, as indicated by the title, a mockery of the tradition of the dress parade. The soldiers felt the need to relieve boredom and lift their spirits at the same time, so they poked fun at one of the most sacred military formations. Only the most slovenly clothing and equipment was allowed; officers were made to stand in ranks while the lowest-ranking soldier 'commanded' the parade. There is no recorded instance of any officer refusing to participate.

The Cossack version of such a formation is not a sight for someone with weak nerves. Farcical proclamations appear from Regimental HQ, 'Mechs appear with huge apparent rust stains, 'broken' weapons, and sometimes 'Mech-sized crutches and canes! Once a giant top hat appeared on Colonel Khorsakov's Atlas. An inflated globe, complete with oceans and continents, showed up one year on the other Atlas in the regiment. A ComGuard lance was once portrayed. It consisted of a light 'Mechs, three tanks, and a local cow, draped with radar-reflective foil. Often the most jarring

sights are noted. A biplane of ancient design showed up in a lineup of their AeroFighters. Tanks have often sported steam boilers (false), extra turrets and weapon; a prizewinner was a Demolisher mounting a pair of aircraft-style wings. Oars as on an ancient galley (they worked, too) won first place the following year. An infantry battalion paraded in proper formation as an ancient Roman legion, with correct insignia. Techs and other support personnel appear with giant-sized tools of their respective trades, or conduct themselves in otherwise shameful fashion.

A darker side is presented by the 'Chamber of Horrors', held in private. Here are displayed the crueler, more vulgar amusements. House Lords are sometimes lampooned in the Chamber, which is one reason that it's private. We are told that Hanse Davion was never an object of display.

To briefly list some of the prize-winning displays of years past:

3037 — A living display featuring Chancellor Romano's Celestial Throne Chamber. This featured a local *fille de joie* in a flesh colored bodysuit, a number of anonymous gentlemen also in flesh-colored bodysuits, and a doorkeeper named 'Tsen Shang' who photographed, fingerprinted, and rewarded each man as he exited the chamber. If your imagination cannot supply the details, a viewing of the latest version of *I, Claudius* should give a fairly accurate picture.

3040 — The Lyran uniform was crudely parodied by a man wearing a gross travesty of the uniform, made up in white pancake makeup, a red plastic nose, orange wig and the requisite outsize shoes. The display was set up as a recruiting station for the AFFC, who were allegedly not amused.

3044 — At the height of the Cossack's troubles with the LCCC, the most venom was reserved for the Mariks. This

display consisted of a maze, through which the observer had to travel, the whole way 'beLeagured' by idiots in Marik uniform, goons offering bogus deals and pompous petty nobility offering bribes for farcical political services. At the center sat 'Thomas', a blindfolded, gagged, and chairbound store dummy. ComStar initiation chants were played in the inner chamber, which was crudely decorated to represent the Audience Hall on Atrous.

3050 — A Rasalhague mercenary compound was parodied, complete with (fake) concertina wire, armed guards, and searchlights. Obvious mines were placed at the exits, ball-and-chain sets and first-aid kits for wandering mercs were on hand, and only 'sleaze service' facilities were available within the compound bounds. A particularly vicious slur attacked the 'Count Dracula'- style dress uniform adopted by the Republic.

The Cossacks do many other things during the mock dress parade, some of them not printable. They certainly have fun doing it, and it gives them a great opportunity to blow off steam. Every mock parade has been fully filmed, usually for members of the Regiment, but copies often go out to friends and the occasional employer, notably First Prince Hanse Davion. It is also rumored that Davion was served two fingers of brandy before reading any Cossack after-action report, by his standing order to the palace staff. The unit has not sent films to Prince Victor; a formal correctness still is observed in their relations with this Steiner Davion heir.

Reaction to the mock parades varies according to the temperament and self-confidence of the viewer. Some have been infuriated and others apparently genuinely amused. No one has remained unmoved. Tor Miraborg was reportedly incensed by the portrayal of merc conditions in the Rasalhague Republic. He was notably silent regarding the uniform. After being vilified, Chancellor Romano Liao declared that the Cossacks may not be mentioned in her presence on pain of death. (Upon leaving Outreach, she added the Dragoons to that list, now comprising some fourteen merc and House units.) Thomas was

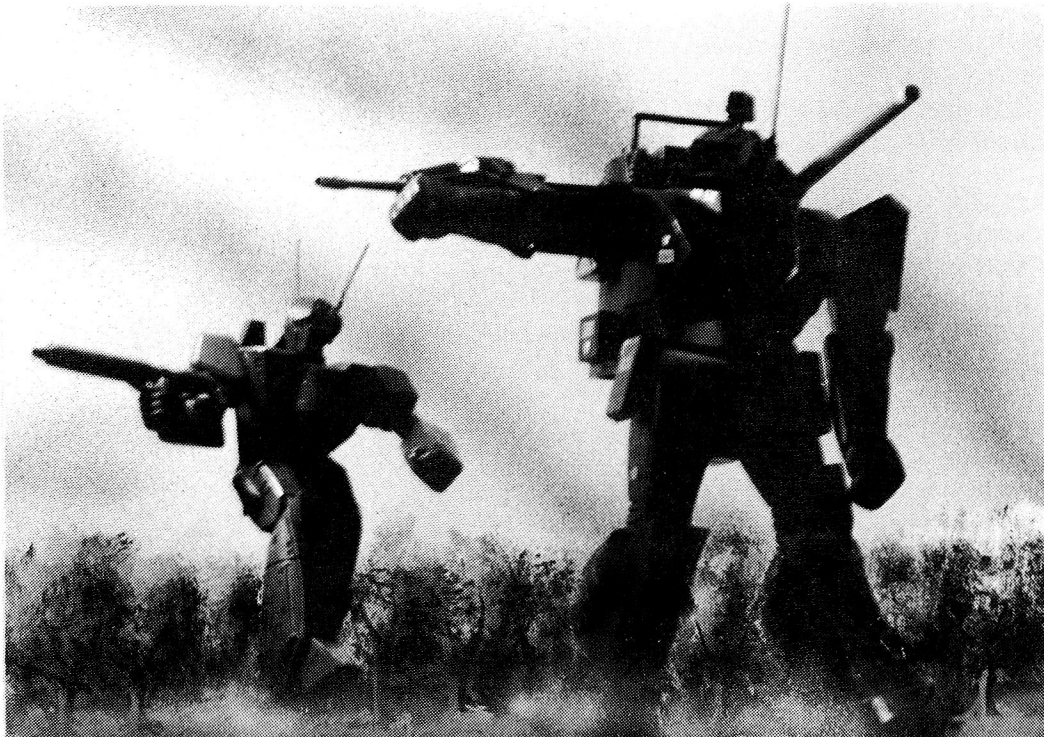
not amused, but saw where the ridicule was being directed. Davion supposedly got a good belly-laugh (in private) out of the 'Lyrans recruitment station'. Anastasius Focht is not available for comment.

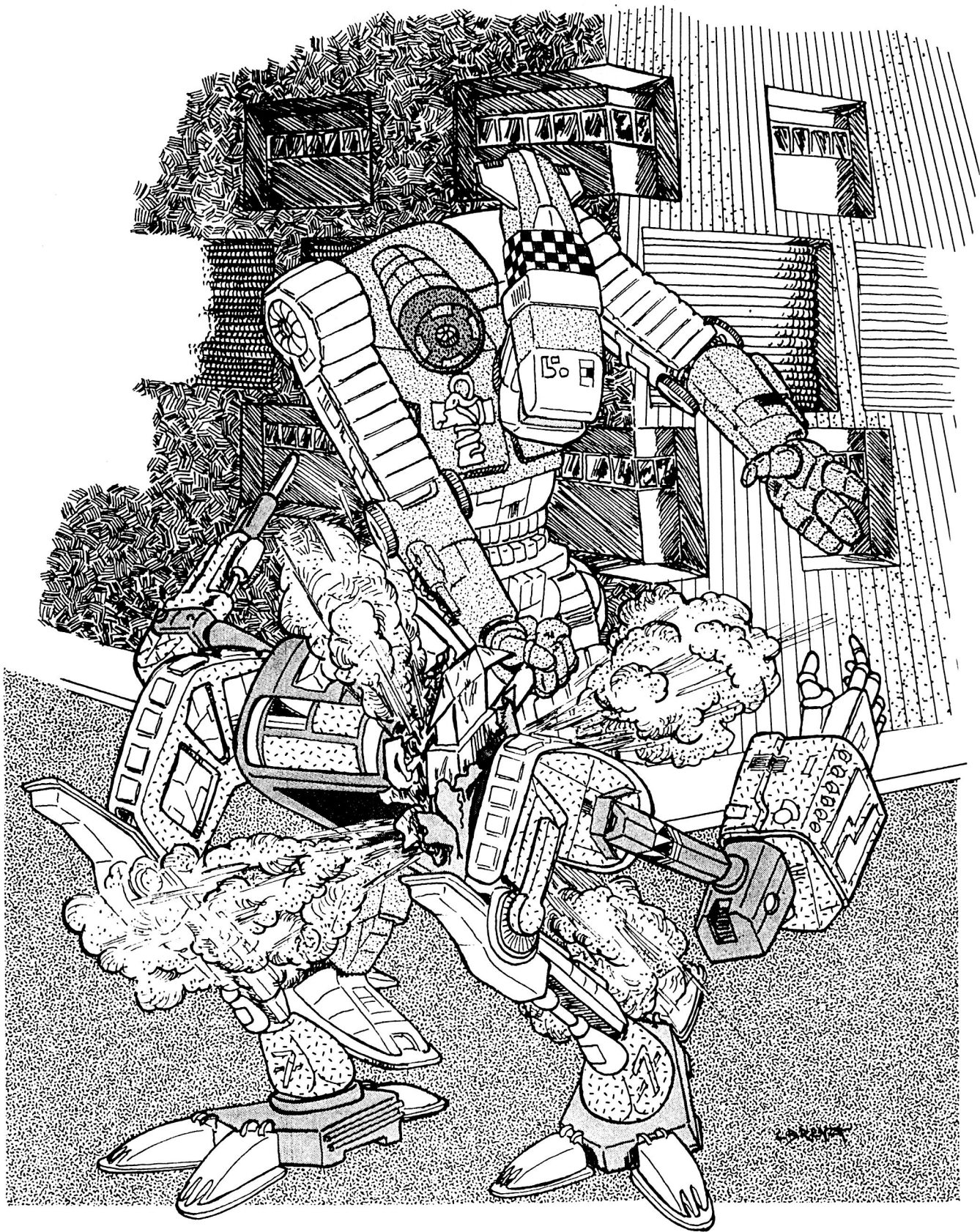
In sum, while the idea is probably sound, current execution of it could use some fine-tuning in the way of tact. The Cossacks claim that it helps them keep a sense of perspective. They say the shrinks tell them they're in better shape if they can laugh at themselves. If they can do this, they can certainly laugh. It isn't our province to comment on their state of mental health.

The Cossacks are currently on loan to the DCMS for garrison and raiding duty, stationed on Luthien. They may exercise far more than their usual decorum and discretion when holding such a formation.

Some few other outfits are known to do things along these lines, notably the Wild Geese Battalion. None, however, go nearly as far as the Cossacks in their efforts. Notably, the parades have never mocked at House or other mercenary regiments. Or if they have, they have kept it a better secret.

Cossack 'Mechs in Mock Salute 3054





Target Of Opportunity

Note: This story has been cleared for publication by the military censors of the Federated Commonwealth. Certain names and technical details have been changed to protect those involved.

Major Iko fidgeted in the metal chair. She wonder how the JumpShip crew managed to keep all the metal fixtures on the ship at about twelve degrees below the ambient air temperature. It had to be some plot to keep her and the rest of the 'Mech jocks off balance so they could be taken at cards.

She felt a sharp stab of pain in her side and bit back a surprised yelp. Colonel Kann, her commanding officer, had just jabbed her with his elbow to gain her notice. He was a small man, with dusky brown skin and piercing black eyes. His bald head gleamed like oiled wood in the harsh light of the briefing room; his large, slightly hooked nose looked razor sharp. He gazed at her, his eyes hypnotically intense, and directed her attention up to the podium when their liaison officer was providing a tactical update on the mission.

"But I've already memorized all this!" she whispered.

"We are being paid quite well for this mission. I expect my command staff to respect this."

Kann's voice was a dry hiss that made Iko think of a snake crawling across stone. Kann gave Iko a case of the shudders. He was an enigmatic leader, always seeming to be in command of his emotions and a master of any situation. There were odd rumors about him in the unit, rumors of mystical rituals and his uncanny ability to predict his enemies. Others said he was deathless, having come from Old Earth during the first wave of colonization. She knew the rumors were untrue yet still...

On the podium, the liaison droned on. Iko forced herself to pay attention.

"We'll be jumping into the Sudeten system at 0945 today," the man said, his Federated Commonwealth Intelligence Corps uniform bright blue in the neon light. "In deference to Colonel Kann, we've delayed four days."

Iko thought she detected the ghost of a smile curve Kann's thin lips.

"We'll come in system here," the liaison office continued, pointing to a spot on the holographic display that hung in the air before them, "a pirate point in an asteroid belt. Drop ships will detach immediately, so all units will be in their DropShips for the jump. Once in system, we will be broadcasting signals IDing us as a supply ship. Intel has identified the frequencies and codes used by the Clan supply forces.

We hope that will keep the Clan units off our tail until after the operation is completed."

The holotank image shifted, scrolling through a series of Clan 'Mechs, each decorated with a bright green bird of prey.

"This is our enemy, the Falcon Guards. Specifically, the Sixth Falcon Regulars, Iota Galaxy."

The image transformed into a schematic showing the 6th Falcon Guards organizational structure. Green symbols burned in the air, showing each 'Mech, aerospace, or elemental unit.

"The clan military structure is somewhat flexible. Based on 90 units comprised of 3 Clusters each comprised of three binaries, we get a maximum of 375 units. Yes, that's a lot of birds. That shouldn't matter too much, we're not invading the planet. This is our objective."

The holotank showed the image of a sprawling industrial complex nestled in a broad mountain valley.

"What you are looking at is the last recorded image of the Olivetti Weapons manufacturing facility on Sudeten. This is a pre-Succession War factory that was state-of-the-art and, as of its loss to the Jade Falcons, was producing TDR-9S Thunderbolt and WHM-7S Warhammer BattleMechs. Intel wants some of these 'Mechs to see what the Clans have been doing with a standard design. We think it might provide a bridge to the Clan OmniMechs."

Iko felt a shudder of excitement trace her spine. Set's Asps, Kann's mercenary unit, had tangled with the clans before she joined. The survivors told tales of what the Clan warriors could do with their OmniMechs. It had been a series of harrowing battles that winnowed many of the Asps. Iko was hired after the war, rising to the rank of Unit 'Mech Commander, an impressive accomplishment for a thirty year old woman who joined the Asps less than three years ago. She knew it was a measure of Kann's trust in her, or a sign of his seeming preternatural hunches. This would be her first major field action in command of all four 'Mech lances.

On the surface, her assignment seemed simple. Once the drop ships grounded, she was to hold the LZ until the raiding party returned with a load of captured 'Mechs. A platoon of Federated Commonwealth scouts backed by two platoons of jump infantry equipped with heavy support weapons would acquire the 'Mechs. She'd met a few of the scouts and found them secretive and almost eerie in their intensity. She thought they were a perfect match for Kann. Based on the available evidence, she deduced the scouts

were from the nearly legendary Stealthy Foxes. If anyone could steal 'Mechs from under the Jade Falcon's noses, they could. Her job was to secure the line of retreat from whatever might counterattack. And she was sure it would be OmniMechs.

The holotank showed the LZ. They would ground in the center of the complex, near the main warehouses. Projected paths that the complex defenders would most likely use glowed red, Iko stared at them, fixing them in her mind though she knew all the data would be in her 'Mech's onboard system. One path drew her notice, tracing from a distant barracks north east of the landing zone. The path seemed to sparkle like a glittered trail of crushed rubies, or burning blood. She felt a tingle in the back of her neck as she stared at that route. She rubbed her neck and glanced suddenly at Kann, the voice of the liaison a distant drone. He

thoughts of her past. Only the present mattered, only the moment. The artificial gravity of acceleration dragged at her, seeming to fill her bones with lead. She tried to cut her mind adrift from the dull aches that throbbed through her body. Through her comlink, she heard the continued chatter from the crews of the five DropShips that were burning their way towards Sudeten. As she listened, she put together an image of what was going on.

The Falcons weren't reacting. Long range sensors showed a large number of JumpShips at the system zenith and nadir jump points. Based on the fragments they were picking up from the planetary telecommunications net, the Intel boys were reasonably sure the Jade Falcons were at war. And they were fighting the Wolves! Speculation was running in favor of the theory that this was some sort of testing of forces between the Wolves and the Falcons. Kann

said no, and suspected this was the way the Clans kept their edge. They fought each other, so the Wolves were raiding the Falcon planet. The interesting thing was, the Wolves appeared to have landed only three days ago. If the Asps had come in on the preset schedule, they would have arrived nearly at the same time as the Clan invaders, trapping them between the two forces. Now, the Falcons and Wolves were engaged and the Asps might be able to sneak in through the back door and get

Time dragged by like a crippled insect

stared back at her, his face as unreadable as carved stone. Yet somehow, she sensed he was pleased.

Iko stared at her reflection in the polarized armored glass of her 'Mech cockpit. The woman that stared back was slender with short black hair and large deep green eyes. The bones of her face were fine and slightly up-slanted. She wore a single earring, a silver ankh with a snake winding across the crossbar, the emblem of Set's Asps. A hairline scar marred her forehead, the gift of an older brother that trained her in the arts of combat. She wondered if she looked like either of her parents but knew she would never answer that question. Her parents were a mystery that her brother had never spoken of. All she knew was that the two of them had been abandoned on the streets of Dis, a hellish mining planet on the edge of the Capellan March. Her rise to her current position had been a struggle against crushing adversity, one that she was proud of. She owed no favors that might rise from her past. Except to her brother, and he could never collect.

She swallowed the thick lump in her throat and cast out

out, before either side reacted.

"Right," Iko muttered, "and Seker will grow wings and just fly down from orbit."

Seker was her 'Mech, an Axman outfitted with the latest equipment that was owned by the Asps. Unlike most mercenary units, many of the Asps' Mechs were owned by 'the company'. The Asps had bought her old Jenner when she signed up, the money was held in an account, drawing interest as well as a percentage of her pay. When and if she mustered out, she had the right to buy any unit 'Mech at a fair market price. It kept everyone interested in keeping the huge war machines in good condition and assured pilots were matched to 'Mechs they could best use.

Iko ran another check of Seker's systems. All the telltales glowed green. She switched on the heads up display and accessed the tactical map of the LZ. The projected routes defenders were apt to use showed red. Again, her attention was drawn to that one route leading north east. It mesmerized her, calling to her in an unknown tongue that was as incomprehensible as it was undeniable

Seker moaned, echoing the sound that permeated the DropShip as it plummeted through the atmosphere. Iko knew it was only her imagination, but she felt the growing heat that must be blistering the ship's skin. She repressed the sensation, knowing it was a phantom creation of her active mind bored by seeming inaction.

"If the shielding was breached, the crew wouldn't be so calm," she muttered.

And the com chatter was remarkably mild for a combat drop. No AeroSpace forces had picked them up yet. Intel showed that the Falcons were heavily engaged about eight hundred kilometers south of the industrial complex. It looked like the birds and the wolves were mixing it up with a vengeance.

"Drop in sixty seconds from my mark."

Kann's voice startled her. She hadn't realized they were that close to the drop. She quickly ran a last check, enabling the weapon systems and warming the jump jets. Her heart thundered in her chest, seeming to beat in cadence with Kann's count down. It was that pre-combat rush she always felt when battle loomed. She rode it, letting it infuse her with its wild energy. Her skin tingled and she felt as if she stood before a yawning chasm, a burning wind at her back. Darkness beckoned, promising the orchestrated savagery of war.

"Launch," Kann said, his voice dead calm yet somehow still filled with the same wild magic Iko felt.

A sharp jolt rocked her as explosive charges propelled her through the opened hatch into the predawn. She caught a flash of the Overlord DropShip, its heat shield glowing like an over-banked furnace. Across the ship's skin, 'Mechs popped from other hatches. Each tumbled for a moment until their gyros and jets brought them upright. Iko felt her stomach lurch as Seker straightened. She eased pressure on to the foot pedals that controlled the jets. Seker vibrated as the jets fired in long bursts. On board processors read the down-looking radar images, matching them to the tactical information. An overlay on her view screen showed her the landing zone. The plan was to drop two lances onto the field to take out any hard points that guarded the LZ. Stealth was gone: once they entered the atmosphere: anyone watching could figure out their objective. Now, it was all a matter of firepower and will.

Seker descended on a column of super-heated steam. She came in hard, sacrificing a soft landing for speed. Red beams lit the night. Intel had been right. Automated laser batteries on pylons the field. Above her, brilliant light blossomed as one of the lasers found a descending 'Mech.

"Where's the damned air support?," she shouted as she locked on to the nearest battery and fired. Fire gouted up as the laser exploded.

"Right here, Major," a voice crackled in her ear. Four Lucifers screamed over head, peeling off to cover the four

points of the compass. The lasers hunted the fast moving craft, weaving a web of crimson light. As best she could tell, none of the fighters were hit and all four dropped their bomb loads. The ground shuddered as the detonations rocked her. Nearly three quarters of the laser turrets were swept away in the walls of fire and rubble.

"All right, Juarez," Iko shouted, "now clear the deck and let us mop up."

She locked her large pulse laser onto another battery and fired, the stabs of light flaring like a strobe. It took only a few moments. Few of the lasers had been mounted with fields of fire that included ground based targets. The 'Mechs made short work of them. Iko took a quick head count; only one 'Mech lost. Then she set survivors into their defensive perimeter. Above, five stars grew brighter as the DropShips burned in. Each of the huge, egg shaped ships landed, shuddering the ground. Instantly, the hatches opened and reinforcements poured out. The Foxes and their support scattered, heading for their targets. Iko assigned the rest of the 'Mechs to the defense. Then she waited.

News filtered in from the scattered forces. Before landing, the DropShips had launched a series of spy satellites to keep watch of the on-going battle between the Falcons and Wolves. So far, nothing was moving north. Everything was on track. The Lucifers were out about thirty kicks, watching for any incoming ground units that might escape notice of the satellites. Defense of the LZ from the factory garrison, if present, fell to Iko and the rest of the 'Mechs.

Each time Iko looked at the chronometer, sure that nearly an hour had passed, she saw it had only been a few moments. Time dragged by like a crippled insect. An itch formed between her shoulder blades. She knew it was a sign of tension and tried to ignore it. The image of the holographic pathway snaking between the buildings hung at the back of her thoughts. Iko wasn't a gambler, but this hunch was so strong.

"To frack with it," she muttered as she moved Seker north east across the concrete, winding between the grounded DropShips towards that dammed route. She found it guarded by the two 'Mechs she'd assigned, Torn's Cicada and Dunlevi's revamped Phoenix Hawk. They were both experienced warriors, but would they be enough if a major attack came?

No, Iko thought, we're all good but no two of us could hold up to a major Clan assault. The idea is to spot them coming and get more forces to the battle site as quickly as possible. So, will that work? She scanned the long dark roadway with the full range of her sensors. Low light didn't work; the floods set by the drop ship to illuminate the LZ washed out the screen. Infra red was a possible, but the cold wind would keep the heat generated by a 'Mech from being noticeable more than a few dozen meters from the 'Mech. Audio picked up the whine of the wind, and the massive,

block house style buildings were hardened, foiling magnetics. With a chilling jolt, she realized that the Falcon Guards could be just beyond the edge of the light and she wouldn't know.

"Chin! Dubeck! Alzarad! Ayers! Get over here!" she shouted over the comlink. Her hunch seemed a lot less ludicrous facing into the dark. The four heavy 'Mechs should shore up this flank until more Asps could arrive. But what if an attack came from a different direction? Was she focussing too much of her forces?

"Is everything OK, Major?" The comlink carried the strain in Dunlevi's voice.

Iko realized her outburst had spooked the young warrior. This was only Dunlevi's third combat mission, and nothing had come close to this scale.

"Just playing a hunch," Iko answered. "You and Torn use the edges of the buildings for cover and watch my back. I'm going to take a look."

Under her direction, Seker paced between the massive buildings. She had about ten meters of room to each side and the buildings were nearly twenty meters tall. She felt like she was walking down a firing line into unknown guns. The bright lights of the DropShips faded. Darkness enveloped her.

Away from the lights and sounds behind her, she paused to assess the situation. She saw nothing to warrant her concern.

"What other direction?" she wondered as she looked down the deserted road way. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the massive buildings rising to either side of her.

"It's worth a look," Iko muttered.

She pressed down on the foot pedals and Seker jetted up, arching over to land on the building to her right. She felt the jar of the impact, Seker flexing at the knees, and triggered a full sensor scan. Immediately, her computer identified several dozen incoming targets.

Iko's pulse surged as the lowlight imaging painted the picture before her. Most of the approaching Falcons were armored infantry, the damned Elementals. Ten of the targets were IDed as Clan OmniMechs with projected tonnages between 30 and 65 tons. The counterattack was on.

"We got Falcons coming in on the roof top!" Iko shouted over the comlink as she hit a button, transmitting the information in her computer to Kann's tactical system on his flag ship, the *Sethos*.

Her targeting system painted the nearest Mech with a neon green outline. The computer labeled the Mech as a Dragonfly, a forty ton 'Mech that was faster and far more heavily armed than Seker. The rest of the Falcons were back at least fifty meters except for ten Elementals that were the advanced guard. They were between her and the LZ. The Dragonfly was only ten meters away from her. Apparently, the Clan pilot was startled into inaction by Seker's

sudden appearance. Iko used that to her advantage. Firing the huge Luxor Devastator autocannon and her battery of medium lasers, she charged the Dragonfly.

Her lasers missed, carving brilliant red lines through the night, back towards the rest of the Falcon force. Her autocannon struck the 'Mech's torso, peeling back armor and ripping into the inner systems. Laser fire scored along Seker's side. Warning lights flashed but her armor wasn't breached. She lashed out with Seker's massive battleaxe. The shock of the blade biting into the Dragonfly's right shoulder reverberated through her 'Mech. Smoke and flames blew out around the axe. She pulled back, trying to free the wedged blade.

The Dragonfly kicked out and short range missiles peppered Seker's armor. Trailing a net of shredded cables, the axe ripped free. She struck out again, aiming for the same cut. She didn't have time for a long fight. The Elementals had to be closing on her from behind, and soon, she'd be swamped in Clan 'Mechs.

The blade bit, cleaving into the gap she'd already cut. Something inside the Dragonfly gave way in a spray of gold sparks. The 'Mech exploded, fragmenting into smoking ruin. Iko staggered. Seker was intact. But she knew that wouldn't last. Missiles exploded around her, fired by the closing 'Mechs. She snapped off shots from the Large Pulse Laser into the oncoming Falcons and she retreated, still firing. The hair on the back of neck prickled. She was sure the Elementals were right behind her but she couldn't turn her back to the Clan 'Mechs.

"I could use some help up here, people," she shouted.

"I read you, sir," a voice countered.

Two lines of crimson stabbed past her into the leading Clan 'Mech. Dunlevi's Phoenix Hawk had joined her atop the building, along with five other Asps. Trusting them to cover her, Iko turned back for the LZ. The Elementals were nearly on her. Their lasers flicked across her. An alarm wailed. Seker's armor was opened on the left side. She swept the roof with laser fire. One Elemental was on her leg, ripping at her armor with its mechanical claw. She cut down with the axe, twisting her leg as the blade descended. She hit the Elemental, shearing the armored man in half. She triggered her jump jets, leaping over the scattered Elementals. She reached Dunlevi and they joined their fire. Other Asps landed on the roof, forming a line.

The Asps strengthened their defense, pouring in their reserves once scouts confirmed that no other routes were being used by the Falcons. It looked as if they were driving in a wedge from the northeast, concentrating the full weight of the force at a single point. The Asps fell back, surrendering ground for time. Even though Seker accumulated damage, Iko stayed with her command rather than retreating to the drop ships. Asps began to drop, torn to pieces by Clan fire.

"Over the edge!" she shouted. "We'll hold them at the



field.”

The Asps retreated, dragging back their injured. Iko was the last to go. She fired all her lasers then jumped back, clearing the edge in three leaps.

“Everyone, turn to face the building,” she said. Following her own order, she brought all her weapons to bear on the edge of the building they had just abandoned. “On my order, fire low!”

Moments latter, the lead elementals reached the edge.

“Wait for it!” Iko’s nerves sang with tension as a few of the Elementals fired down at them. Her fingers twitched for the fire controls but she held back, knowing they had one chance for her plan to work. A hulking figure reached the edge dwarfing the Elementals around it. Her computer ID it as a Thor heavy ‘Mech. She zoomed in on the torso, spotting the series of red, five pointed stars painted on the dark green armor.

“A command ‘Mech,” Iko breathed, realizing she’d just been granted a favor by the mercurial gods of war. The battle hinged on this moment.

“Fire!!” she roared, triggering all her weapons.

All of the Asps fired in a single shuddering volley. The

face of the building shattered, blowing aback in a cloud of dust and debris. The Asps poured fire into the shattered structure. A deep rumble thundered across the field. Like ice from the edge of a glacier, the front of the building sheeted away in an avalanche. Iko saw Jade Falcon ‘Mechs and elementals tumbling with the slabs of broken ferrocrete. At least forty meters of the building had collapsed.

“Lances Ra and Bast, keep hitting the building, the rest of you, hammer the rubble.”

She targeted the command Thor that was struggling to rise from the shattered shards of concrete and twisted steel beams.

“Sorry, this is war,” she muttered as the heavy laser locked on. The pulsing beam speared through the Clan ‘Mech. It jerked like an electrocuted man, the coherent light of laser scattering in a rainbow display. Smoking, the Thor fell back and lay still.

The Falcons fell back to regroup. Iko took stock of the situation. Seven Asp ‘Mechs were out of action, three were destroyed. Five MechWarriors were dead and the infantry had taken a mauling. If not for the trap she’d worked with the collapsing building, they’d have been over-run.

"We can't take much more of this," she said, linking to Kann's system. "How soon can we bug out?"

"Unknown. The Foxes have not yet returned. Maintain the defensive perimeter." Kann's voice was insufferably free of tension. Iko imagined him sitting at his command council, his uniform unmussed, his features impassive.

"Great," she muttered as she ran a quick diagnostic on Seker's systems. "What'll we throw at them if they rush us again?"

She worked a quick circuit around the LZ, checking for signs that the Falcons were coming yet again. For the moment, everything was quiet. Iko assessed the level of damage on the 'Mechs mauled in the last fight and adjusted her defensive program accordingly. Then she prowled the LZ, trying to stay calm though her nerves jumped with unspent energy. She was on edge, ridding the aftermath of the battle, refusing to let herself slide into exhaustion. She knew it wasn't over yet. And some how she was sure, they'd come from the northeast again.

Fifteen minutes later, word came over the Comlink that the Foxes were inbound with over half a dozen captured 'Mechs. At the same moment, Iko spotted movement amid the rubble. Elementals were creeping up.

"Incoming!" She flashed her medium lasers across the rubble, drawing attention to the invaders. Dozens of Elementals erupted from the wreckage. Most bounded out from the gaping face of the building, firing as they came.

"Watch for 'Mechs! They're bound to be right behind!" Iko waded in, firing her lasers and lashing out with her axe. The Elementals moved past her towards the DropShips. "All 'Mechs under forty tons, deal with the Elementals! The rest of you get set to fight the Falcon 'Mechs!"

She was positive they were coming. Later, she could never explain why she was so sure.

"The Foxes are loading, prepare to embark," Kann said. "Load by the numbers, according to plan."

Tactical showed that the Elementals were being beaten back. The return of the reinforced infantry that had accompanied the Foxes tipped the balance. The first Asp 'Mechs began to retreat. Iko felt the tension rise within her. It felt as if a serpent coiled in her guts, rearing up to warn an enemy.

Without pausing to think, she fired her pulse laser down the rubble strewn street. Out nearly five hundred meters, the pulsing beam struck something. The laser light scattered, painting the target long enough for her computer to register and analyze. It was a Mad Cat, the twin shoulder mounted racks of Long Range Missiles unmistakable.

"Everyone, break to the sides! *Intrepid*, can you give me heavy PPC fire down this road on my order?" Iko's voice cracked with command. The 'Mechs still on the field parted, taking cover beside the two buildings. Missiles began to land across the LZ.

"This is *Intrepid*, ready to fire on your command, Major."

Iko brought up Seker's seismic sensors and ordered the computer to triangulate the vibrations of the approaching 'Mechs.

The Falcons would be here in moments.

"All right people, once the *Intrepid* finishes firing, pop up and fire one full volley, then bug out. Pair up. If your partner goes down, try to evac them but don't slow down. The ships can't wait for us. This is for all the marbles. Let's earn those bonuses and teach the Falcons the meaning of Inner Sphere...."

She cut her speech off, the Falcons were less than a hundred meters away. Missiles fell in a steady rain, cratering the huge landing pad.

"*Intrepid*, Now!"

The DropShip fired.

Cobalt blue spears of artificial lightning blazed down the corridor formed by the Asps' 'Mechs, tearing into the charging Clansmen. Powered by the ship's engines, the beams of charged particles blasted again and again. Saint Elmo's fire danced across Seker's skin. Iko shut down her electronic sensors. The static made them unreliable.

"That's it, Major," the *Intrepid*'s fire control office said. "If we give you any more, we'll melt the charging coils."

"Thanks, *Intrepid*. We'll finish loading in a moment. OK people, give it to them!"

All of the Asps stepped into position and fired on the reeling Clansmen, then broke and ran amid sporadic fire. Iko watched them go. She knew that in only seconds, the Falcons would rally and pursue. An eye-searing blaze of light lit the field. The first DropShip lifted up on a column of silver fire. Seker jumped.

She landed in the roadway, less than fifty meters from the Falcons. She saw a half dozen 'Mechs on the ground and at least twenty more behind them. The Mad Cat was in the lead, its armor battered, one leg twisted at the hip. Iko fired without targeting.

The roar of the autocannon echoed through the cockpit. The Mad Cat staggered as the slugs chewed into its torso. She twitched her hand slightly, adjusting the fire angle without really aiming. Again, the cannon roared and a red light flicked on, marking that the ammo bin was empty. But the shot did its work. The Mad Cat's head blew back in a gout of smoke and debris. A moment of frozen silence descended on the battle field as Iko stared at the massed clan 'Mechs.

They respect honor and bravery, she thought as the Mad Cat toppled. She lifted her ax high above her head and swept it down, saluting her fallen foe. For a moment, all was still. Two more DropShips lifted.

A Loki 'Mech with two red stars on its torso stalked forward.

Iko felt her blood ice. She waited, knowing that if it came

to a fight, she'd be overwhelmed in moments. The Loki stopped over the ruined Mad Cat. Time balanced on a razor edge. Iko felt like a fly trapped in amber. Then, the Loki bowed and slowly turned its back.

It walked away. The rest of the Falcons followed. Another ship blasted upwards.

"This is your last call, Major." Kann's voice held the same dry tone it always did.

Iko shook herself back into reality. She realized she'd been mesmerized by the Loki.

"I'm all over it," she countered, turned and leaped across the battle field.

She passed over the ruins of war. Asps and Jade Falcons lay commingled in death, the shattered remnants of their weapons around them. Ahead, she saw the last DropShip, the *Sethos*. The cargo bay door beckoned and she felt the rumble from its engines as the massive fusion drive powered up. The cargo bay door began to slide shut. Iko forced Seker into a final leap. She glanced off the huge armored plate and careened into the cargo bay. Instantly, she sprawled out Seker on the floor, knowing what was coming. The shock of lift-off drove her down into the webbed straps of the cockpit. She tasted blood as her teeth cut her mouth. It felt as if someone had parked a tank on her chest. But despite the pain, she was elated, her spirit buoyed by their success. They'd won.

The full debriefing took place over four days. Iko went over the battle again and again, dredging up every fragment of information she could recall about how the Jade Falcons had fought. No one seemed interested in how she figured out where the Falcons would attack. When the debriefing was finely completed, she left the military Intelligence complex with Kann. All the other Asps had been released and awaited them back at the Asps' temporary headquarters by the starport. A military transport unceremoniously dropped them at the edge of the Federated Commonwealth Tactical Center. Once they passed through the gate checkpoints, they stood on civilian soil.

"A municipal ground transport should be along shortly," Kann said, consulting the timetable posted on the wall of the roadside kiosk.

"Couldn't you call and have someone come pick us up?"

Kann looked back at her, his face impassive.

Damn it, she thought. I spend four days in a room with a half dozen FedCom Intel spooks and look like something a 'Mech stomped. He looks like he just had himself dry cleaned.

"Wasteful," he answered, "And we'll get back faster this way, Major."

"Permission to ask a question, sir," she said, wishing her voice was deeper and sounded less hesitant.

He nodded and folded his arms across his chest.

"Back on Sudeten, I played a hell of a hunch. It paid off but it could just as well have led to disaster. And I think somehow, you knew I was going to, just like you knew we should delay our attack by several days. I'm uncomfortable with relying on intuition on a battle field, sir, and wonder if this is some part of the Asps' hidden protocols."

This time, she was sure the ghost of a smile haunted his lips for an instant.

"Well, that's not really a question but I understand what you're asking," he said. "Some call it intuition, some precognition, others, only lucky guesses. Perhaps it is just that some people are equipped with a subconscious mind that is particularly adept at collating seemingly unconnected fragments of data. The fact remains that certain individuals are better at predicting events yet to come than random chance should allow."

Kann adjusted his perfectly aligned collar and flicked invisible dust from his arm.

"I have made a point of finding such individuals to employ in my unit. On the battle field, information is the key to success; not weapons, troops, or morale, but knowledge. Force is only as good as its targeting. At least, so I believe.

"I think you have the talents I am looking for," Kann's gaze held her, his black eyes unblinking, "the skills of an accomplished warrior coupled with sound judgement and, well, something undefinable. I think you are an asset to the Asps and we are very lucky to have you fighting with us."

He extended his hand.

For a moment, Iko was startled. Kann never touched anyone. It was practically a mania. She took his gray gloved hand, feeling surprising strength to his grip.

"Well, it was a great fight," she said, "but now what do we do for excitement?"

Kann adjusted his tunic.

"Well, an agent from Outreach is waiting to speak with us. And we have a standing offer from the Federated Commonwealth. The Combine may hold promise. In short, I suspect we will manage to keep active." He pointed down the roadway. "For now, we have the adventure of dealing with the mysteries of the public transit system. I hope we are up to the challenge."

Iko laughed, the sound deep and honest.

"Commander, I never realized what a dry wit you had."

"I prefer to think of it as...desiccated." He stepped to the side, allowing Iko to mount the three stairs into the hover bus.

As Iko entered the bus, noting the stares of the civilians impressed by her uniform, she decided she was going to enjoy her stint with the Asps. She was going to fit right in.

Our Associate Editor, Robert Carter IV says, "Takashi Kurita was a hard man." Well, yes he was. He was a product of hard times, spending the first fifty years of his life between the royal hardline version of the bushido code and the constant incoming attacks of the Third Succession War.

Before his accession as Coordinator, Takashi Kurita seemed to be a product of the Kurita royal house MechWarrior mold. Born on August 18, 2970, he enjoyed a privileged upbringing, with a strong emphasis on discipline and duty. His earliest friends were his younger brother Miyamoto and long-term head of the ISF Subrash Indrahah, who became the future Coordinator's friend in primary school.

Bushido discipline increased as Takashi endured six years at the Sun Zhang Military Academy on New Samarkand, graduating at sixteen. He was selected on his own merits to attend the Wisdom of the Dragon elite officer training. After that, *Chu-i* Takashi Kurita led a lance in the border garrison of Marlow's Rift, serving with distinction from the beginning. Over the next seven years, he led MechWarriors on important border worlds like Marduk, Mallory's World, and Harrow's Sun. He was promoted to *Tai-i* in 2995, and to *Sho-sa* (and the command of a battalion) in 2997. Soon after that, Takashi was promoted to the Heir's traditional position of Commander of the Household Guard.

He was married at twenty to Jasmine, the daughter of Duke Marco Isu of New Samarkand. His Consort was a famous beauty, accomplished in the arts of dance and drama. Under her gentle guidance, Unity Palace on Luthien became a center for the arts.

Coordinator Hohiro Kurita wanted his son at court to learn the art of political maneuver and intrigue. Here Takashi met Subrash Indrahah once again. Indrahah's job with the ISF required him to coordinate covert guard operations by that service with the military duties of the Household Guard. The two quickly built a working relationship that was to endure fifty years. On July 1, 2997, Theodore Kurita, Takashi's heir and only child was born.

As the new millennium broke in 3000, Takashi Kurita seemed to be comfortably set on a course which would lead in time to the Coordinatorship. He looked forward to a decade or two of apprenticeship to his father, enjoying the comforts of family life and the companionship of his brother. Within five years, his world was smashed. First in 3002, Miyamoto was killed in battle. Takashi's sense of discipline

would not allow him to feel grief at so honorable a death, but the unspoken pain gave a new shadow to his countenance. A haunted quality shows in his eyes in portraits from then on.

The next death caused dishonor as well as anguish. In 3004, his father, Coordinator Hohiro Kurita, was assassinated by a Rasalhaguan fanatic. As Takashi was head of the Household Guard, he felt that he had failed in his responsibility. Dissident elements whispered at his complicity in the killing, despite the confession and death of the assassin. The new Coordinator Takashi had to act firmly to take control of the Draconis Combine. For the first eighteen months of his reign, he allowed the ISF full rein in a purge of dissidents. His policy throughout his reign became to locate and suppress any opposition.

The necessity for continual suspicion hardened his perceptions. He distanced himself from his wife and set standards for his son which were impossible for a child to meet, then treated the boy with contempt for failing to meet them. He was an able ruler, but a rigid one. This attitude caused one of the great mistakes of his career.

Although Coordinator Takashi had revitalized the image of the MechWarrior, reorganizing and strengthening many frontline units, he continued the traditional Kuritan attitude toward mercenaries. Mercenaries were a necessary evil, to be used and thrown away. No honor was due in dealings with them; the good units were to be coerced into joining the regular Draconis Combine Mustered Soldierly forces; the poorer forces were used to garrison lost hopes, lead charges, and generally be used where honor would not allow the DCMS to

go. Then in the 3020's, Takashi hired Wolf's Dragoons. When the Dragoons clashed with regular forces, Takashi's protege Grieg Samsonov reported them to the Coordinator as out of control mercs who didn't know their proper place. It is to Takashi's discredit that he never questioned Samsonov's word. The situation eventually led to a bloody honor duel on Misery, the Dragoons' leaving the Combine for Davion employ at the start of the Fourth Succession War, and the grim bloodiness of the Galedon Front of that war. Takashi apparently suffered a small stroke at the announcement by Hanse Davion of the invasion of Liao

Death of Takashi Kurita

September 15, 3054, Luthien

Coordinator Takashi Kurita died last night in his sleep. Ninety days of official mourning have been ordered by new Coordinator Theodore Kurita. "The Dragon is dead, yet the Dragon is eternal." So said the proclamation, which went on to give the date of Theodore Kurita's accession ceremonies, chosen by the geomancers with an eye to travel times for various Kuritan dignitaries.

The Coordinator's wife Jasmine was with him when he died, as was his son.

In an interesting sidenote; ISF Director Subrash Indrahah died at ninety plus the same night as the master he had served so long. Present also on Luthien was Takashi Kurita's old enemy, Colonel Jaime Wolf of Wolf's Dragoons. Colonel Wolf was apparently present on Coordinator Takashi's invitation; much honor had been shown in his reception. A complete replica of Colonel Wolf's Archer had been at his disposal during his entire stay in Luthien. Colonel Wolf is unable to remain for the funeral.

continued next page

DRG-2N "Puffing Dragon"

Mass: 60 tons
Chassis: Alshain Type 56-60H
Power Plant: Vlar 300
Cruising Speed, Ground: 54.0 kph
Maximum Speed, Ground: 86.4 kph
Jump Jets: None
Jump Capacity: None
Armor: Starshield with CASE
Armament: 1 Telos DecaCluster LRM Missile System
 1 Victory 23R Medium Laser
 1 Imperator Ultra-5 Autocannon
Manufacturer: Luthien Metal Works
Primary Factory: Luthien
Communications System: Sipher CommSys 3
Targeting and Tracking System: Eagle Eye SY10-10

Type: DRG-2N Dragon

Tonnage:		60.0
Equipment		Mass
Internal Structure:		6.0
Engine:	300	19.0
Walking MP:	5	
Running MP:	8	
Jumping MP:	0	
Heat Sinks:	10(20)	0.0
Gyro:		4.0
Cockpit:		3.0
Armor Factor:	144	9.0

	<i>Internal Structure</i>	<i>Armor Value</i>
Head	3	9
Center Torso	17	25
Center Torso (rear)		10
Right/Left Torso	15	17
Right/Left Torso (rear)		6
Right/Left Arm	10	20
Right/Left Leg	14	26

Weapons and Ammo	Loc.	CS	Mass
Ultra AC/5	RA	5	9.0
Ammo (AC/5)	RT	1	1.0
CASE	RT	1	0.5
LRM-10	CT	2	5.0
Ammo (LRM)	LT	2	2.0
CASE	LT	1	0.5
Medium Laser	LT(R)	1	1.0

RIP Takashi Kurita

territory. If this is true, his unbalanced conduct during the Fourth Succession War is explained. Ignoring his commitments and his allies, he poured money and troops into the Galedon district to eradicate the Dragoons. He came close to succeeding. But if he eventually killed more than two thirds of the Dragoon personnel, the Dragoons had their revenge when he lost the war through inattention.

Yet from the war, he won something precious. His neglected son Theodore was revealed as a brilliant strategist. With uncharacteristic humility, Takashi accepted Theodore's low-born wife and children and named Theodore himself *Gunji-no-Kanrei*, Deputy for War. From then on, Takashi concentrated on internal affairs and politics, leaving the military to his son. Theodore's unconventional troops and doctrine brought new life to the DCMS. In 3039, Theodore repelled a new invasion from both fronts of the Federated Commonwealth in a mere six months.

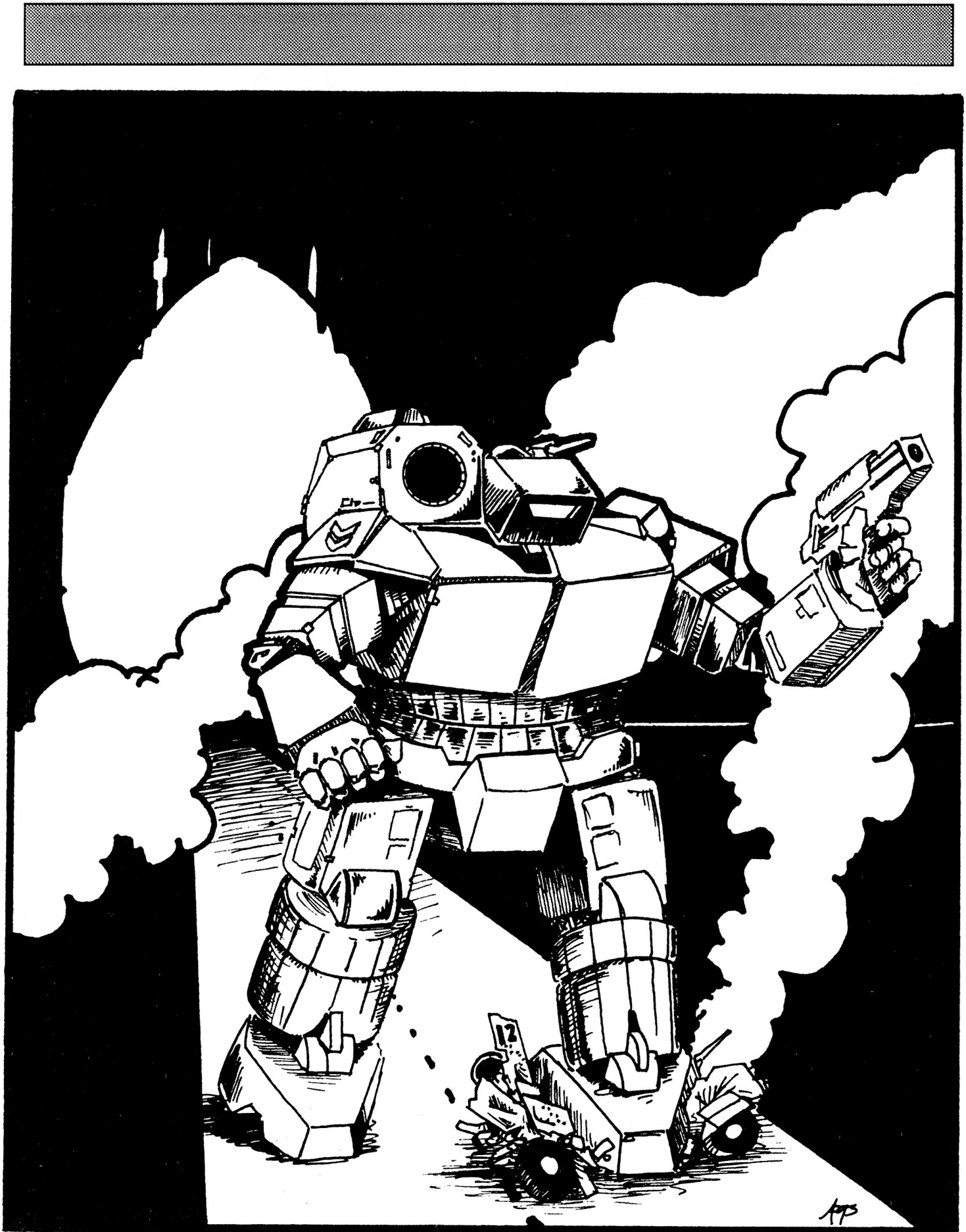
Takashi's health improved. On the family front, he drew pride from his grandchildren, particularly Theodore's heir Hohiro. He interested himself in BattleMech design, sponsoring the expensive steps of research that created the Grand Dragon.

In 3052, Takashi took personal control of a BattleMech regiment in the defense of Luthien. His personal ability and bravery were unchanged. Citizens of the Draconis Combine received portraits of the Old Dragon as prized awards for valor. Wolf's Dragoons returned to Luthien for the first time since the Fourth Succession War, to aid in its defense against the Smoke Jaguars.

Yet this was the Dragon's last bellow. In a mysterious foreknowledge of his own end, he invited his old adversary Jaime Wolf to meet with him on Luthien earlier this year. What they said at their meeting is nowhere recorded. Later that week, the Old Dragon died, peaceably in his sleep. His lifelong friend Subrash Indrahar died the same day, as if he had decided to live no longer than his master.

Takashi Kurita was justly proud of a lifetime of accomplishments. Perhaps the one he is best known for is his sponsorship of the Grand Dragon BattleMech's development. The Grand Dragon is the 'Mech Coordinator Kurita piloted in the Defense of Luthien. The Grand Dragon design has been published several places, notably in *Technical Readout: 3050*.

During the interim stages of development, the last Dragons off the production lines were given CASE. An experiment in retrofitting begun in 3051 changed the Autocannon to an Ultra Autocannon. This version of the Dragon, the 'Puffing Dragon', has never been published before. In honor of Coordinator Takashi Kurita, BattleTechnology here offers one of the benefits his rule brought to the Draconis Combine.



A Leg To Stand On

REPORT: FOR THE JOURNAL OF THE FEDERATED
COMMONWEALTH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Assistant Force Leader Philip Talinin regained consciousness in time to see his DropShip lifting off without him. Fighting the darkness that surely means death to any Mechwarrior, Talinin managed to raise his head just enough to see, not five hundred meters off, the House Hiritsu Overlord-class DropShip "Fist of the People" rising on a column of fire into the black midnight sky. There were lights moving quickly about on the ground recently vacated by the DropShip, lights which Philip Talinin were sure were enemy 'Mechs and vehicles raging impotently against the fleeing victors.

Talinin's House Master and Political Reliability Officer would have been proud of his first utterance: "The raid has...been a great success, particularly if mine...is the only 'Mech lost. For the glory of...House Liao!"

Talinin's next thoughts were rather treasonous when compared to the first. He tried to wave a defiant fist to accompany the bravado of his first statement, and indescribable pain shot through his entire body at the first hint of movement. He screamed curses in three languages, trying to will himself beyond the pain and past the pain and knowing that he would not succeed. His field of vision was obscured by a red fog, and his other senses were overwhelmed by the fire that ravaged him. As consciousness faded once again, Talinin was almost certain that he reached out to his right in the ruined cockpit of his Hunchback to activate his emergency locator beacon, but he could not be sure.

He dreamed a convoluted dream of blood and fire and flying. He heard over and over the words of House Master York, describing the goals and objectives and acceptable losses associated with this little strategic metals raid into the Federated Commonwealth. He heard how this planet, Raballa, had been a happy and productive member of the Capellan Confederation until the motherless savages of the AFFS descended with overwhelming numbers and killed nine-tenths of the population before enslaving the few that remained. He heard again the reminder that this raid was not truly an act of theft, since House Liao still legally and morally claimed all the worlds lost in the Fourth Succession

War. Then Talinin was flying.

He was flying down out of the DropShip, his ablative shield glowing with entry friction and his strap-on landing jets firing without a flaw. He still flew, floating over the arid landscape as his Hunchback made its best speed towards the refined metals storage area near the spaceport. The dream suddenly assumed a more blood-red tinge as militia infantry threw explosive packs and inferno missiles against the advancing Liao 'Mechs.

Philip Talinin saw the faces of the citizens of Raballa, the little mining colony that grudgingly gave its titanium and iron to the hated Davions now, and he saw how they threw themselves in his path and tried to sneak SRM shots at his cockpit and were instead mashed to a bloody pulp by his Hunchback's feet. He saw the control tower at the small spaceport, and he realized that the old Capellan maps of the complex were all wrong, and that many improvements had been made since the war. Talinin briefly wondered, as two shots from his huge Kali Yama Big Bore autocannon blew the upper levels off of the tower, where the resistance fighters opposed to House Davion were hiding.

The dream shifted to the prize, the object of the raid. Tons and tons of refined titanium, waiting to be shaped into armor plating and gun barrels, stacked like cordwood, loaded on to the carriers for the run back to the DropShip. There were dead men and women scattered about the storage area, some killed where they stood firing hand arms at the invaders, and several dead within the wreckage of the forklifts with which they had tried to ram the Liao 'Mechs. Talinin was beginning to wonder about the savagery and desperation that had characterized the defense of Raballa. He had started to question the unquestionable loyalty of these hapless citizens to the Capellan Confederation, when the battalion command center sounded the alert:

"Enemy 'Mech forces incoming from the north! Estimated strength of one reinforced company! Loyal soldiers of the Confederation, rally at the DropShip!"

With the omniscience of dream, Talinin believed that he could see the insignia, a red rose and bloody thorns, on the enemy 'Mechs as they raced in pursuit of the fleeing Liao raiders. But he could not be sure.

Philip Talinin awoke with a start in the hot morning sun and the pain just about slapped him unconscious again.

This time, though, he proved to be its master. The feedback yowling through his neurohelmet still messed with his eyesight, but the pain and the nausea lessened somewhat as he asserted control over himself, and he tried to assess his situation. As near as he could tell, his Hunchback and he were two hurting units.

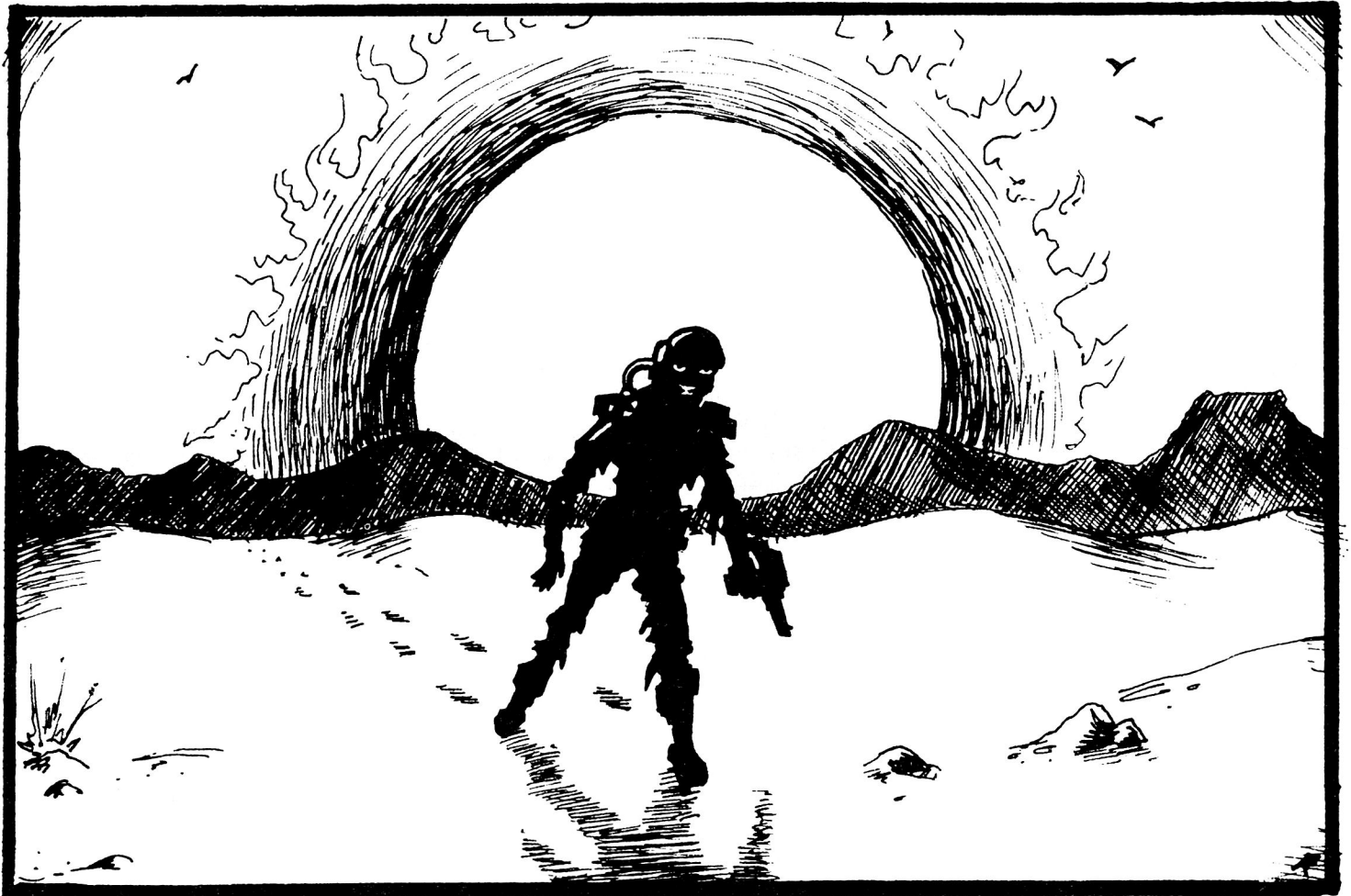
"Ammo explosion...must have been an ammo explosion. Left arm and torso of 'Mech...fail to respond to commands...or diagnostics." He spoke for the benefit of his cockpit data recorder, just as he had been trained to do. Perhaps a new generation of soldiers of House Liao would listen to his words someday and learn from his mistakes. "I will...try to stand the unit...now."

Talinin heard a shrieking sound, and felt shudders run up his unit's left side. A ghost pain filtered through the neurohelmet feedback, but, in a moment, Talinin once again had a full, upright view of the world. "Standing maneuver successful!" he exulted through gritted teeth. "Sensors...still marginal at best...and there seems to be...damage to the...left hip actuator...but this Hunchback can travel. Armament reduced...to one right arm medium laser. Three heat sinks lost...but I still have...more than

enough. I must evade enemy...search parties and avoid capture...until a pickup...can be arranged." Slowly, creaking at every joint, Talinin felt his 'Mech lumber off down the long hill into the desert.

Raballa is not the kind of planet that travel agents describe as "tourist-friendly." In fact, there wouldn't have been much more than fat, scuttling scorpions and salt-laden dead oceans there if a survey hadn't located titanium deposits near the south pole. Assistant Force Leader Philip Talinin was discovering these facts for himself as he made his way into the wilderness. He found that he didn't have a whole lot to say for his cockpit data recorder once the novelty of his survival had worn off. The recorder's built-in chronometer would have shown hour after hour of silence and labored breathing, punctuated by the odd curse as that faulty hip actuator caused the occasional stumble. It was ten hours after regaining control, as planetary twilight was setting in, that Talinin once again shared the benefits of his experience with posterity.

"Drek!" This was nothing new, really. He had uttered that particular expletive some seventeen times since he had been left behind, mostly due to the treacherous footing in



the desert. No, the really interesting part came after that. AFL Talinin had company.

"Look at the...size of that...scorpion! No...no, wait, I'll... have to describe it...I know the visual recorders...went out with the sensors. The damned thing's...easily twice as...long as...my Hunchback's foot! It must...weigh two hundred kilos! Hey, it's... coming this way. Let me see if my...last medium laser...has any punch left...in it."

With twinges of pain slicing through his neurohelmet, Talinin raised the Hunchback's right arm. He manually aimed the laser there, a task made doubly difficult by the pain and the growing darkness. He silently breathed a prayer, knowing that his Political Reliability Officer wouldn't appreciate such anti-State mutterings on an official cockpit data recorder, and triggered the weapon.

The air crackled with energy, and the familiar weapon-fire surge of heat washed over Talinin. The gigantic scorpion vanished in a blue bolt, replaced by a scorch mark and some unidentifiable ick on the sand and rocks. Talinin was satisfied, and said so. "Thanks to...the target of opportunity...I know now I...can effectively aim my last... remaining weapon. I...am not defenseless."

Talinin saw then that he was in a shallow depression, hidden from the surrounding desert plains by a low rocky rim. Without effective sensors or navigational computers, he did not feel that nighttime travel was worth the risk. He decided that this was as good a place as any to sleep for the night. Besides, in his wounded and somewhat delirious state, he had been remembering last night's vivid dreams. He wanted desperately to return to them, perhaps to see just what had gone wrong with the mission. He was almost certain that the dreams held the key to his failure and his fate, but he could not be sure.

Although his first dream had been of flying, his second night's fantasy travels were accomplished with feet of pure lead. He ran and ran, towards a DropShip that forever stayed at a distance, even as the enemy 'Mechforce gained on his Hunchback with relentless speed. Talinin turned left, triggering his autocannon at the nearest enemy 'Mech, a Phoenix Hawk whose pilot saw the error of his ways and decided to confront the Hunchback from a discreet distance. That wild shot bought Talinin some time, but his leaden feet betrayed him again. He could come no closer to his DropShip than half a kilometer.

With a sinking heart, Assistant Force Leader Talinin saw the last Liao 'Mech aside from himself enter the DropShip. The great doors closed, and the engines began to power up for the boost to orbit. He was to be left for dead! Suddenly, Talinin's threat receiver beeped a warning. Being abandoned on a hostile planet was not to be his most immediate concern.

Caught flat on his supernaturally-heavy feet, Talinin and his Hunchback could do nothing as a pair of 7K Wolverines,

replete with pulse lasers and twin SRM launchers, jumped onto his position. One landed not fifty meters in front of him, while the other landed the same distance directly behind him. Talinin triggered his autocannon and lasers at the front target, centering the crosshairs on the large red rose with bloody thorns painted dead center on the torso.

As he did so, Talinin incongruously thought of a joke. There was a kind of phony commendation that he had heard was given out by the mercs of McCarron's Armored Cavalry. It was given to any member who survived a major weapon barrage directed at his or her thin rear armor plating. The award came as a very small sticker, to be attached to the rear of the recipient's BattleMech, directly over the engine housing. The sticker read:

"IF YOU CAN READ THIS, I'M SCREWED."

Talinin had once considered this kind of horseplay demeaning, not at all worthy of Mechwarriors in the service of House Liao. Now, however, from the perspective of memory and dream, he found the idea somehow appealing. He certainly had the experience necessary to deserve the award.

The Wolverines fired everything they had, slashing the Hunchback's torso armor into so many aligned-crystal steel toothpicks. Talinin experienced the impacts in a kind of dream slow-motion, watching the missiles blow holes through his laser-softened 'Mech's midsection. He marveled at how the blasts from the two attacks canceled each other out, allowing him to keep his Hunchback standing with very little effort. His dreamy happiness was rudely interrupted, however, when his five remaining autocannon shells, massaged by laser heat and chemical explosions, cooked off simultaneously.

Philip Talinin felt the searing pain run up his left side, as his neurohelmet echoed his 'Mech's agony. The CASE system protected his engine, but the explosion gathered up all the guts from the left torso and ejected them out the back in a thick spray of fire, rendering the left arm and side useless. The Hunchback dropped to its knees, and the two Wolverines jumped away, apparently content with their evening's work. Consciousness in the dream became questionable, and Talinin was aware of a sudden quiet as his Hunchback slowly tipped forward.

In the dream, there came the distant sound of thunder as the Liao DropShip "Fist of the People" lifted off into space. Talinin heard his own voice say "The raid has...been a great success, particularly if mine...is the only 'Mech lost. For the glory of...House Liao!" He tried to stop himself from gesturing, but he failed. He seemed doomed to dream a repeat performance. Through the haze of pain, he could sense his hand moving towards the activation toggle for the emergency locator beacon. It was in an awkward position, and

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there was so much noise from the DropShip and so much ruined and dangling equipment in the cockpit. He thought he had hit the switch, just before he woke up, but he could not be sure.

Assistant Force Leader Talinin awoke, and the sound of DropShip jets stayed with him. He shook his head slowly so as not to dislodge his neurohelmet, but the sound became steadily louder. It was a moment before Talinin realized that there was, in fact, a DropShip landing quite close nearby. He gingerly stood his unit up, favoring the damaged hip actuator and avoiding even the slightest stress on the shredded left side or arm. The dawn had only recently arrived, and the huge spherical DropShip descended with the low sun behind it.

The cockpit data recorder caught Talinin's next words. "Okay... all right...here goes...nothing. Either that's...the "Fist of the... People"...or I've had it. One way or...the other...it ends here." Talinin rose out of the depression and marched his unit at his best speed towards the landing DropShip.

There is no indication on the cockpit data recorder exactly when Assistant Force Leader Philip Talinin realized that he was approaching a DropShip whose markings, a huge red rose with bloody thorns, matched those of his enemy. His course did not waver, nor did his speed. He

simply moved in as fast as his condition allowed, opening fire with his laser upon reaching close range. In fact, the cockpit data recorder only has nine more words on its tapes, recorded when the DropShip finally opened one of its doors and a Wolverine was sent out to confront Talinin:

"Good God! How did they make it so big?!"

Philip Talinin will be quite a long time in recovering from his injuries. I have spoken to him at length, here aboard the Lancaster's Rose DropShip "Crown of Thorns" in the secure hospital area. He has been through a terrible ordeal, and the Mechwarriors of the 'Rose should have a certain admiration for his courage and stamina. His story must be believed, because there is so much corroborating data, much of which comes from Philip's own memories, as well as from the testimony of the two Wolverine pilots involved in the incident.

When I examined Philip that morning, he was wearing the traditional neurohelmet and cooling vest of a Mechwarrior. He had been horribly injured, with five broken ribs on the left side and multiple compound fractures of the left arm and hand. His left hip had suffered major ligament damage, making walking impossibly painful. He was clutching a data recorder, a battery power unit, and a laser pistol in his good right arm. His wounds imitated those of his BattleMech, a Hunchback, with a coincidence terrible to consider.

You see, Philip believes he walked into the desert in his 'Mech.

He did not.

His Hunchback lies where it first fell, some thirty kilometers away from where we found Philip, alone and raving in the desert. We believe, from all the available evidence, that Assistant Force Leader Talinin triggered his eject mechanism when he meant to switch on his locator beacon, and in doing so injured himself seriously. It would seem that Philip suffered some kind of body-image breakdown, believing his 'Mech to be himself and translating his own injuries and physical problems into 'Mech damage. The severity and complexity of such a psychosis is unique in the literature, and the effectiveness of any treatment is not predictable. We can hope that there will someday be a cure for Philip...

...but we cannot be sure.

Dr. Michelle Campbell
Chief Medical Officer
Lancaster's Rose
Nadir Jump Point Station
Sarna, April 3053



Snake Dance

You've heard people talking about where they were when the Clans first hit. You've heard the wild stories about single pilots in Stingers taking down Clan heavies. You've heard the stories of single Clan 'Mechs devastating Inner Sphere companies. Well, some of it's true, and I saw a lot of it. You would have too, if you were with the Headhunters.

Mallory's Headhunters are the house regiment of House Mallory, a small holding in the Federated Suns. Officially, we're stationed on Antietam, but I haven't seen Antietam in over a year. We specialize in anti-piracy tactics, counterinsurgency, and dirty jobs nobody else wants. Not many people have heard of us, and that's just the way we want it.

When the Clans hit, Second Battalion was assigned to Toland, a cold, dry world on the edge of Rasalhague space. The locals had been complaining of pirate raids, and we were detailed to handle the situation. What we got, though, was not a normal pirate raid in any way.

A regiment of the Twelfth Star Guards had been assigned to cover the capital city. Our assignment was at the planet's biggest mining complex, about 40 klicks to the north. We figured the mines would be the primary target, but the Guards commander thought the city needed more protection. In any case, we figured we were more than a match for any raiding party.

The first sign that something was wrong was when the Aerojocks went up to repel the enemy DropShips and came back with their tails between their legs.

The second sign was when the raiders called from orbit to ask who was on the planet. The Guards commander thought this was funny, and transmitted his entire force roster just to show the pirates what kind of trouble they'd jumped into. When Major Ryan, our battalion commander, got the same message, he told the raiders where they could put their request. We figured the raiders would get all the information they would ever need when we pounded them into scrap.

About 0900, word came that raider 'Mechs had been spotted ten klicks south of the capital. Major Ryan sent Charlie Company to observe and report. We clustered around the communications tent to hear the news as the Guards closed on their targets. The raiders had put down about a battalion and a half against an entire regiment. With that kind of mismatch, we figured the Guards would get a light workout and be back in town celebrating in an hour.

Boy, were we ever wrong.

By 0830, the Guards had been pushed back into the city. By 0945, everybody in the city was either dead or running for his life, including the Guards. Our Charlie Company had gotten caught up in the battle covering a retreating Guards unit, and had lost four 'Mechs and two pilots for its trouble.

About 1015, Charlie Company and the remains of a

Guard battalion straggled into camp. After they were sorted out, Captain 'Happy' Hart, our company CO, walked over to our lance's parking area, her usual scowl on her face.

"Lieutenant Wozniak!" she barked.

"What's up, Happy?" I queried.

Happy's scowl got even deeper. She's a good commander, but her sense of humor is like Takashi Kurita with a toothache.

"Charlie Company's recon lance lost its lieutenant and lance sergeant. The Major's borrowing Sergeant Johnson from your lance to take over Charlie Recon."

I was silent for a moment. I'd known Hansen and Flynn pretty well, and I'd grieve for them later. For now, though, their loss had left a hole in the command structure, and Johnson was the best man to fill it. I wasn't happy to lose him from my lance, but I could see the need.

"Johnson's doing maintenance on his 'Mech. I'll go get him," I said.

"No, I will," replies Hart sharply. "You've got a mission briefing in five minutes." She strode off toward the maintenance area, and I rounded up Mikki and Tony, the other members of my lance.

The mission briefing was given by Major Ryan himself. "According to the Guard survivors, some of their units withdrew into the Remagen Canyon to regroup. The Guard DropShips are relocating to our position to pick up survivors, but they aren't sure they can contact all of their remaining units. Your mission is to search the canyon for survivors and lead them here."

"Are we bugging out?" I asked with a surprised tone in my voice.

"Yes, we are. Our opponents obviously are not a normal raiding party. They appear to have superior weaponry and are well organized. The fact that they inflicted enormous losses on an entire regiment of the Star Guards means that we would have little or no chance against them." I could see in the Major's face how much he hated the idea of running from a fight. "We will do more good by retreating and warning the Commonwealth of this threat that we will be dying in a useless defense. We will leave the planet at 1500. You have roughly four hours to complete your mission and return. We can't wait any longer than that."

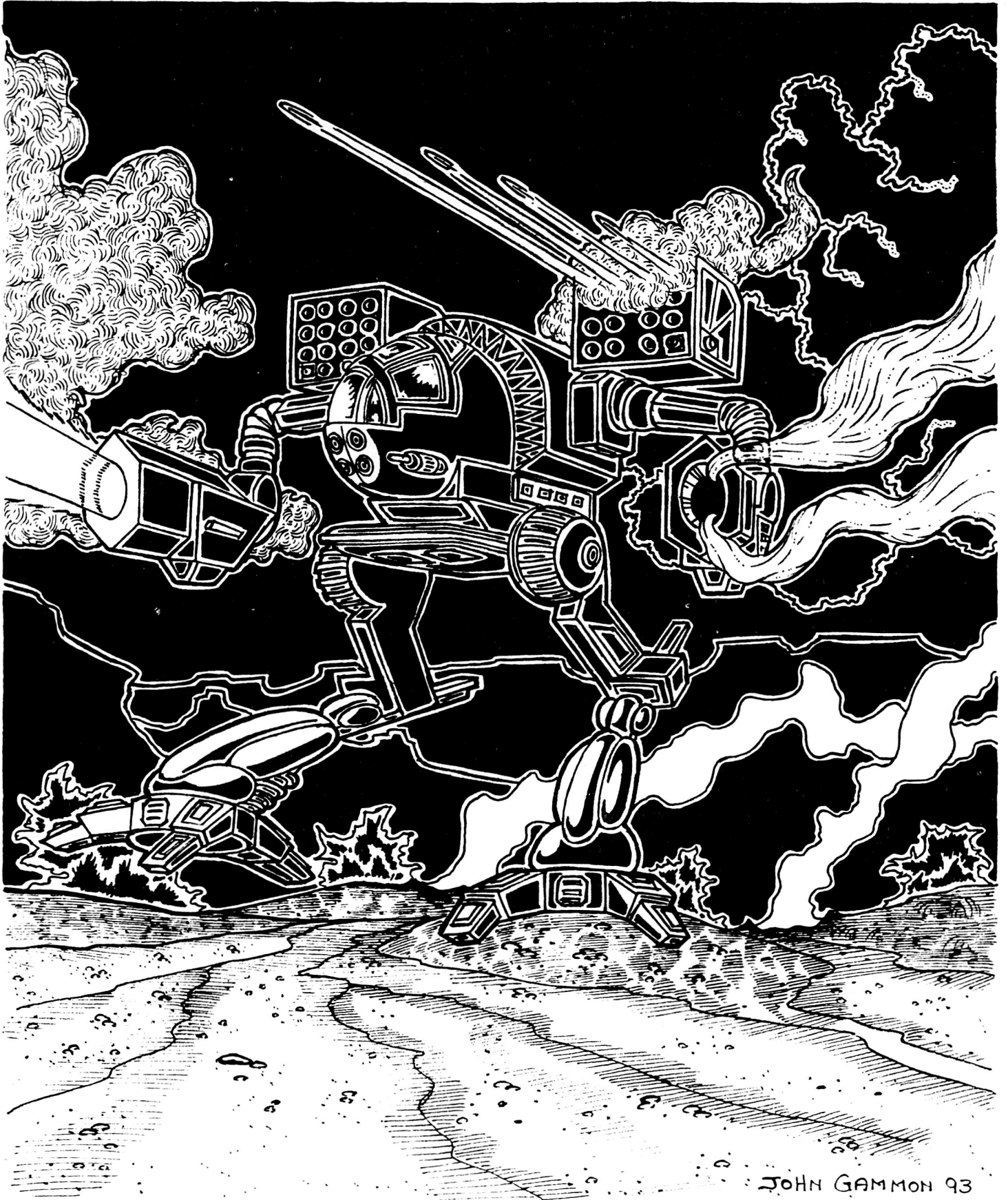
"Can the Aerospace guys help us search?" asked Tony.

"Negative. We have to conserve our remaining fighters to cover our retreat." The Major made 'retreat' sound like a four-letter word.

"What are our rules of engagement?"

"We believe there may be raider forces in the canyon attempting to hunt down the remaining Guard units. Avoid combat if possible. Remember that your primary mission is search-and-rescue."

As we returned to our 'Mechs, Happy had one final comment.



“Remember, the Major defined this as a search-and-rescue mission. Avoid combat if possible. If not possible, avoid it anyway. IS THAT CLEAR?”

I have an undeserved reputation for getting into trouble. “Roger, Captain, will do. Save us a seat on the DropShip, huh?” Hart decided my comment wasn’t worth a reply, and she stalked away. I strapped into my ‘Mech and switched the taccomm to the lance channel.

“Tony, Mikki, are you ready for this fishing expedition?”

“Roger, Woz.” was Mikki’s reply.

“Lead on, Boss,” said Tony.

We moved out to the southeast. Although we were a ‘Mech short, we were still the best unit for this kind of mission, a search-and-rescue in hostile territory. Our Rattlesnake ‘Mechs look like normal Jenners. Inside, though, they’re stuffed full of high-tech upgrades. They have almost twice the armor and firepower of a Jenner, and they’re even more maneuverable. We could cover a lot of ground fast, and deal with almost anything that might try to stop us. We weren’t looking for trouble, but no matter what Captain Sandra ‘Happy’ Hart, we were ready to make trouble for anyone who wanted it.

Twenty minutes later, we entered the Remagen Canyon. The Canyon is a dry riverbed, and one of the great tourist spots on the planet. It’s not quite as big as the Grand Canyon on Terra, but searching it one valley at a time is still a long and painful process.

We’d been winding our way between the sheer granite walls for nearly an hour when Mikki’s voice came over the taccomm.

“I’ve got a moving MAD contact at ten o’clock, range 2500, and it’s a *big* one!”

“IFF reading?”

“Negatory, Woz. If it’s one of ours, he’s not advertising the fact.”

“Might be one of the locals, but it could be a hostile. Let’s check it out. Mikki, behind me; Tony, you take the rear.”

“Roger.”

“Rog.”

We closed cautiously with the contact. At about 1000 meters, we came to the mouth of yet another box canyon, much like the dozens of others we’d already checked. The floor of the canyon was uneven, with small clumps of tired-looking trees growing between rock-strewn patches. The canyon was about 1000 meters long, with jagged 200-meter cliffs on either side, and an even taller cliff at the far end. We’d seen the same features over and over again.

The thing that made this canyon different was the ‘Mech at the far end. A chill ran down my spine as my battle computer confirmed what I’d already guessed — this ‘Mech wasn’t anything I or anyone else had ever seen before.

It was scanning the walls, as if it were looking for something. It had a podlike body, like a Stalker, with an

armored shield over the top and a missile rack on the left shoulder. The heavy forearms had multiple gunbarrels instead of hands, and the legs bent backward like a Marauder’s.

Tony said it all: “What in blazes is *that*?”

“I don’t know,” Mikki said, “but I wouldn’t want to meet it in a dark alley.”

“I’ve got news for for you,” I replied, as I activated my targeting system and gun cameras. “That’s what we’re doing right now.”

“Boss, you always did look at the bright side of things,” came Tony’s response.

“Can the chatter for now. Spread out, pattern Delta.”

Mikki stared edging her ‘Mech toward the left wall of the canyon. “We’re not going to have a lot of room to maneuver in here, Woz.”

“It’s the best way to go up against heavy armor,” I replied. “we’ll have to substitute cover for distance.” As Mikki continued her move on my left and Tony mirrored it on my right, I switched my taccomm to the company channel.

“Bravo Leader, this is Rattler Leader requesting immediate assistance. One enemy assault ‘Mech of unknown design trapped in a box canyon. I’m transmitting video over the data channel. Please acknowledge, over!”

Happy’s voice came over the speakers. Even through the heavy static I could hear the resignation in her tone. “Rattle Leader, this is Bravo Leader. Roger on receiving video. We are not in position to support you. Reinforcements cannot arrive in under two-zero minutes. You’re on your own.”

“Understood, Bravo Leader,” I replied. I didn’t really expect any help, but it doesn’t hurt to ask. I switched my tacomm back to the lance channel.

Just then, the ‘Mech at the end of the canyon turned to face us, its arms bringing their weapons to bear on us. We stared at each other for a few seconds, each side sizing up the other. Then, without warning, a gravelly, distorted voice came over our supposedly secure tacomm.

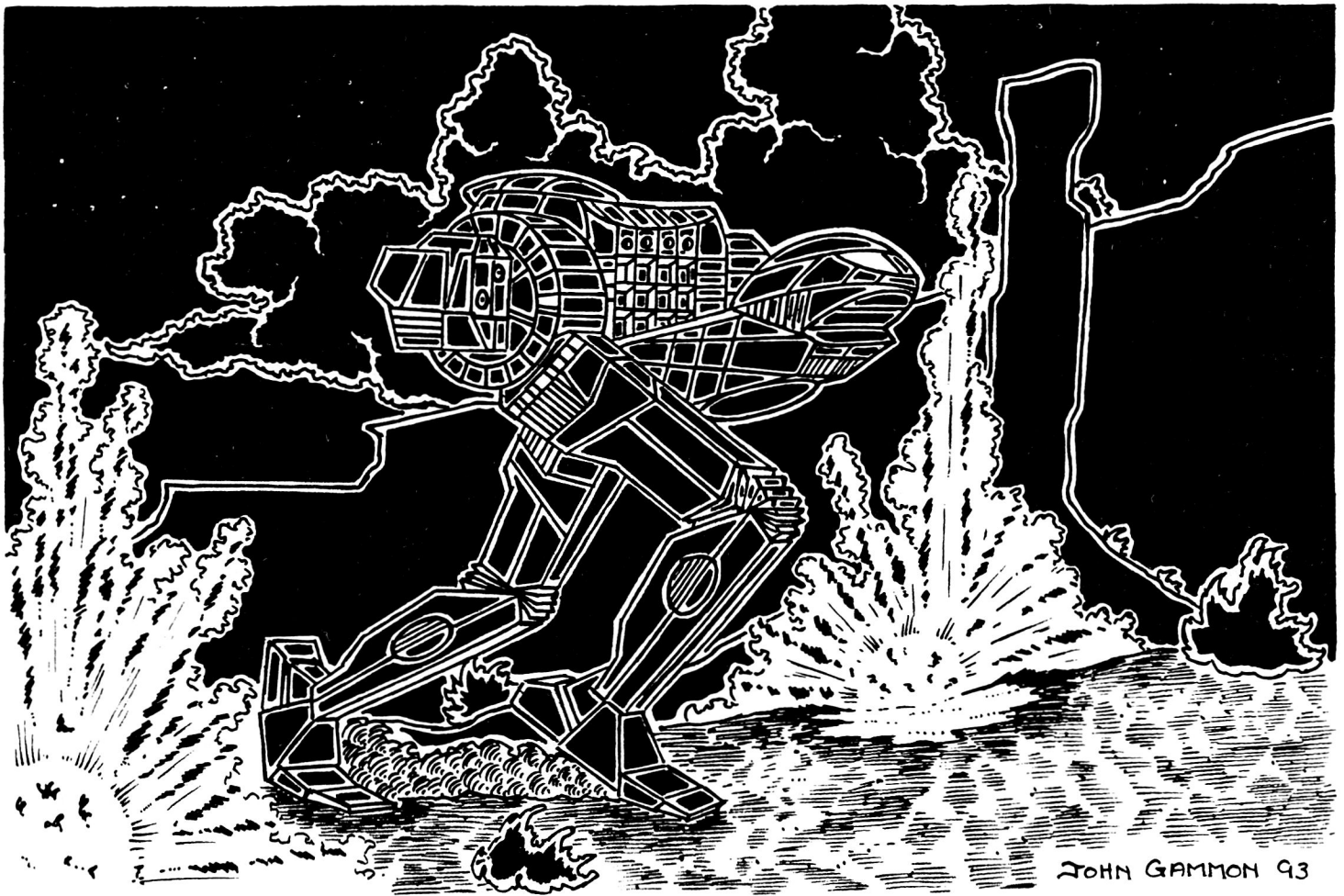
“I am Corlin of the Jade Falcons. Who do I have the honor of meeting in combat?”

Tony’s muffled curse told me that I wasn’t hearing things. How could this guy tap into our scrambled communications? I took a couple of seconds to recover my wits and decided to play by the book for a change.

“This is Lieutenant Gordon Wozniak of Mallory’s Headhunters. Deactivate your weapons and open your canopy, or we will be forced to open fire.”

Even with the distortion, I could hear the contempt in the raider’s voice as he replied, “I do not yield so easily, Lieutenant. Prepare to defend yourselves!”

“Switch to scramble India, guys,” I called into the tacomm. India is our ‘unauthorized’ lance channel. We use it when we don’t want our own side to know what we’re



doing. Hopefully, the raider only had our standard unit scrambles and wouldn't be able to break this one right away. I punched the new code into the tacomm. "This guy not only has our scramble codes, he's got a serious attitude problem. What do you think we should do about him?"

"Happy told us to stay out of trouble," said Mikki. "But then again, when have we *ever* been able to stay out of trouble?"

"I don't think we should just walk away from this," replied Tony. "After what they did to Hansen and Flynn, I'm not in the mood to let some self-important assault jockey intimidate us."

"It's your call, Woz. Do we take him?" asked Mikki.

I bit my lip and thought for a second. The MAD gave this guy's mass at 100 tons, and the invaders were ton-for-ton nastier than anything we'd ever run into before. Our Rattlesnakes were worlds better than standard Jenners, but I had almost decided that discretion was the better part of valor when the other guy made our decision for us. A flight of LRMs ripped out of the launcher on the raider's shoulder. Although the missiles fell far short, they made his intentions clear.

"Mikki, Tony, if anyone asks, remember he shot first. If this guy wants a fight, he chose the wrong people to have

it with. Let's take him!"

We tore down the canyon at full speed, Tony hugging the right wall, Mikki the left, and me charging right up the middle. Delta is our favorite tactic for taking on big 'Mechs. The idea is basically to avoid giving the enemy a shot at any single target for more than a few seconds. As one 'Mech draws the enemy's fire, the others go for the weak back armor. Done right, Delta means that at least one 'Mech will have a back shot at all time. It isn't the ideal way to fight in a canyon, but we didn't have time to develop new tactics.

The raider wasn't much for fancy tactics either. He came at us head-on, as if he expected to crush one of us with a single volley. With a standard Jenner, that might work. This guy wouldn't be the first one, though, to be surprised by a Rattlesnake's armor.

As I closed, I could make out the insignia on the 'Mech's chest: a green bird holding a sword in its talons. The ID computer came up with zip on the insignia. I had just enough time to register that fact before a barrage of laser fire erupted from the raider's 'Mech.

This guy might have been arrogant, but he was good enough to back it up. At 600 meters, he didn't have much of a chance to hit a target moving at 80 klicks an hour. Still, the lasers flashing all around me were way too close for

comfort. "Watch out!" I called, as I launched my 'Mech into a 200-meter jump that took me out of the line of fire. "This guy's almost as good as he thinks he is!"

"I see it, Boss," replied Tony as he finished his end runs and began to approach the raider from behind.

"Me too," said Mikki, as she mirrored Tony's move on the other side.

The raider turned to keep his weapons aimed at me, but his move exposed his rear armor to Tony's fire. Armor vaporized from the left arm, but there was no obvious damage. Instinctively, the raider turned toward the immediate threats. By turning toward Tony, though, the raider had left his back exposed to Mikki. More armor puffed, this time from the right leg. Then it was my turn.

Rattlesnakes are heavily armored for light 'Mechs, but they aren't designed for stand-up fights with assault 'Mechs, especially ones that have more firepower than any two Atlases. My job was to get in the enemy's face and distract him while my lancemates chewed on him from behind. With a bit of luck, I might survive. With a lot of luck, I might even do some damage.

The raider swiveled toward me, took one step forward, and then the world lit up like a nova, his laser barrage backed up by autocannons. My canopy quickly polarized, but not fast enough to keep me from being dazzled by the glare. I slammed down on the jump jet controls and the laser triggers in the same convulsive motion and vectored to the right, landing heavily. A quick scan of the monitors showed heavy damage to my 'Mech's left arm and torso, but no malfunctions. Tony's voice cut through the static.

"You all right, Boss?"

"Nothing hurt but my pride. You take decoy. I'll work on him from here."

"Roger. I'll...Mikki, break left!"

The raider had turned his attention toward Mikki. As she dodged to the left, he triggered another massive laser volley throwing in the LRMs for good measure. Mikki avoided the worst of it. Even so, enough connected to strip the armor off her right leg and torso.

"I'm still ticking," called Mikki, before either of us could react. To prove her point, she triggered a retaliatory salvo. Four of her lasers scored, cutting deep into the damaged armor on the raider's right leg.

I moved forward and triggered all my lasers as the raider reacted to Mikki's fire. Five of my shots chewed deep into the raider's torso, but not in time to prevent him from firing a second volley at Mikki. This time she was ready and jumped clear.

"Tony! Keep him busy!" I yelled as I pushed my 'Mech to full speed. "Try to cover me; I'm going to do something really stupid." From the front, this bogey could ace any of us in three volleys. So far, though, he hadn't fired anything to the rear. Maybe he didn't have anything back there to fire —

I was about to find out the hard way.

I ran the Rattlesnake right up behind the guy; I couldn't have been more than ten meters away. At this range, he was even uglier from the back than from the front, but nothing shot at me. As Tony dodged yet another volley, I triggered every weapon I had. If I had a slingshot, I would have fired it, too. Eight eye-searing beams lanced from my 'Mech into the bogey's rear, cutting jagged holes through layers of torso armor and into its vitals.

There are few mobile objects that can ignore that kind of damage, and this 'Mech wasn't one of them. He tried to spin around and shoot at me, but one of my shots must have creased his gyro. He managed to turn about halfway, then staggered forward half a step, trying desperately to turn his back away from me, but one of my shots must have creased his gyro. He managed to turn about halfway, then staggered forward half a step, trying desperately to turn his back away from me and stay standing at the same time. Tony's Rattler came flashing in, adding his lasers to the barrage, and Mikki added some more. The raider scored a couple of hits on Tony, but then the raider must have lost it. He started firing wildly, sending shots in every direction, but not hitting anything but the canyon walls.

I screamed into the tacomm, "We've got him! Go for the damaged leg!" as I slammed another volley onto his back. Mikki and Tony fired almost simultaneously, carving deep furrows through the damage armor on the raider's legs. This time, he couldn't keep control, and the enemy 'Mech collapsed onto its face, sending a cloud of dust into the air.

As we closed in for the kill, a hatch popped open on the head of the raider 'Mech, and the pilot jumped out, landing hard in a pile of rocks. He slowly climbed to his feet, his hands raised in surrender. As we moved in to cover him, just as the tension of battle was starting to ease, our MAD detectors lit up with multiple targets, no more than three hundred meters away, directly behind us.

The three of us spun as one to face the new threat. It took us several seconds to realize that the 'Mechs at the canyon mouth weren't an avenging group of raiders. These 'Mechs we recognized, and underneath the maze of scorch marks and battle damage on their armor we could make out the Star Guards insignia. A heavily-scarred Thunderbolt stepped forward, and a clipped voice came over the general frequency.

"I say, we seemed to have missed all the fun. Might I inquire which of you chaps is Lieutenant Wozniak?"

"That would be me," I replied as I tripped my IFF beacon. "And who are you, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Ah. I'm Major Lethbridge, in command of what remains of the Yorkshire Battalion, Twelfth Star Guards. Your Captain Hart — delightful lady, I must say — informed us that you might be in a spot of trouble. I'm frightfully sorry we're late; the echoes from the cliffs confused the signal from your

transponders and we were misled into the wrong canyon. I'm delighted to see that our help was not required, but rather disappointed that you've finished without us."

"Sorry," I responded. "Our friend here doesn't seem to want to play any more."

"Oh, that's unfortunate. The lads and I were quite looking forward to a second go-round with these blighters. He's your prisoner, of course. You'd best accept his surrender before he changes his mind."

Something about the way this man could keep his sense of humor in the middle of disaster struck a chord in me. I decided that the best thing I could do would be to give Lethbridge a chance to meet the enemy as a victor instead of a victim.

"Would you do me the honor of accompanying me, sir?"

"Delighted, Leftenant."

A tall figure climbed down from the Thunderbolt and walked to the feet of my 'Mech. As he approached, I saw an older, gray-haired man with a neatly-trimmed moustache and an air of command about him. I climbed down to the ground, nodded to Lethbridge, drew my pistol. Together we walked toward the prisoner.

He had sat down to wait for us, holding his head in his hands. As we approached, he raised his head, but made no attempt to stand. Lethbridge and I stared at him for a second, glanced at each other, then looked back at our captive. The pilot of an assault 'Mech, the warrior who had so coldly challenged us, couldn't have been more than twenty years old!

Apparently we weren't the only ones surprised. The prisoner's eyes locked with Lethbridge's, and his jaw dropped. "But..you are *old!*" he exclaimed.

"I may not be the picture of youth, but I deserve more respect than that from a child like yourself," replied Lethbridge coldly, his joviality vanishing into a glare that could shatter armor.

I moved forward to divert their attention from each other and onto me. "In the name of the Federated Commonwealth and of House Mallory, I require your surrender," I said, quoting directly (I swear!) from the Headhunter's *Code of Military Conduct*.

It was my turn to be stared at. "You are Lieutenant Wozniak?"

A few good lines ran through my head, but with the state Major Lethbridge was in I figured I'd better keep playing it straight. "I am."

He bowed his head slightly to me. "Very well, I surrender to you. You and your comrades are superior warriors. I hereby submit myself to your Clan Mallory and their justice."

Meanwhile, Lethbridge had wandered away to cool off and was looking in the hatch of the enemy 'Mech. "I say, Leftenant," he called out. "This machine is remarkable! I've not seen controls this sophisticated in my entire career!"

At that moment, Tony broke in on my wrist comm. "Woz, Cap'n Happy is on the line, and she's mad enough to chew through a DropShip! You'd better let her know what's going on."

"Patch me through, Tony," I replied, keeping my eyes on my prisoner.

"...olation of direct orders..." came Happy's voice, in its usual sweet and soothing tones.

"Rattler Leader here, Bravo Leader. Good news; it's headhunters one, raiders zip. We have a prisoner and a mostly-intact enemy 'Mech. Major Lethbridge from the Star Guards says the 'Mech is something special. Any chance we can keep it?"

"Wait one, Rattler Leader." After about a minute, Happy came back on line. "The Major is sending in a DropShip to your location, ETA 22 minutes, to pick up the enemy 'Mech and the Star Guards. There's enough room for your lance, but after this stunt, I really don't care if you're aboard when it takes off. Copy?"

"I copy, bravo leader. By the way, Happy, Major Lethbridge sends his warmest regards" Tony didn't cut the link fast enough to avoid a few choice words from our fearless leader.

For the next half hour, I had nothing to do but talk to the prisoner. It turned out his name was Corlin no last name (This fact seemed to upset him for some reason). He was from a unit called the Jade Falcons, but now, since we'd defeated him, he considered himself part of "Clan Mallory." This was his first combat mission, and he was upset at himself for losing to three "overgunned garbage cans," as he described light 'Mechs in general and our Rattlesnakes in particular.

Well, the DropShip picked us up on schedule and we boosted outsystem at max thrust all the way. The Headhunters have a new "special Consultant" by the name of Corlin Mallory. Turns out the 'Mech we fought was a Daishi, and Corlin was part of the first wave of Clan invaders. We've been making ourselves a nuisance to the Clans ever since, and we're shipping out again as soon as we complete repair-and-resupply.

Ever since that battle, one question has been running through my mind. Corlin was a first-time pilot, and the Clans gave him a brand-new assault 'Mech. If these guys are putting green pilots in assault 'Mechs, what are the *veterans* driving?

About the Author

Gordon Ethan Wozniak has been with Mallory's Headhunters for five years. He was promoted to Senior Lieutenant for his actions on Toland. The whereabouts of Wozniak, and the Headhunter's Second Battalion, are currently unknown. They are believed to be behind Clan lines.

Battle Technology recently received a broken-up transmission. Internal evidence makes it certain that it comes from TekTeam, a mercenary repair and supply unit, and that they were subcontracted by the Federated Commonwealth to resupply Snord's Irregulars behind Jade Falcon lines. No clue to the location of the base is given. The initial portion of the transmission was scrambled past retrieving, so we begin the story as the unit finds itself in serious trouble.

We had just entered the Black Nebula system, jumping into the coordinates given us by Rhonda Snord's liaison officer, when we found that we weren't alone. There was an unidentified Invader Class JumpShip also in the system, not as close to Camelot Command as we were. Had our supply run to 'Clan Snord' had been compromised? Were we in a trap?

"Incoming JumpShip, identify yourself. This is Camelot Command. "

"This is the TekTeam ship *Lorelei's Hope*, under contract to resupply you. What's going on here?"

"We are under attack from a unit of the Jade Falcons. Expect company soon. They won't want to see those supplies reach us."

Our cargo holds were full of badly needed supplies. We were already readying the heavily laden Mammoth class DropShip that was carried as our fourth attachment. Before we were hired, two small FedCom JumpShips had gone missing. Our first run had been turned back by the Jade Falcons; we had barely escaped. These supplies just had to make it through.

Our fighters were already launching as the Clan *batchall* came in, the challenge to combat. Within a few minutes, a pair of large OmniFighters were detected approaching at high speed. We turned towards Camelot Command, limping along at our maximum speed, a small fraction of the acceleration of the approaching OmniFighters. Our escorting fighters fired salvo after salvo at the Clanners, but they just shrugged them off with their heavy armor, intent on taking our DropShip. When the two Kirghiz class Omnifighters neared the *Lorelei's Hope*, they turned and decelerated until they had nearly matched speeds with us. As they approached, we opened up with every weapon that we had. We had upgraded our onboard weapons since our first encounter with the Jade Falcons. We hoped this would be a great shock to our attackers, indeed one of the Kirghiz was blown in half almost immediately. As our guns concentrated on the other OmniFighter, it delivered its payload. In stead of hearing the pounding of explosions, we heard a number of thumping sounds throughout the length of the hull. Gunnery reported success; the second Kirghiz was crippled, soaring away with its power out. But what had it left behind?

Repel Boarders... if You Can

We turned our attention to the hull-mounted video sensors. At least two dozen Elementals had attached themselves to our hull with magnetic grapples. These Elementals differed in appearance from any we had seen before. Now we knew how the other ships had been lost. The question now was how were going to keep from being captured ourselves.

First, we launched all of our attached DropShips with the exception of the Confederate. We had to get the supplies through. The lance of BattleMechs from the Confederate strapped on magnetic hull shoes and sallied out to attack the Elementals on our ship's hull. Techs scrambled to analyze the Elementals' weapons configuration.

Our drive section was too well shielded for entry; one group of Elementals had begun to move forward on the hull towards the command section. Another group had entered the *Lorelei's Hope* through holes in the cargo section made by demolition charges. To face them we had a couple of platoons of infantry, armed with light weapons. The rest of the crew remained in reserve in the forward sections of the hull.

Tech analysis came in. The Elementals were armed with weapons for use against personnel such as machine guns and flamers. The Jade Falcons wanted to keep our K-F drive intact. So did we; it was our only means of getting home. The crew in the drive sections were sealed behind thick bulkheads. They were directed to stay there; we would keep this section out of battle as long as we could.

Our own used of explosives against the Clanners was severely restricted. We began to set up barricades in the corridors while looking for a means of quickly neutralizing the Elementals. One of the corridors that the Elementals were using to advance ran next to the spare liquid helium storage tanks. One of the crew suggested sealing off a section of the corridor, then using the JumpShip's central security system to flood the corridor with liquid helium after the Elementals had entered. We set up the trap, racing against the advancing boarding force. Five of the Elementals entered our surprise corridor. The helium flooded down on them; they struggled to exit the corridor, but failed as one by one their systems froze up. Five down.

That left about fifteen Elementals fighting against our



BattleMechs on the hull, and another five identified inside the JumpShip. The only weapons on board that we could use effectively were a number of manpack PPCs stored in the ship's armory along with their associated waldoes. Their fields of fire had to be severely restricted to avoid damaging vital ships' systems. One was set on each of the two remaining avenues of approach to the bridge. The crew's quarters were to be the final stand against the invaders. The BattleMechs which destroyed the Elementals on the JumpShip's hull had received heavy damage, though not as heavy as if the Elementals had been armed with their normal SRMs. To make matters worse, there had been sighting of additional OmniFighters approaching at long range. These were smaller ships, but any Elementals they could land would finish us.

"Camelot Command, this is the JumpShip Lorelei's Hope. Can you give us any aid?"

"We've got our hands full ourselves. We'll send what we can, but it'll take some time to get to you. Your best bet is to use the system drive to get under our guns." JumpShips can't land, but we could dock at the base. Their huge Star League docking bay had enough fire power to deter those remaining OmniFighters while we offloaded our remaining

cargo. *Lorelei's Hope* raced toward Camelot Command while the members of her crew and Elementals of Clan Jade Falcon died within her. The remaining Point of Elementals rushed into a hailstorm of gas and stun grenades, bullets, laser and PPC fire, all carefully angled toward internal walls. We were able to stop them, at the cost of a platoon of infantry and a dozen of the ship's crew.

The other OmniFighters, Bashirs, were fended off by our escort fighters and the relief from Camelot Command until we arrived to their point where Snord's guns could give us cover. Once our supplies had been delivered, including tons of vital ammunition, the tide of battle changed. We joined with the superbly-trained Rhonda Snord's Irregulars to repel the remainder of the Jade Falcon raiding force.

Our share of the salvage from the raid included five quick-frozen Elemental suits. We should be able to repair them to put in use against their former units. Our share of the cost includes the attention of the Jade Falcons. They have found reason to desire the destruction of *Lorelei's Hope* as well as the rest of our unit, TekTeam. Their bids will probably be larger at our next encounter. We will have to ready ourselves for whatever the Clanners plan to throw at us.



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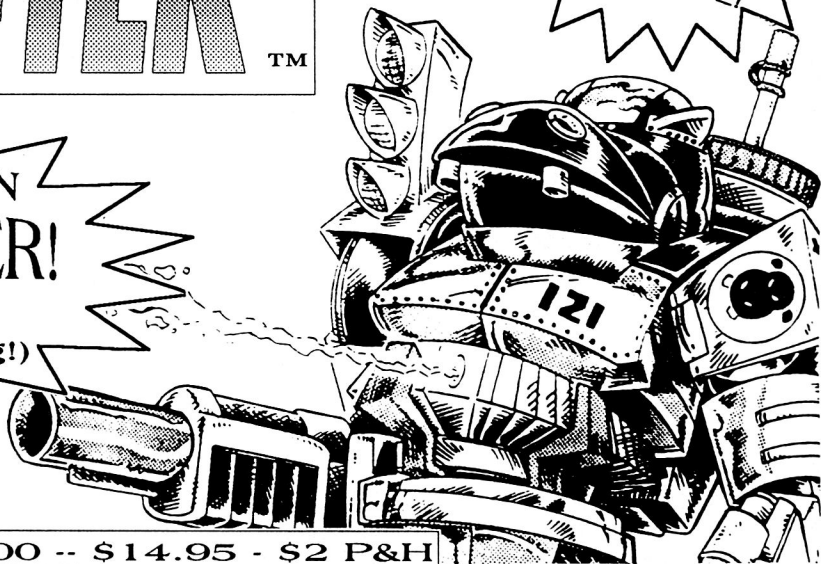
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AVT-7A Avatar

Overview:

The Federated Commonwealth requested a design to compete against the Clans' artillery support 'Mech, the Naga. Investor groups from Nashan and Defiance Industries, as well as Kallon Industries formed a new limited company called 'TriTech', whose home base is on Talon. Tritech won the contract to produce five hundred of the new 'Avatar' BattleMechs.

Capabilities:

The Avatar has been well received by the few units that have received a lance apiece for field testing. Several features make the Avatar a unique 'Mech. The Avatar comes with two targeting and tracking computers, one for the main artillery weapons and the other for the secondary weapons system. It was made that way so that the pilot could operate the 'Mech and its secondary weapons while the other computer can automatically fire the main artillery weapon at preset coordinates.

A problem that most support 'Mechs have in the field is lack of ammo. To help with this problem, the Avatar was designed to carry in its hands what have been called 'ammo clips'. These are specially made cannisters that can hold up to nine tons of ammo reloads for the artillery weapon. The cannisters are also covered with one ton of ferro-fibrous armor to protect the ammo. During long patrols the Avatar carries its reloads; otherwise the reloads are carried by support vehicles. The Avatar 'Mech can't reload the ammo clips by itself, but must have another 'Mech with hands to attach the cannisters to the back of the Avatar. This takes ten minutes. During the course of battle, a 'Mech cannot be reloaded, but there are often pauses between fire fights which give time enough to take care of it. The Avatar pilot tries to avoid fighting hand to hand until it has emptied its hands. If it must fight, each punch that hits necessitates a 2D6 roll; on a result of 2, an ammo explosion occurs.

The Avatar is one of the first 'Mechs designed to use the Federated Commonwealth version of the triple strength myomer as its standard.

Deployment:

The Avatar lances have been sent first to various Regimental Combat Teams based near Clan space, for field testing under the conditions of various raids. Two lances have gone to the mercenary regiment, the Knights of Sol, who are evaluating it from their position on Winter, near the Steel Vipers lines.

Variants:

The Avatar comes with three choices for its main weapon. The Arrow Missile System is the most commonly used; 50% of the Avatars produced have this option. The other weapons used are the Thumper or Sniper artillery pieces which are split evenly among the rest of the Avatars.

AVT-7A Avatar

Mass: 80 tons

Chassis: TriTech Type 1

Power Plant: Pitban 320

Cruising Speed, Ground: 54 kph

Maximum Speed, Ground: 86.4 kph

Jump Jets: None

Jump Capacity: None

Armor: Kallon Royalstar

Armament: 1 Arrow IV Missile Artillery systems

1 Defiance 1001 Extended Range

Particle Projection Cannon

3 Defiance B3M Medium Lasers

Manufacturer: TriTech Consortium

Primary Factory: Talon

Communications System: Garret Supreme Sound

Targeting and Tracking System:

N&D Longreach II/ N&D Hands Free II

Type: AVT-7A Avatar

Tonnage: 80.0

Equipment **Mass**

Internal Structure: 8.0

Engine: 320 22.5

Walking MP: 4

Running MP: 6

Jumping MP: 0

Heat Sinks: 10(20) 0.0

Gyro: 4.0

Cockpit: 3.0

Armor Factor: 144 9.0

	<i>Internal Structure</i>	<i>Armor Value</i>
Head	3	9
Center Torso	17	25
Center Torso (rear)		10
Right/Left Torso	15	17
Right/Left Torso (rear)		6
Right/Left Arm	10	20
Right/Left Leg	14	26

Weapons and Ammo **Loc.** **CS** **Mass**

Extended Range PPC LA 3 8.0

Medium Laser RA 1 1.0

Medium Laser RA 1 1.0

Medium Laser RA 1 1.0

Arrow IV LT 6

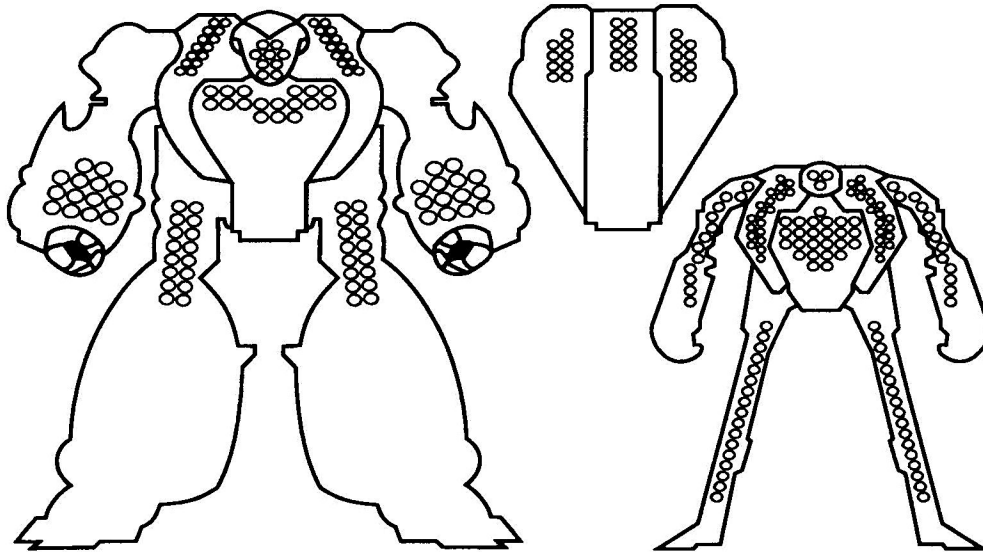
Arrow IV RT 6

Arrow IV CT 2

Ammo RT 5 2.5

Ammo LT 5 2.5

BattleTechnology: AVT -7A Avatar



Mech Data

AVATAR _____ Type
80 _____ Tonnage

Movement Points

4 Walking
6 Running
2 Jumping

Weapons Inventory

#	Type	Location
1	Arrow	LT/CT/RT
1	ER PPC	LA
3	Med Laser	RA

Pod Space
45 AMMO:

Arrow

Total Heat Sinks



Double

Warrior Data

Name _____
Gunnery Skill _____
Piloting Skill _____

Hits Taken (Consciousness Number)
1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th 6th

HEAT SCALE

30	SHUTDOWN
29	
28	Ammo Explosion 8+
27	
26	Shutdown 10+
25	-5 Movement Points
24	+4 to-Hit Modifier
23	Ammo Explosion 6+
22	Shutdown 8+
21	
20	-4 Movement Points
19	Ammo Explosion 6+
18	Shutdown 6+
17	+3 to-Hit Modifier
16	
15	-3 Movement Points
14	Shutdown 4+
13	+2 to-Hit Modifier
12	
11	
10	-2 Movement Points
09	
08	+1 to-Hit Modifier
07	
06	
05	-1 Movement Points
04	
03	
02	
01	
00	

CRITICAL HIT TABLE

Left Arm

- Shoulder Actuator
- Upper Arm Actuator
- Lower Arm Actuator
- Hand Actuator
- TSM
- (Roll Again)

1

- (Roll Again)
- (Roll Again)
- (Roll Again)

2

- ER PPC
- ER PPC
- ER PPC

Left Torso

- Arrow
- Arrow
- Arrow
- Arrow
- Arrow
- Arrow

1

- Ammo
- Ammo
- Ammo
- Ammo
- Ammo
- (Roll Again)

2

Left Leg

- Hip Actuator
- Upper Leg Actuator
- Lower Leg Actuator
- Foot Actuator
- TSM
- TSM

Head

- Life Support
- Sensors
- Cockpit
- (Roll Again)
- Sensors
- Life Support

Center Torso

- Engine
- Engine
- Engine
- Gyro
- Gyro
- Gyro

1

- Gyro
- Engine
- Engine
- Engine
- Arrow
- Arrow

2

Right Arm

- Shoulder Actuator
- Upper Arm Actuator
- Lower Arm Actuator
- Hand Actuator
- TSM
- (Roll Again)

1

- Med Laser
- Med Laser
- Med Laser
- (Roll Again)
- (Roll Again)
- (Roll Again)

2

Right Torso

- Arrow
- Arrow
- Arrow
- Arrow
- Arrow
- Arrow

1

- Arrow
- (Roll Again)
- Ammo
- Ammo
- Ammo
- Ammo

2

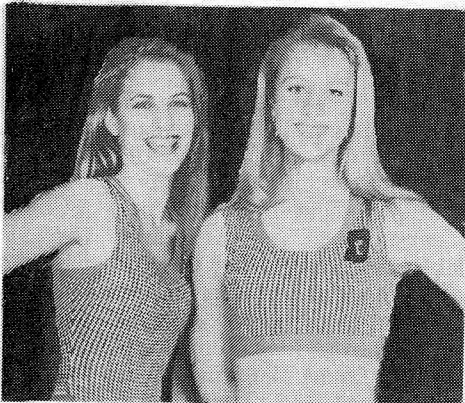
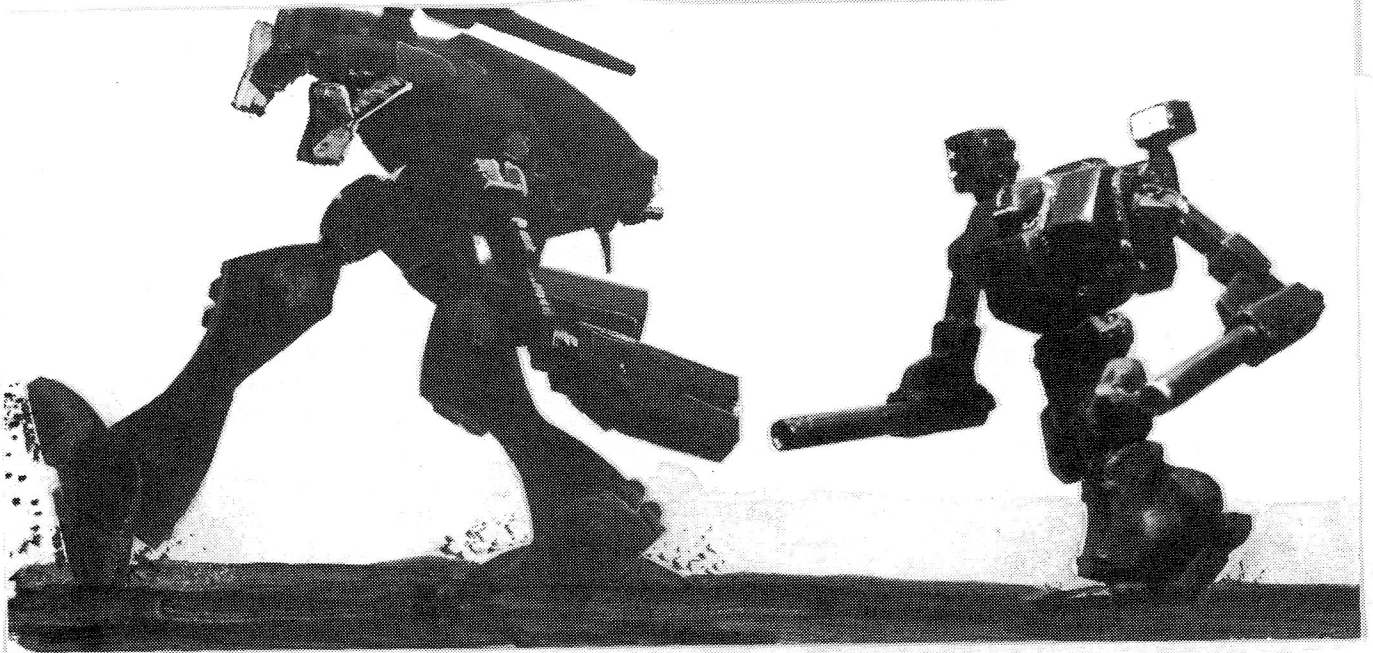
Right Leg

- Hip Actuator
- Upper Leg Actuator
- Lower Leg Actuator
- Foot Actuator
- TSM
- TSM

Engine Hits ○○○○
Gyro Hits ○○
Sensor Hits ○○

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Special Forces

In the Modern Military Operations Scheme

(The author, Captain Benjamin Gaunt, is the commander of the Special Forces Company of the 1053rd Striker Battalion of Lancaster's Rose, a mercenary unit most recently active in the Clan Occupation Zone. This article was drawn from a lecture Captain Gaunt delivered at The Nagelring in the spring term of 3054).

Introduction and Overview

Back in the year 1808, Napoleon Bonaparte rolled over the armies of Spain, capturing its major cities and establishing Joseph Bonaparte as his puppet king. Later in that same year, partisans drove Joseph out of Madrid, necessitating Napoleon's return to reconquer the city. The partisans thereafter never gave the French a moment's peace. Their actions guaranteed Wellington's conquest of occupied Spain.

Those Spanish partisans gave their Known Sphere a new word, a word for their 'little war'. They gave us the 'guerilla', and warfare has never been the same. Guerilla war disdains all that is honorable and noble in combat, pitting cleverness against forethought with a level of violence abhorrent to the knights in shining armor. Guerrilla war leaves no room for the general's chivalry or the strategist's clean lines on the map. It is war as a primitive exercise, the kind of war that makes reasonable people wonder why we fight at all.

Ever since the mid-20th century, nations and planetary alliances alike have fielded forces specifically for these unconventional and non-traditional military operations. The first unit designed for guerilla warfare purposes was the 10th Special Forces Brigade, stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, USA, Terra, early in the decade of the 1960's. Units that have performed Special Forces operations over the years include the Stealths and the Tamar Tigers of the Lyran Commonwealth, MI 6 troops of the Federated Suns, the Death Commandos of House Liao, and the Draconis Elite Strike Teams. Mercenary forces such as the Eridani Light Horse and Wolf's Dragoons also incorporate Special

Forces elements.

In the context of the Clans invasion, the ability to propagate guerilla actions should be essential to the strategic planning of every House and Periphery state. Given our scarce resources and the limits of interstellar communications, populations must often fight the invaders on their own, with very little reinforcement, for lengthy periods. It is the responsibility of modern military planners to see that our people are prepared, prepared for the little war until the big war comes again. I wish to offer you an overview of the Special Forces concept as employed by my unit, Lancaster's Rose, with an eye towards bolstering resistance to the Clans and ensuring the general peace of the Inner Sphere.

Design and Equipment

Special Forces units incorporate all aspects of the armed forces: BattleMechs, AeroSpace elements, tanks, VTOLs, and infantry, all working together. The essence of SF utility is speed, silence, total efficiency, and killing power. Following are the criteria most Houses and mercenary use to determine a BattleMech's suitability for modern Special Forces duty:

- 1) All weapons must be energy-based, not ammunition-based, for maximum self-sufficiency in the field. The only exception to this rule is the use of certain special-applications missile systems.
- 2) 'Mechs must carry as much armor as their tonnage will allow, also to maximize survivability.
- 3) 'Mechs must consistently inflict enough damage to knock down another 'Mech with a single volley.
- 4) All 'Mechs must carry the Guardian ECM Suite.
- 5) 50% of 'Mechs per unit must carry the Beagle Active Probe.
- 6) 50% of 'Mechs per unit must carry Target Acquisition Gear.
- 7) All 'Mechs in the unit must have special movement capabilities, such as MASC, Jump Jets, or LAM capability.

8) SF 'Mechs must have a maximum tonnage of 75, and a minimum movement of 54 kph.

9) The average tonnage to the prototypical SF company is 50, and the average movement is better than 65 kph.

10) 'Mechs designated for Special Forces service must have at least .25 tons of cargo space. This space is used to transport SF assets, including equipment, information, and personnel.

In addition to these criteria, Lancaster's Rose has other requirements for BattleMechs that do not touch on the Special Forces concept. Requirements for other military vehicles are similar in nature. All must be fast for their size, heavily-armored and well-armed, and all must carry advanced electronics and cargo space into the field.

Goals and objectives

Special Forces most often have non-linear combat objectives acting against specific goals and targets instead of simply capturing territory. They must have the flexibility of training and equipment necessary to the completion of a wide range of unusual tasks. There are five primary SF missions in the operational schemes of 3054's military

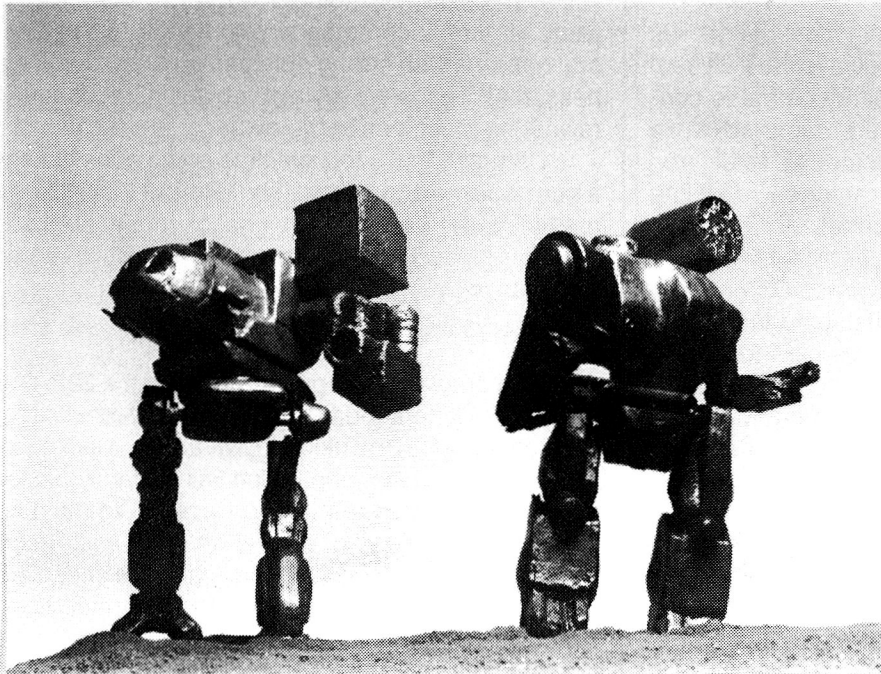
strategy. These are:

- 1) Unconventional Warfare
- 2) Guerilla Insurgency Training
- 3) Intelligence Gathering
- 4) Search and Rescue
- 5) Tactical Research and Development

Special Forces Mission One: Unconventional Warfare
Lancaster's Rose defines four types of Unconventional Warfare: *Penetration, Misidentification, Procurement, and Termination.*

Penetration: Landing under maximum ECM screens or as part of a scheduled civilian drop, this mission requires long stays in enemy territory without detection. SF team members may be required to live as natives until ordered into action. This mission may be combined with a Procurement or Termination mission.

Misidentification: In this scenario, the SF team lands publicly and loudly, using paint schemes, codes, uniforms, and battle jargon sure to be associated with another House or merc unit for dirty deeds done by our side. As with Penetration, this mission may be combined with Procurement or Termination.



Jane's Interstellar The Clans

The latest release in a grand tradition offers an expanded glossary of Clans combat vehicles and their tactics. The book also contains numerous newly declassified photographs. Get yours at fine military bookstores now!!

Procurement: This term applies to theft ('inorganic procurement') as well as kidnapping ('organic procurement'). The use of this option implies the safe return of the 'goods' to some friendly area or power.

Termination: This option describes the destruction of a chosen target with a minimum of witnesses of collateral damage. Inorganic termination is a fact of life in the raiding business, with targets ranging in size from microchips to 'Mech factories. Organic termination, outright murder for hire, is much more rare. 'Mercenary' does not mean 'hired assassin', and Lancaster's Rose does not engage in such actions without substantial proof that the interests of peace are well served by the targeted individual's untimely death.

Special Forces Mission Two: Guerilla Insurgency Training

SF units are often called upon to provide native noncombatants with the skills and supplies necessary for the instigation and propagation of guerrilla warfare. Resistance to an enemy force may function in concert with friendly conventional forces, in preparation for a friendly invasion, or as a last-ditch defense when friendly conventional forces have been defeated.

SF 'Mechs and armor units always carry small caches of personal laser weapons, along with extra power packs, and the means to recharge those packs from internal power. SF infantry are certified in languages and weapon and tactics instruction, allowing them to train a friendly population in terminology familiar to the trainees.

The insurgency mission is perhaps the most dangerous any SF force may undertake. There is always the very real possibility of betrayal, discovery, or military defeat to consider. Add that to the fact that soldiers captured while performing this mission are usually executed as spies, and you can begin to understand the need for stringent recruiting and training requirements for SF personnel.

Special Forces Mission Three: Intelligence Gathering

SF units will most often be the first introduced into potentially hostile areas. Their job is usually to gather information about enemy strong points and weak points, and to transmit such information back to friendly forces. This communication can involve hyperpulse generators, carrier pigeons, or any technology in between.

The primary intelligence mission nearly always involves moving through enemy-held areas undetected. This is not easily accomplished, thanks to modern and recovered electronic technologies. To add to the dangers, 'Mechs and vehicles loaded with the electronic and movement capabilities necessary to intelligence-gathering are usually light on weapons and armor. Care must therefore be exercised in the choice of intelligence units, with a special eye to survivability in the event of discovery.

Special Forces Mission Four: Search and Rescue

The scenario is familiar. An AeroSpace pilot ejects behind enemy lines as her fighter spirals down into an 'undesirable high-speed air-ground interface'. The resulting column of smoke might attract any number of hostiles, from capture squads to local farmers.

Enter SAR, the team charged with the recovery of human resources from the grasp of the enemy. SAR duties most often go to hover tanks, faster than all get-out and bristling with antipersonnel weapons and electronic tracking gear. In terrain where such tanks are less than effective, ultra-fast SF 'Mechs or VTOLS are assigned SAR duties.

SAR teams are not designed for contact with front-line hostile forces. Rather, they use superior speed to avoid forward units and penetrate to the search area. In the rear, contacts will most likely be supply units, capture squads, or civilians. These can usually be dealt with by the SAR team's weapons.

Special Forces Mission Five: Tactical Research and Development

As elite forces, SF units often field-test new weapons, tactics, and configurations still in the experimental stage. In most cases, this means that any regiment's most talented and creative Techs will be found attached to the Special Forces. Technicians assigned to SF units usually find their work stressful, competitive, dangerous, and more fun than you could possibly imagine. Also, since most MechWarriors, pilots, and tank commanders assigned to Special Forces are veterans with strong opinions on operational effectiveness, their Techs are always replacing, reconfiguring, and reworking machines to the owner's specifications.

("Dammit! That's the last time some punk hiding behind a tree pops me one from behind! Rip out the Linblad and the ammo, Willy, and stick in one of those Active Probes. Always felt kinda dumb carrying anti-missile ammo in my torso, anyway!")

Conclusion

I must draw an analogy from Terra of the 20th Century to finish my talk here today. Thanks to the recent sacrifices of the Com Guards on Tukkeyid, we are now locked in a 'cold war' with the Clans, one which will certainly blossom into killing heat in less than thirteen years. We must not allow ourselves the luxury of relaxation. We must keep up the pressure in subtle ways, encouraging the occupied worlds of the Federated Commonwealth, Rasalhague, and the Draconis Combine alike to make life difficult for their conquerors. We can best accomplish this by increasing our emphasis on unconventional warfare, training and implementation.

You see, I have been behind the 'Iron Curtain', inside the

Clans Occupation Zone. I have seen the remains of villages that rose up as one against the Clans with no training, no supplies, and no real hope of success. They were armed only with the certain knowledge that they must live free or die. I have seen the brutality with which the Clans reply to such attacks. We, as the ones lucky enough to have a choice, must choose to support their gallant sacrifices.

Our comrades under the invader's heels have the will to resist.

We must not fail them.

The following is a prototypical Special Forces BattleMech, designed according to the specifications given above. It is superficially a 3050s-tech SHD-5M Shadow Hawk with some major modifications.

SP-type SHD-5S Shadow Hawk Spy

Mass: 55 tons

Chassis: Earthwerks II Endo Steel

Power Plant: 330 XL

Cruising Speed, Ground: 64.8 kph

Maximum Speed, Ground: 97.2 kph

Jump Jets: HildCo Model 30

Jump Capacity: 200 m

Armor: Maximilian 43

Armament: 1 Defiance B3L Large Laser

1 Defiance P5M Medium Pulse Laser

4 Defiance B3M Medium Lasers

Manufacturer: Earthwerks Incorporated

Primary Factory: Calloway VI

Communications System: Cyclops 14 with Guardian Electronic Countermeasure Suite

Targeting and Tracking System: Cyclops Beagle Active Probe with TAG

Type: SP-Type SHD-5S Shadow Hawk Spy

Tonnage: 55.0

Equipment		Mass
Internal Structure:		2.75
Engine:	330 XL	12.25
Walking MP:	6	
Running MP:	9	
Jumping MP:	5	
Heat Sinks:	13(26)	3.0
Gyro:		4.0
Cockpit:		3.0
Armor Factor:	184	11.5
	<i>Internal Structure</i>	<i>Armor Value</i>
Head	3	9
Center Torso	18	30
Center Torso (rear)		6
Right/Left Torso	13	20
Right/Left Torso (rear)		6
Right/Left Arm	9	18
Right/Left Leg	13	25

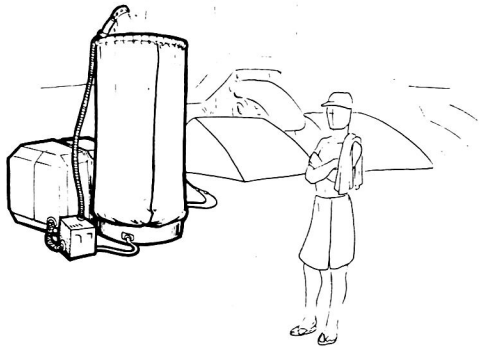
Weapons and Ammo	Loc.	CS	Mass
Large Laser	RA	2	5.0
Medium Pulse Laser	LA	1	2.0
Medium Laser	RT	1	1.0
Medium Laser	RT	1	1.0
Medium Laser	LT	1	1.0
Medium Laser	LT	1	1.0
Beagle Active Probe	RT	2	1.5
Guardian ECM Suite	LT	2	1.5
TAG	LA	1	1.0
Jump Jets	RL	2	1.0
Jump Jets	LL	2	1.0
Jump Jets	CT	1	0.5
Cargo Space	H	1	0.5

THORNHILL ARMS

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After a long patrol in enemy territory, one of the first things you want to do is clean up! But how many times do your field camps include appropriate wash facilities? No long a worry, because you've got an InstaClean Portable Shower System! Just clip the one hundred liter flexible water tank to a Heat Sink or Freezer unit and fill the tank from any local water supply using the included pump and particulate filter system, then fire up your 'Mech's engine. Waste heat from that fusion core heats the water to a comfortable temperature you select by adjusting the unit thermocouples. Once you're ready, the convenient hand held shower head delivers a steady stream of hot water, just the way you like it. Collapsible 'Modesty Screen' assures private bathing — or throw a shower party! Sure to be the hit of any camp site!



InstaClean Portable Shower

45 C-bills

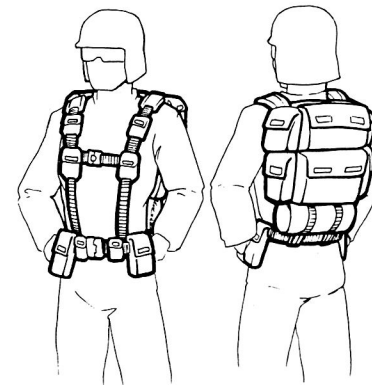
3 Kgs

WORK HORSE

TACTICAL LOAD-BEARING HARNESS

Ever felt that you're lugging a back-load of bricks across the battle field? Ever had your pack come lose at the wrong moment, dumping thousands of C-bills worth of electronics into the mud? Ever scrambled for that extra ammo clip only to realize that it's buried at the bottom of your pack, under four days worth of used socks? Try the Work Horse Tactical Load-Bearing Harness next time! The Work Horse weighs less then half a kilogram but comfortably supports sixty kilos by distributing it across your torso, hips and shoulders. Sixteen weatherized velcro pouches and pockets let you distribute your equipment however you wish and the modular holster and ammo pouch keep your side-arm always ready. The clip on pack-sack holds all your filed camping gear. The heavy gortex and micro-spun Dacron construction guarantee years of use under even the most rigorous field conditions, and adjustable straps assure a perfect fit. Availed in flat-black, battleship gray, white and 16 camouflage prints.

Work Horse Tactical Load-Bearing Harness 20 C-bills. weight .4 Kilo



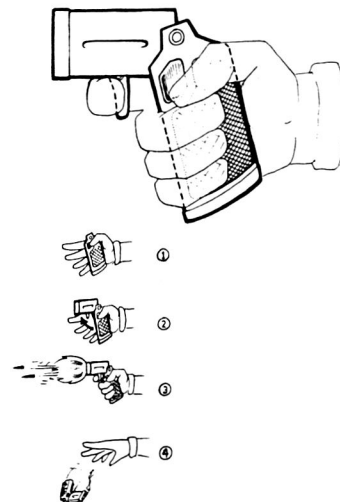
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THUNDERFIST DISPOSABLE HOLD-OUT GUN

Continuing our tradition of bringing you the latest developments in personal armaments, Thornhill Arms presents the Thunderfist, a two shot 11-mm caseless derringer formed of woven graphite fiber. In cross-section, the Thunderfist is only 3 centimeters across and only 10 centimeters long. Readily concealable and containing no ferrous metals, this baby still packs a powerful punch out to 20 meters. Internal chemical propellant fires the ceramic projectiles that are sharpened for maximum armor penetration. And when you've fired both rounds, just throw the empty gun frame away! Available in matte-black, gunmetal gray, olive drab, and silver.

Thunderfist Derringer 15 C-bills each. Weight 0.1 Kilo

(For MechWarrior simulations: Damage & Range as per hold-out pistol)

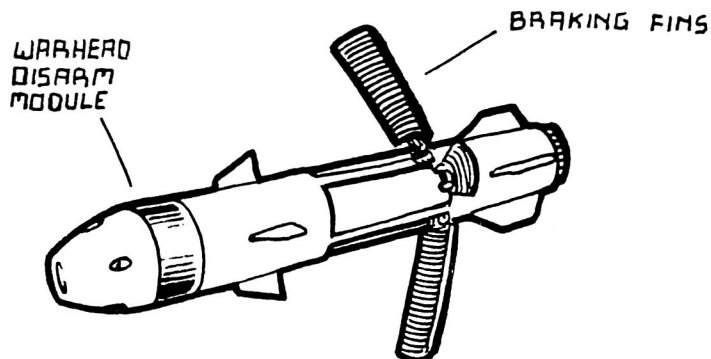


ARROW IV MISER MISSILE ARTILLERY SYSTEM

If you're like me, you hate wasted ammo. And, like me, you applaud the resurgence of guided missiles in modern combat. But still, each wasted shot must irk you, if only a little bit. Come on, be honest. Well, we at Thornhill Arms, the leaders in personal defense technology, have something that might just bring a smile to your face, the Arrow IV Miser Missile Artillery System (or AMMAS, as we call it). The system functions exactly like the Arrow IV Missile Artillery System, first offered in 3050, with one little difference. On board sensors in each missile track the flight, correcting for the acquired target, just like you'd expect, but if the missile misses its target by as little as five meters, on-board systems disarm the warhead so the missile falls harmlessly to the ground. After the battle, you can save those expensive rockets, refurbish them, and use them all over! How's that for a saving!

ARRM System 450,000 C-bills. Reloads 18,000 c-bills per ton

(For simulation purposes, missed shots can be salvaged after combat at reused 80% of the time at a cost of 200 C-bills per ton. ARRM hits can not start fires or produce rubble.)



WHAT NOW,



M E C H W A R R I O R ?

**ANALYSIS OF BATTLEFIELD
TACTICS AND STRATEGY.**

The Best Tool for the Job

Disposing Your Forces

“What Now, MechWarrior?” is a war-game prepared as a set of training exercises by order of Archon Melissa Steiner-Davion as part of an ongoing effort to merge the military doctrines of the former Federated Suns with the Lyran Commonwealth. The Archon has requested that BattleTechnology reprint selected scenarios from ever-expanding list of cases so others may benefit from the experiences of the past. The scenarios presented are versions of historical battles or situations along with the decisions of the unit commanders. The scenarios are intended to be used to prompt discussions. Each of the participants offers their recommended actions at each of the decision points then discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of the offered solutions. In BattleTechnology’s test of the workability of this method, we discovered that such discussions are apt to become quite heated so we recommend that they be conducted in a relaxed, informal atmosphere conducive to the free exchange of opinions (We also recommend that the discussion area be kept clear of heavy objects that could be used as projectiles). It is worth noting that there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers to the presented problems. The historical information simply shows how one commander handled the situation. Someone may well come up with a better solution. The information contained within these scenarios is not classified or considered militarily sensitive.

BattleTechnology magazine wishes to thank Capt. Roquan of the New Avalon Military Information Center for his help in providing the information presented in this article. Copies of standard simulator programs are available for 100 C-bills from your BattleTechnology magazine distributor. Please include the scenario name and programming language you want when ordering.

The Best Tool for the Job

You have been given command of a lance of light BattleMechs that are being sent to garrison a planet that has recently been repatriated after nearly a hundred years of rule by another Successor House. Your lance consists of two Locusts, a single Wasp and your own Valkyrie; you are to be placed under the command of local military. The planet is essentially Earth-like with nearly normal gravity and atmospheric conditions. The planet does have relatively high normal temperatures and heavy seasonal rain fall. In transit to your new duty station, you review the available information.

In summary you learn that the local population is considered 'transitory', meaning some place between two Successor Houses. Apparently, there is a great deal of popular support for your house but there have been a growing number of 'incidents' showing support for the recently ousted government. These incidents have been growing more violent. On the plus side, Tactical considers it very unlikely you will be faced with any sort of invasion by an organized military force. It looks like civil guard duty to you. What Now, 'MechWarrior?

(Recommended discussion items: The suitability of the 'Mechs for the assigned mission. What sort of information the officer should request. Status of the pilots. The use of 'Mechs against civilians.)

Historical: The lance commander reviewed all the available data and interviewed his personnel, looking for any signs of planetary prejudice that might produce friction between his people and either the local command or the population. He also insisted all his personnel review crowd control texts and held a series of seminars on planetary politics, sensitivity to the local population's fears and concerns, and the use of 'Mechs to quell civil disobedience. Additionally, he insisted on a clear charter from his commander regarding the authorized level of force he could employ.

During transit to your target, you spend the time getting to know your lance mates and find nothing to contradict your set of assumptions. Everyone seems resigned to a tour-of-duty on a belligerent planet. At least the possibility of a major 'Mech confrontation is unlikely. When you land, you check in with your garrison commander, a harried official trying to deal with a myriad of logistical problems. He sends you the planetary government liaison and instructs you to take orders from her. You track her down and find a polite middle-aged woman who confirms your suspicions. You're working

crowd-control and "it would be best if you minimize damage to people and property during your duties" (trying to make a good impression and all). She offers to help modify your 'Mechs if you wish to tailor them for their new duty. Seems like a good idea. What now, MechWarrior?

(Recommended Discussion items: Use of 'Mech weapons on civilians. Possible modification strategies. How different weapons configurations might be used in urban, open terrain, or other settings. The problems in serving as police (warrior pride, morale, etc.). Possible dangers from civilian mobs.)

Historical: The unit leader opted for weapons reconfigurations to better suite the mission profile. The Locusts loaded latex rounds in the machine gun ammo bins and the Wasp set smoke/tear gas rockets in the SRM launchers. All the lasers were powered down and recalibrated to produce a broad beam, strobe light effect to blind attackers. The unit leader chose to leave his own laser intact though he used smoke/gas rounds for the first quarter of the ammo for his LRM. All the laser modifications could be switched back to normal weapons mode in about thirty minutes of 'Tech work.

You have reconfigured your 'Mechs as listed above and now await your first assignment. It comes two weeks later. You receive a call to proceed to a section of the city and help break up a large, anti-government demonstration. As you and your companions mobilize, you review the available information. It's inconsistent. Some reports indicate a moderately large crowd of demonstrators, others indicate a huge mob of armed rioters. You figure it's somewhere between the two extremes. You arrive at the public square and find that several thousand people fill the area. Local police have contained the demonstration but some violence has sprung up at the edges. No weapons beyond rocks and clubs have been confirmed. The incident commander requests your help in dispersing the crowd. What now, MechWarrior?

(Recommended discussion items: How to achieve mission objectives without causing undue civilian casualties. Possibilities of panic and the effect of the presence of 'Mechs on the crowd. Appropriateness of the use of 'Mechs in this situation.)

Historical: The commander determined the prevailing wind direction was from the north. Not wishing to cause a panic, he requested the watch-commander open a corridor towards the east, away from the city core, to allow the demonstrators to withdraw. He then formed his 'Mechs up to the east, out of sight of the crowd and slowly advanced.

Once the 'Mechs came into view, the demonstrators wavered and began to fall back. One volley of tear gas dispersed the rest with no loss of life.

Your first action in your new role goes quite well. None of your 'Mechs are damaged, no one was killed and the riot was quelled with a minimum of property damage. Everyone, except the demonstrators, seem happy about the outcome. Things proceed for several months with you and your forces called on occasionally to back up the civil authorities.

One night, during your fifth month on planet, you get an emergency call to respond to a major riot in an industrial sector. The civil authorities have been unable to control the violence and there are confirmed reports of light field weapons being used. Your tactical map shows that roughly eight square blocks are involved and the violence seems to be spreading. You respond at once, moving your people out. You should reach the scene in ten minutes. What now, MechWarrior?

(Recommended discussion items: Tactical orders for your units. How to distinguish looters from the civil guards. Possible political objectives for the riot.)

Historical: The commander contacted the incident commander and requested orders. He was directed to the core of the rioting where it was suspected foreign agents were directing the action. This would remove him from any areas where the civic authorities might be.

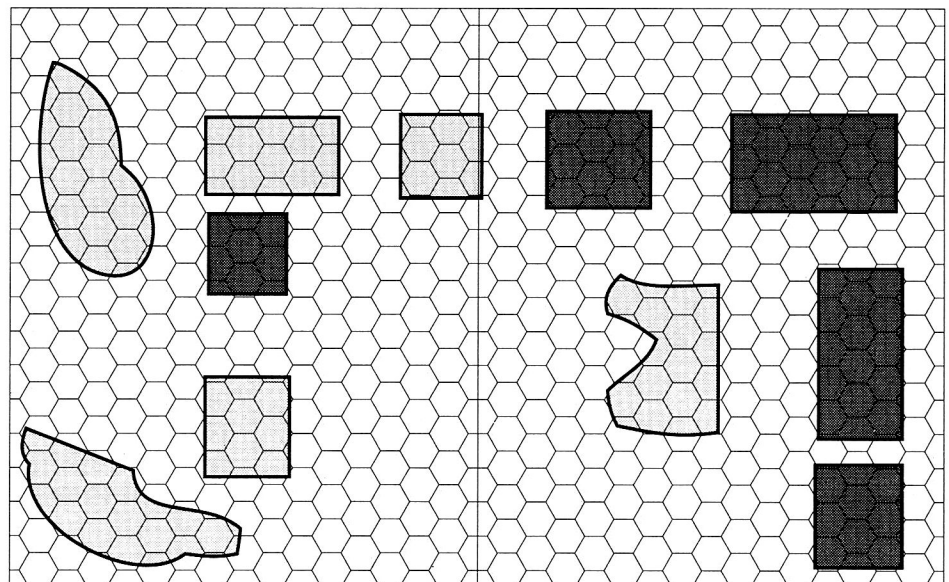
You move through the flaming ruins of torched warehouses towards the core of the rioting. On the way, you disperse numerous clusters of looters with sprays of latex bullets fired by the Locusts. At your target, you find a cluster of cargo lifters centered around what must be the command post. Small arms fire begins bouncing off your armor as you move forwards to fully assess the situation. A sudden kick on your magnetic sensors draws your attention east, to-

wards an near by factory. The outer fence rips free and some sort of 'Mech lumbers into view. Your computer can't ID it but it looks like an industrial 'Mech in the 60-ton range outfitted with weapons salvaged from the an assortment of armored vehicle. An arm mounted PPC fires from the construct, blowing a leg off one of the Locusts. Looks like a trap to you. What now, MechWarrior?

(Recommended discussion items: Relative mission priorities, The possibility of retreat and what effects that would have on the tactical situation, If you fight, do you use physical or ranged attacks, Possible strategies for combat or retreat.)

Historical: The commander ordered the Wasp to assist the downed Locust and all three of the other 'Mechs to evacuate, knowing they did not have effective ranged weapons. He contacted the incident commander and informed her of the situation. He chose to fight the patchwork 'Mech, not wanting to let it inflict major damage on the surrounding buildings. He decided not to close with it, since it was substantially heavier than his Valkyrie, and chose to assume its piecemeal weapons systems were apt to be less accurate than his integrated systems.

With the Wasp helping to drag the wounded 'Mech



■ = Level 3 Hardened, Undestroyed

□ = Destroyed building or rubble, treat as rough terrain

away, all three of your lance mates pull back. You launch several spreads of LRMs at the command center to clear the gas rounds, then turn your attention to the Patchwork 'Mech. It counters with a pair of industrial lasers, one of which scores the side of your machine. The two of you exchange fire for several minutes and in that time, you get a good idea of what you're facing.

The Patchwork 'Mech is slower and more massive than yours. You think that if it connects with a kick or punch, it should be able to do serious damage. For weapons, it carries two industrial lasers (slightly less powerful than medium weapon-type lasers) a salvaged Lord's Light PPC and a number of one-use SRM packs. The warrior piloting that monster appears to be quite competent, though hampered by his machine. You have taken damage to about 30% of your armor though it's unbreached. You've landed a few good shots but considering the unconventional nature of your foe, you have no idea how badly off it is. You can either stand and fight, or withdraw, waiting for reinforcements to help out. What now MechWarrior?

(Recommended discussion items: When to fight and when to run. Possible problems of waiting for reinforcements. A commander's responsibilities. How best to fight a single target that's larger and better armed.)

Historical: Hoping to demoralize the resistance and destroy what he suspected was their major weapon, the commander decided to stand and fight. He landed several hits with his laser then took a solid PPC hit in the torso, crippling his 'Mech. Before the enemy unit could finish him off, several squads of jump infantry arrived and destroyed it. The commander lost his right arm in the conflict, but he was credited with keeping the Patchwork 'Mech in place until it could be destroyed. The planet subsequently had no major incidents of civil disobedience.

BattleTechnology Personal Ads

BattleTechnology Magazine provides this space to facilitate open communications between Mechwarriors and others of the Inner Sphere. This space is open to all those who pay the required fees regardless of political leanings, criminal status in certain areas of space, or other circumstances that might otherwise force silence.

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Snake, Rattle & Roll

May 13, 3050 One of the few early Inner Sphere victories over Clan 'Mechs occurred on the border planet of Toland, in Steiner space. The initial Clan attack decimated a full regiment of the Twelfth Star Guards. While the majority of the Star Guards retreated toward Toland City, a few stragglers, cut off from their comrades, sought shelter in the Remagen Canyon area.

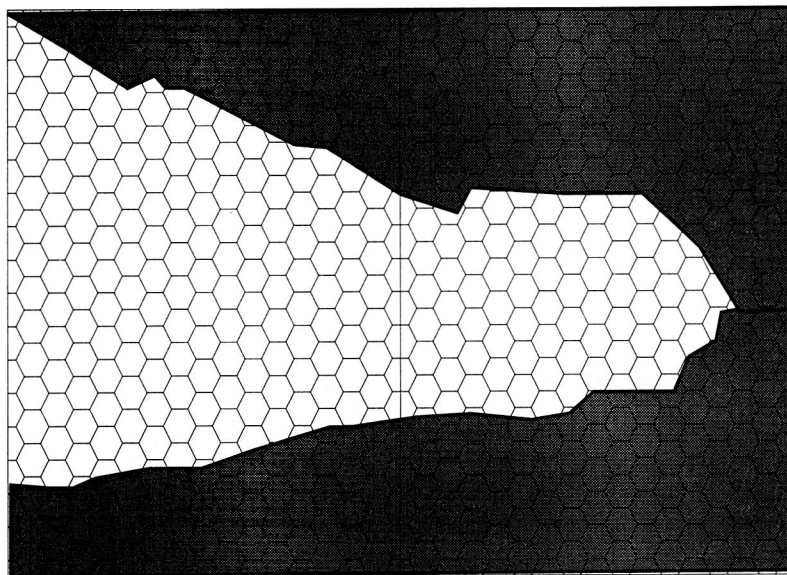
A battalion of 'Mechs from Mallory's Headhunters had been stationed at a mining area near the canyons. The Headhunters decided to pull out rather than be destroyed by the overwhelming Clan forces. Since the Star Guard command post had been thrown into disarray by the Clans, the Headhunters offered to coordinate the transportation of any Guard units that could make the rendezvous. A short lance of Headhunter 'Mechs was dispatched to the Remagen Canyon to round up survivors.

Unknown to the Headhunters, a lone Daishi had also entered the canyons, in pursuit of an escaped Guards Crusader.

While searching a box canyon, the Clan 'Mech was trapped by the trio of Headhunter 'Mechs. Believing the Inner Sphere 'Mechs to be ordinary Jenners, the Clan pilot attacked. However, the Headhunter 'Mechs were improved designs, known as Rattlesnakes.

The Daishi has the advantage in size and long-range firepower; the Rattlesnakes, in speed and short-range firepower. The battle is evenly matched.

N



Set Up:

Use the two original BattleTech maps, laid end-to-end. These maps represent the floor of the box canyon. Designate one of the short sides as North. The North end is open. The other three sides are blocked by impassable cliffs; the half-hexes along these sides cannot be entered.

Defender:

The Defender is Jade Falcon MechWarrior Corlin. His skills are Piloting: 4, Gunnery: 3. He is piloting a Daishi (primary version) in perfect condition. The Daishi may be placed in any complete hex adjoining the South wall of the canyon.

Attacker:

Attackers are three Rattlesnakes from Mallory's Headhunters, B Company, Second Battalion.

Lt Gordon Wozniak, Piloting: 4, Gunnery: 3

MechWarrior Antonio Madarasz, Piloting: 5, Gunnery: 4

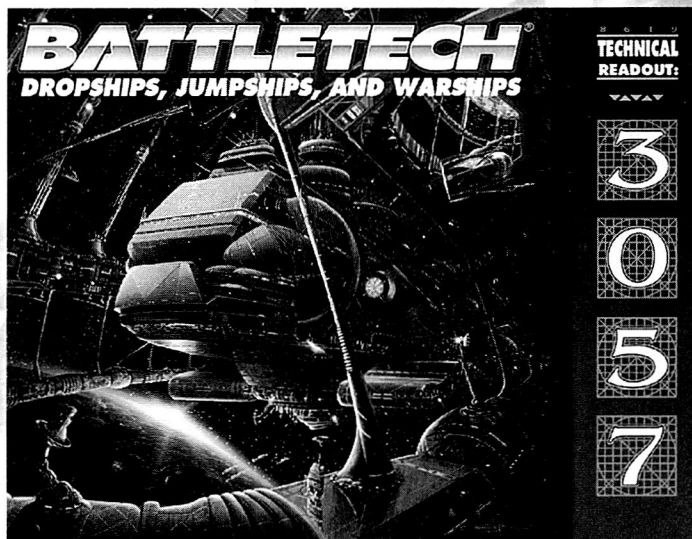
MechWarrior Michelle Young, Piloting: 5, Gunnery: 4

The Rattlesnakes enter the map from the North end of the canyon.

Victory Conditions:

The Daishi must exit via the North end of the canyon on turn 15 or earlier: the Rattlesnakes must prevent him from exiting. On turn 16, a heavy lance from the Twelfth Star Guards arrives and the fate of the Daishi pilot is sealed. (If you wish to play this tragedy out to the bitter end, use a Thunderbolt, a Warhammer, a Marauder, and a Crusader for the Star Guard forces).

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JR7-31P Rattlesnake

Overview:

The JR7-31P Rattlesnake is the latest design from Phoenix Heavy Industries. Phoenix, a manufacturing concern located on Ashkum in the Capellan March of the Federated Commonwealth, has gained a reputation since the Fourth Succession War as a developer of unique combat designs and refits. Other recent Phoenix designs include the UM-R 90 SuburbanMech and the Omar Hovertank/APC.

Phoenix has developed a close working relationship with the St Ives Compact, and the relationship has been profitable to both parties. Phoenix manufactures 'Mechs to the Compact's specifications, to improve the defensive capabilities of the relatively small Compact military. In return, the Compact provides advanced technical information to Phoenix, enabling the corporation to upgrade both its manufacturing facilities and its product line.

The latest requirements submitted by St Ives called for "a reconnaissance BattleMech, built with advanced technology, capable of engaging and destroying any other 'Mech of the same or lesser tonnage." Phoenix had already begun work on an upgrade of the JR7-D Jenner, and the incorporation of recovered Star League technology made meeting the Compact's requirements a simple matter. When testing the new design, however, the Phoenix designers found that they had built something far more significant than another recon-killer.

Testing of the new JR7-31P included field trials against heavier 'Mechs, to determine its ability to survive such a mismatch. In almost every case, the new design was able not only to survive, but to win, in one-on-one combat against 'Mechs up to 75 tons. The combination of high maneuverability and significant firepower allowed the JR7-31P to control the range and tempo of combat, striking at high speed to attack the enemy's vulnerable rear armor while evading his return fire. A defeated Crusader pilot declared that the new 'Mech was "as fast as a rattlesnake and just as deadly." Thus, the JR7-31P Rattlesnake gained its name.

Capabilities:

The Rattlesnake is based on the design of the JR7-D Jenner, and at first glance is externally identical to its older cousin. Close examination will reveal heavily-reinforced, ferro-fibrous armor and reconfigured weapons ports. The most radical changes, however, are hidden from external view.

Power for the Rattlesnake is supplied by a Phoenix 245XL engine, providing excellent speed at a lesser weight than conventional engines. Some of the saved weight has been used to augment the 'Mech's jump capability, raising it from the Jenner's 150 meters to 210 meters. Thus, the Rattle-

snake has impressive mobility both in open terrain and in more confined areas.

The truly unique feature of the Rattlesnake, however, is its armament. The JR7-31P carries close-range firepower equivalent to some heavy 'Mechs, in the form of seven HEC Mjolnir-5 medium lasers and a Mjolnir-3 light laser. Eleven dual-capacity heat sinks allow the Rattlesnake to use its entire arsenal without significant heat buildup. Provision has been made in the targeting system to incorporate an advanced fire-coordination system when these become available (see Variants).

Hammerstrom Electronics, the manufacturers of the Rattlesnake's weapons systems, expressed initial surprise at the lack of long-range weapons in the 'Mech's design. As the Phoenix design team pointed out, however, the Rattlesnake can close the range between itself and any target rapidly, thus making the lack of long-range firepower less important than it would be with a slower 'Mech.

Battle History:

No reports are yet available on the Rattlesnake's performance in actual combat. The 'Mech, however, has been deployed in lance strength by several units in both the St Ives Compact and the Federated Commonwealth. It is certain to be a significant factor in any battle in which it is involved. (See *Snake Dance*, elsewhere in this issue, for the first recorded engagement involving Rattlesnakes.)

Variants:

The Rattlesnake was designed to incorporate an HEC Munin IX-X fire-coordination system, popularly known as a "C-Cubed unit", to link the Rattlesnake's targeting computer to friendly missile-support units. This system is still in development. JR7-31Ps are currently equipped with an extra medium laser occupying the space for the Munin system. The Munin system will be installed on these 'Mechs at no charge as soon as it becomes available.

Notable 'Mechs and MechWarriors

Lieutenant James Lanier

Lieutenant Lanier is a member of the Fire Hawks, Phoenix's private mercenary unit. Lanier was assigned to temporary duty as a test pilot for the SuburbanMech design, and was promoted to his current rank for his actions in defending the test facility against a pirate raid. He has been detached to continued duty with the design team as a senior test pilot. Lanier is now involved with a project to upgrade the Thunderbolt BattleMech to advanced technology.

JR7-31P Rattlesnake**Mass:** 35 Tons**Internal Structure:** Phoenix JR35**Engine:** Phoenix 245 XL**Cruising Speed:** 75.5 kph**Maximum Speed:** 118.9 kph**Jump Jets:** Phoenix J245**Jump Capacity:** 210 m**Armor:** Phoenix Cuirass 112 Ferro-Fibrous**Armament:**

7 Hammerstorm Mjolnia-5 Medium Lasers

1 Hammerstorm Mjolnir-3 Small Laser

Manufacturer: Phoenix Heavy Industries**Communications:** Hammersorm Hugin Mk XIV**Targeting/Tracking System:** Hammerstorm Munin Mk IX

Type: JR7-31P Rattlesnake	Tons
Tonnage: 35	35.0
Internal Structure:	3.5
Engine: Phoenix 245 XL	6.0
Walking MPs: 7	
Running MPs: 11	
Jumping MPs: 7	
Heat Sinks: 11(22)	1.0
Gyro:	3.0
Cockpit:	3.0
Armor Factor: 116	6.5

	Internal Armor Structure Value	
Head	3	9
Center Torso	11	15/6
Rt/Lt Torso	8	11/5
Rt/Lt Arm	6	11
Rt/Lt Leg	8	16

Weapons and Ammo:

Type	Loc	Critical	Tons
Medium Laser	CT	1	1.0
Medium Laser	LT	1	1.0
Medium Laser	LT	1	1.0
Medium Laser	RT	1	1.0
Medium Laser	RT	1	1.0
Medium Laser	LA	1	1.0
Medium Laser	RA	1	1.0
Small Laser	LT	1	0.5
C3 Slave	Head	1	1.0
Jump Jet	CT	1	0.5
Jump Jets	LT	3	1.5
Jump Jets	RT	3	1.5

(Note: The Rattlesnake does not have Hand Actuators or Lower Arm Actuators in either arm.)

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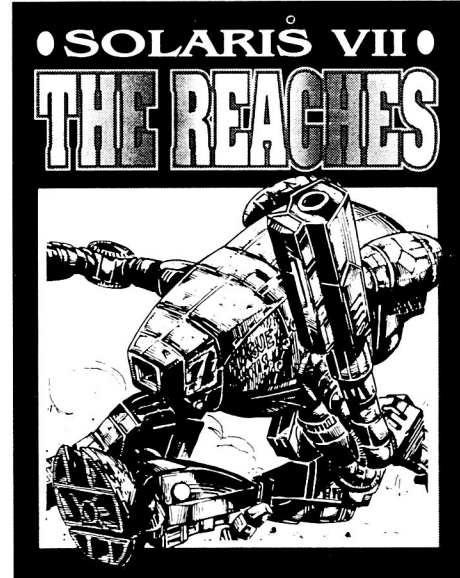
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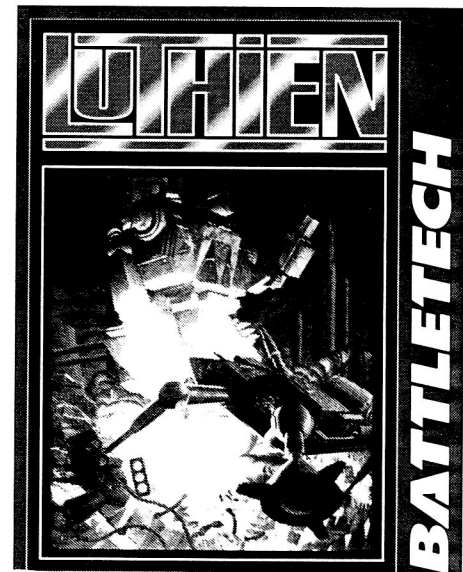
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From Pacific Rim Publishing Company
a few remaining BattleTechnology, the War Years,
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BattleTechnology #22, due in December 1993



The Inner Sphere has never been a stable environment for communication. BattleTechnology, as a medium for information, has always labored to report the facts as fairly and as completely as possible. In that task, the magazine's staff has been opposed by politicians seeking to control the truth, by soldiers wanting to prevent the spread of information with possible military usage, and by the disruption and violence of war itself.

Professor Donald L. Harrison and Professor John Merriken Preston, who had previously collaborated to discover a cache of de-circulated copies of BattleTechnology, have combined their efforts once again. And — again — they have been successful. This time, they have accessed a number of copies of BattleTechnology issues which were, for various reasons, not fully-circulated. These magazines are virtually unknown in some parts of the Inner Sphere.

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