

Issue 0202

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BattleTechnology

The Magazine of Combat in the 31st Century



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BattleTechnology

The Magazine of Combat in the 31st Century

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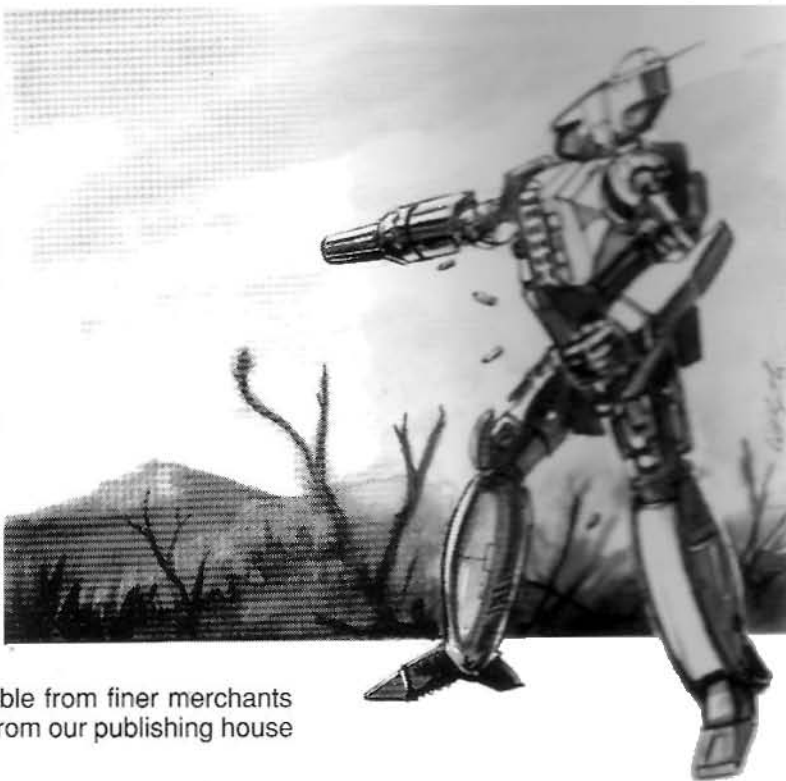
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The Magazine of Combat in the 31st Century

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"The Conscience of a Would-Be King:
An Interview with Hanse Davion"
by Michael A. Stackpole
"Max" by W. R. Shumaker
"Cavalry: Tactics and Applications for a New Age,"
"Cavalry Vehicles," and "Strike at Wittengate"
by Thomas S. Gressman
"Banshee-S" by Bob Charrette
"Challenger" by Steven L. Forsythe
"Banner of Young Davion" by J. Andrew Keith
All other writing by William H. Keith, Jr.

About the Cover:

It's hover tanks against Battle-Mechs as a 31st-century Light Brigade charges into the Valley of Death. The cover shows Captain Verna LeMann of the Royal Grays cavalry militia during her charge against Kurita heavies at Harmony Pass. The engagement is described in this issue's BattleTips on page 12.

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OPENING SHOTS

Just because you're paranoid...

...doesn't mean they're *not* out to get you!

Perceptive BattleTechnology readers will be keenly aware that the last issue, dated February 3028, was a bit late. Readers with the keen observation and lightning mental reflexes possessed by highly-trained MechWarriors will note that the issue number on that front cover is 0201—meaning the first issue of our second calendar year of publication—while our various Simulator rules variants refer to the *same* issue as 0103—the third issue of our first year.

As things were originally planned, our third issue would have been out in December. Unfortunately, a series of unforeseen difficulties arose to plague us.

Chief among these was the mysterious obliteration of three of BattleTechnology's regional offices, on Luthien, on Tharkad, and on Atreus. Authorities within the Draconis Combine, the Lyran Commonwealth, and the Free Worlds League have all independently assured us that these events were isolated and coincidental, the work of aberrant individuals... possibly irate literary critics.

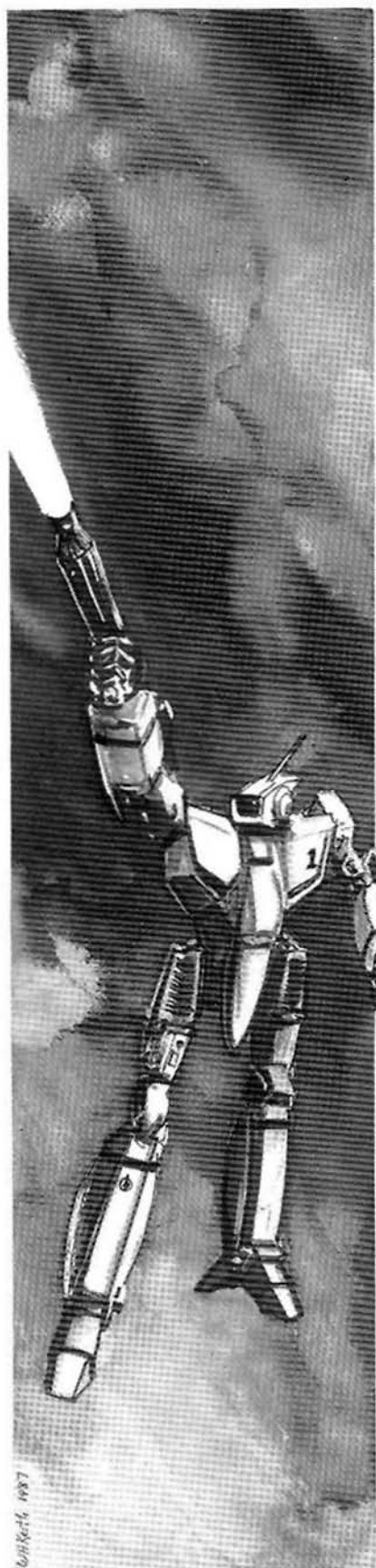
While this theory is certainly a possibility, we wonder if there might not be something more to it than this, something conspiratorial. We have discounted the rumors that local police kept secret the small, black, origami cats discovered among the ruins at each site, but there continue to be persistent rumors that Someone wants to silence BattleTechnology forever. Who that Someone is is a matter for conjecture. Suspicions range from the Nekekami (a secret mercenary unit featured in a BattleTechnology exposé in Issue 0102) to the Bereiter Arms Company (displeased with our reviews of their products). Internal police units within the Draconis Combine are investigating reports that a small, well-organized band of BattleTechnology subscribers may be exacting revenge for late delivery of the magazine.

In any case, let me take this opportunity to assure all of BattleTechnology's readers that we intend to continue publishing this magazine despite all threats, attempts at coercion, or acts of violence. BattleTechnology is dedicated to providing MechWarriors from all of the Successor State Houses with news from everywhere within the Inner Sphere, without favoritism, propaganda, or political manipulation.

We do sincerely apologize to you all for the delay in Issue 0103/0201. New offices for our staffs on Luthien and Tharkad have been secured, and they will be in full operation just as soon as survivors can be located or replacements can be trained. MechWarrior readers interested in news from the Free Worlds can be assured that we have not forgotten them. It may simply take us a bit longer to reorganize on Atreus, since the blast in our offices there took out most of a city block.

Meanwhile, be it known that the Rules Variants in 0201 will henceforth and forever be referred to in future issues as 0201-A and 0201-B. *This* issue is 0202. Next issue, which is scheduled to cover news within the Capellan Confederation, will be 0203. It is fortunate indeed that the "coincidences" on Luthien, Tharkad, and Atreus did not extend to Sian as well!

William H. Keith Jr.



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BattleTechnology News Service

PEACE A POSSIBILITY

Dateline: Tharkad—The announcement made earlier this year of the impending marriage of Prince Hanse Davion of the Federated Suns to Archon-Designate Melissa Steiner of the Lyran Commonwealth has raised widespread speculations about the possibility of peace. Michael Fyhne, Duke of Arcturus, was quoted last week as saying that the much-talked-about alliance between the two houses could well be Man's best hope of a lasting peace.

"We've been balanced too long against the points of five drawn daggers," the Duke said. "The alliance between Davion and Steiner would change that old balance of power and eliminate the rivalry which brought down the old Star League in the first place."

Government officials on Tharkad refused comment. One Lyran official, however, was quoted as saying, "I think the marriage is going to bring us peace in our time."

The Duke's suggestion that peace was a possible result of the marriage alliance between Hanse Davion and Melissa Steiner brought only subdued comment from the capital of the Federated Suns. "Peace? It's a possibility," said Colonel William Moore of Davion's Public Information Office. "Let's hope Liao and Kurita see things the same way."

Continuing war has been a fact of life for the citizens of all of the Successor State Houses for centuries. It is generally acknowledged that the conflict known formally as the Third Succession War, which began in 2866 with the invasion of coreward portions of the Lyran Commonwealth by Draconis Combine forces, has long since petered out due to the mutual exhaustion of the combatants. Raids and skirmishes continue along all of the House frontiers, with no formal cessation of hostilities.

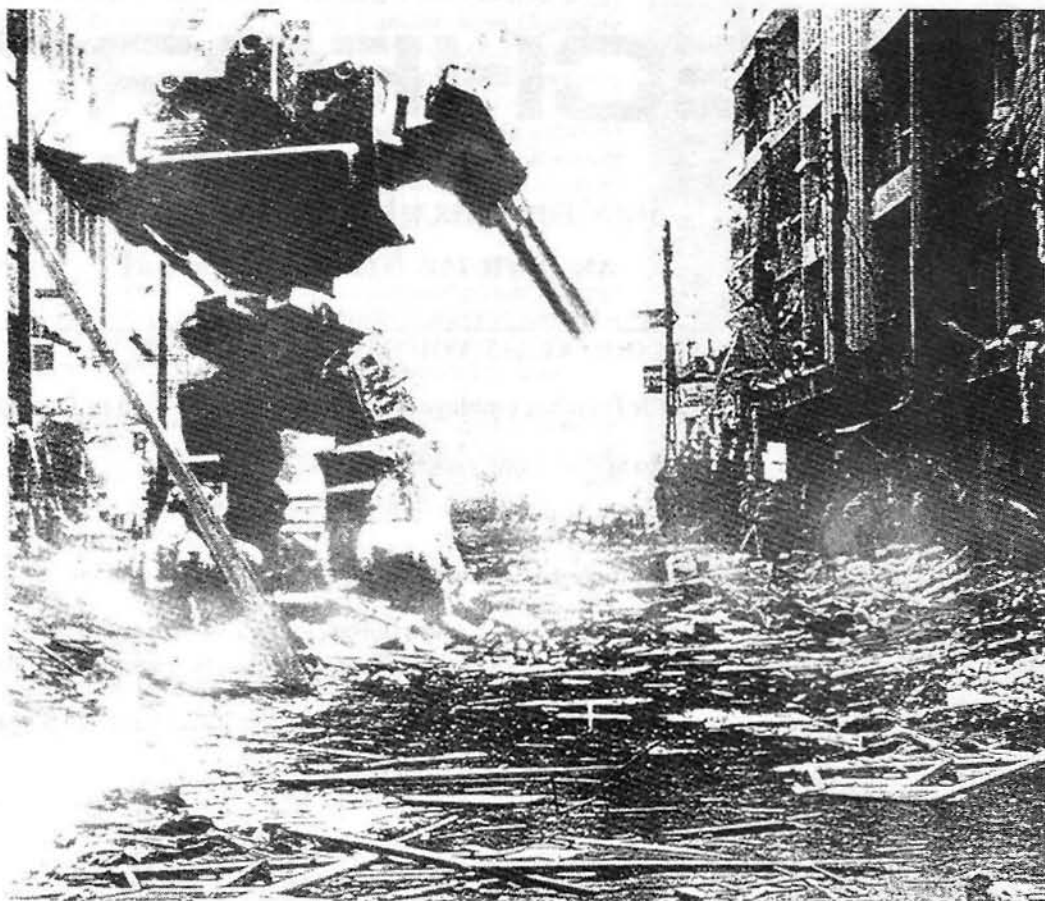
News of the alliance has raised hopes that a firm Davion-Steiner union would be so powerful that the other three major houses would be forced to fall in line behind Hanse Davion. Rather than risk defeat on the battlefield, Houses Kurita, Marik, and Liao might sue for peace—or voluntarily join the alliance—to avoid being left out as plans for a new Star League are drawn up.

Optimism over the alliance is not universal, however. Government officials on Atreus, Sian, and Luthien all refused comment. A usually reliable source on Luthien, however, assured BattleTechnology correspondents that the announcement earlier this year has raised grave concerns within the Draconis Combine government. "All of the big bosses are in an uproar," the source reported. "They don't like this one bit."

If optimism and acceptance of the alliance are not universal, however, it is certain that war-sickness is. "It can't continue," one Davion official said, on condition of anonymity. "The Third War has us all worn down to where we can scarcely defend ourselves against pirates and bandits out on the Periphery. These raids and harassing strikes we've been seeing would be nothing compared to what a fourth major war would bring on all of the houses."

The official added, "We must have peace. Another big war will ruin us all."

Right: "Another big war will ruin us all." A Kurita Rifleman photographed in central New Derry, Galtor III, during the recent campaign on that border world. Growing concerns that continued war could bring on the end of technic civilization have fed speculations that a Davion-Steiner alliance could mean final and lasting peace.



BattleTechnology News Service

Mystery Blasts Rip Successor State Capitals

Dateline: Exeter—Members of the staff at the editorial offices of BattleTechnology on Exeter today revealed that continued delays in the publication of the magazine were the result of explosions which destroyed their regional news offices on Luthien, Tharkad, and Atreus. "It's a systematic campaign against us," one staffer said, on condition of anonymity. "The police on Atreus say a gas main exploded. That whole planet has been powered by fusion plants for centuries. On Tharkad, they're saying it was an aberrant individual with a home-made bomb. The security forces on Luthien claim the blast there was the result of a freak hit by lightning. But I don't think any of them are telling all they know."

Other staff members at the magazine's head office on Exeter reported that "steps are being taken" to insure the survival of BattleTechnology. "We've put the call out for mercenaries," said one. "Anyone tries to do that here on Exeter is going to be in for a surprise!"



Above: Remnants of the local offices of BattleTechnology magazine on Luthien. Similar destruction occurred simultaneously on Tharkad and Atreus. A coincidence?

Galahad '28 Plans Announced

Dateline: New Avalon—An official spokesman for Prince Hanse Davion, ruler of the Federated Suns, formally announced plans for this year's wargame exercises. The controversial military exercises, code named "Galahad," have been held each year since 3026.

"Galahad is intended to demonstrate our preparedness and our strength of purpose," said Colonel William Moore of Davion's Public Information Office. "Critics insist the maneuvers are inflammatory, stirring up raids and intel-gathering probes. We insist they make the opposition think twice about launching a major campaign."

Reports of major troop and BattleMech movements along the frontier with the Capellan Confederation brought an angry response from House Liao officials. "Davion is shifting everything he has to our borders," Major Xiang Tse-Sung of the Sian Information Services reported. "He will find he cannot intimidate the free peoples of the Confederation with bluffs, threats, and military parades."

Special Late News Bulletin: Wolf's Dragoons On The Run

Dateline: Luthien—Reliable sources on Luthien this week revealed to BattleTechnology that the contract of Wolf's Dragoons, a celebrated BattleMech mercenary regiment, with House Kurita, expired this month. Further reports, at this time unconfirmed, suggest that combat has broken out between Wolf's Dragoons and regular elements of the House Kurita military forces. The cause of this combat, the current location of Wolf's Dragoons, and the mercenary regiment's destination and future plans are all unknown.

BattleTechnology's informants did reveal, however, that savage fighting has been reported on both Misery and Capra, Combine worlds recently occupied by the Dragoons. Combine government officials could not be reached for comment.



The Dragonslayers

With this entry, *BattleTechnology* continues its exclusive service to those of its readers who are themselves mercenary soldiers, Techs, or MechWarriors, describing and appraising a potential market for their services as mercenaries. In this case, the market is an independent BattleMech company currently in the employ of House Davion, now actively seeking replacements to make up losses recently suffered in battle.

As described in previous *Hiring Hall* columns, a three-letter code has been developed to rate each prospective employer reviewed by *BattleTechnology*. These letter codes, ranging from A (very good) to Z (very bad) provide insight into possible advantages and disadvantages which must be weighed by mercenaries considering hiring themselves out to the employer in question.

The areas rated through this code are:

NEED: How frequently does the employer hire mercenaries? High ratings indicate a continual need. Low ratings suggest that new openings are rare.

PAY: How good is the pay? High values suggest above-average pay scales. Low values indicate low pay or, possibly, a history of non-compliance with contracts.

CONDITIONS: What are the usual conditions under which mercenaries work? High values suggest access to R&R facilities, service on an Earthlike world, or "soft tickets" such as ceremonial guard duty or providing escort for nobles at court. A low rating means poor or unpleasant conditions, such as duty at an isolated outpost or in a hostile environment.

As always, contract openings, pay, and conditions under the same employer may vary tremendously depending on circumstances or on changes unreported to *BattleTechnology* since the basic research was done. These code values are intended as guidelines in the presentation of a reader's service. *BattleTechnology* assumes no responsibility, written or implied, for damages, costs, or casualties incurred through service to mercenary employers screened in this column.

The Dragonslayers
Rating Code: J/K/U



Above: The emblem of the Dragonslayers recognizes the unit's beginnings as lancers and honors its long history of combat service against House Kurita.

UNIT HISTORY

The mercenary unit known today as the Dragonslayers traces its history back to 2866, when Reginald Killian, Duke of Delavon, used his personal fortune to form and equip a line Davion BattleMech unit during the opening months of the Third Succession War. Entering the rosters as the 1st Delavon Lancers, the unit distinguished itself in several actions within the Draconis Marches. Though it began at slightly less than full company strength, it quickly expanded to three regular companies of BattleMechs, plus three auxiliary platoons of mechanized infantry.

In 2896, during the invasion of Lapida II, the 1st Lancers took part in the fighting in the rugged uplands north of Scaleandro. With victory secured, they were assigned the duty of guarding the captured port against incursions by marauding guerillas.

A sudden thrust by Kurita forces hidden in forest cover nearby surprised and overwhelmed the unit which, at the time, had only four light 'Mechs activated and on perimeter defense. Eighteen of the unit's 'Mechs were captured intact, another five destroyed. Worse, Kurita infantry ran wild through the regiment's encampment, destroying supplies and slaughtering personnel indiscriminately. Colonel Victor Rasmussen was captured and subjected to prolonged "interrogation," apparently because of unfounded or malicious rumors that the 1st Lancers had been guilty of atrocities earlier in the campaign.

His son Erik assumed command of the unit's remnants. Against direct orders to the contrary, he led the Lancers into Kurita-held Scaleandro. The elder Rasmussen's body was returned to Davion lines, cradled in the hands of Erik's *Shadow Hawk*.

Rasmussen and his officers were later court martialed and dismissed for their disobedience to orders at Scaleandro, and the unit punished by being forbidden to display its battle honors for one year. The regiment's protest was not formally referred to as mutiny... but the decision was quickly made that the 1st Lancers were now too small to constitute a regiment, too broken to be incorporated into other units. The 1st Delavon Lancers were disbanded.

Erik Rasmussen promptly organized the surviving MechWarriors into a mercenary company, named Dragonslayers in token of the blood feud which now existed between the unit and the legions of House Kurita. New members were required to swear an oath, vowing vengeance upon Kurita and his minions "to the end of time." Initially, the unit served solely with House Steiner, mistrusting the possibility of a second "betrayal" by House Davion. Eventually, memory of the Rasmussen court martial faded... but not the oath of vengeance against the Combine.

The Dragonslayers have remained in service for 132 years. In that time, they have served with every major Successor State house save House Kurita, as well as executing contracts with several score lesser houses, periphery states, and private organizations requiring military services. Though always referred to as a regiment, their actual field strength has varied from as much as a short battalion to as few as eight 'Mechs organized as an understrength company.

A well-known trademark of the Dragonslayers is their prominent display of the unit's battle honors on their 'Mechs' armor at all times. In modern combat, these are most often painted on 'Mech armor only for special occasions, parades, and reviews and painted out before combat. The Lancers, however, have maintained the tradition of displaying their battle honors even during extended campaigns, in memory of the court martial on Lapida II long ago.

RECENT CAMPAIGN HISTORY

After an extended tour of service with House Steiner, during which time they saw duty along the Kurita frontier opposite Verthandi during the unrest generated by the rebellion there, the Dragonslayers signed on with House Davion in anticipation of increased military activity along the Draconis Marches during the upcoming Galahad '28 wargame campaigns. Curiously, while the unit continues to maintain its old blood feud with House Kurita, it is not averse to signing on with the House which originally ordered it to disband. Individual unit members claim there is no ill-will towards the Federated Suns. Indeed, one old sergeant, in response to a direct query, simply grinned and claimed that any enemy of Kurita was a friend of theirs.

They are currently stationed on Exeter but expect to be ordered to a world closer to the border as part of the large-scale maneuvers and troop movements planned by the Federated Suns for this summer.

STRENGTH

The Dragonslayers currently muster 3 combat BattleMech lances, plus one reserve/training lance. The Regimental Commanding Officer, Colonel George R. Conrad, is a veteran commander with 18 years' of combat experience, five of those years with the 'Slayers.

Parties interested in the unit make-up of the Dragonslayers may be interested in looking at the scenario on page 56 of this issue of BattleTechnology, where a recent battle of the Dragonslayers is described. In addition to the 'Mechs engaged at Volta, the regiment fields two full armored platoons and one mechanized infantry platoon as conventional ground support. The total strength of the "regiment" is listed as 214 combat personnel, 25 senior Techs, plus 345 astechs and assorted service, maintenance, and support personnel.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Dragonslayers suffered heavy casualties in the Kurita raid on Romulus during their contract with House Steiner, including the loss of four 'Mechs and 42 men. Having signed on with House Davion, they are actively recruiting personnel in all branches in order to build up their strength before they are placed on active duty. A unit spokesman reported to BattleTechnology that they hope to replace their losses and even, if possible, to extend their strength to as much as two full companies. While MechWarriors with their own BattleMechs are most eagerly sought, of course, the spokesman indicated that combat veteran infantrymen, armor troopers, and Techs are also needed.

ASSESSMENT

It is difficult to rate the Dragonslayers according to BattleTechnology's usual mercenary employer rating code, since, in this case, the employer is itself a mercenary unit. Obviously, such factors as pay and working conditions will vary, depending on the ticket the unit happens to have taken.

The unit's history provides a fair set of guidelines for mercenaries interested in signing on with it, however. Since 3023, the Dragonslayers have participated in twelve major battles and hundreds of minor skirmishes. Of the twelve battles, only one, against Hendrik of Oberon in 3027, was fought against an enemy other than forces belonging to House Kurita. The unit has a long history of combat and has racked up an impressive array of battle honors, all of which, as explained earlier, are displayed at all times on the torsos of their 'Mechs and the hulls of their armored vehicles.

The unit is organized along democratic lines. MechWarriors and senior non-Mech personnel vote on acceptance of contracts and distribution of booty. Pay is arranged through regimental shares, and a Regimental fund is maintained to provide funds for education of unit dependents and pensions for retirees. Warriors who were interviewed by BattleTechnology were almost fiercely devoted to the regiment and to Colonel Conrad. Morale seems high, as is the unit's tactical competence. They are classified as a veteran unit.

If there is a negative aspect to service with this unit, it must be the blood feud the Dragonslayers maintain against House Kurita. Though it has been suggested that this feud is the primary motivating force behind the 'Slayers uniformly high morale, it must be remembered that command judgement during battle requires cool heads and unimpassioned reason. The Dragonslayers have been cited by their employers on more than one occasion for recklessness, as well as for bravery in combat.

RESTRICTIONS

Restrictions are few. The unit has never hired anyone who has served as a regular in House Kurita forces, but several of its current members have previously served as mercenaries in Kurita's employ. One trooper, asked if a merc had to hate Dragons to join, simply shrugged and said, "Doesn't matter. We'll teach 'em to hate." Indeed, there appears to be a kind of fatalism about the unit, which pictures itself as

locked in a kind of mystic embrace with the legions of House Kurita, doomed to fight Kurita until the foe is destroyed, or they themselves are dead. This is reflected in the names of some of the unit's BattleMechs: *A Kuritist's Death*, *Death Lock*, and *Dragon's Bane*.

RATINGS

The "J" rating assigned for "Need" in the rating code reflects the fact that there is a high turnover at every level within the regiment. Few warriors can maintain the level of continuing hatred against House Kurita which passes for recreation within the 'Slayers, and many veterans have moved on to other units. There are always openings in the 'Slayers for new members, especially for those with five or more years of combat experience.

The poor rating for conditions reflects the fact that the Dragonslayers are most frequently in front-line combat. Though they have taken non-combat tickets (such as training and industrial security) during lean times, they are found in the forefront of the fighting whenever times are, in their words, "interesting."

Overall, the Dragonslayers are an excellent choice as a potential mercenary employer... if you possess an undying and fanatical hatred for House Kurita and its minions. This is definitely not a unit for mercs interested in soft or safe duty behind the lines!



Above: WHM-6R *Warhammer* piloted by Colonel George R. Conrad, Dragonslayers mercenary unit. Note battle honors displayed on upper left torso.



Laser Rifles

by the BattleTechnology Staff

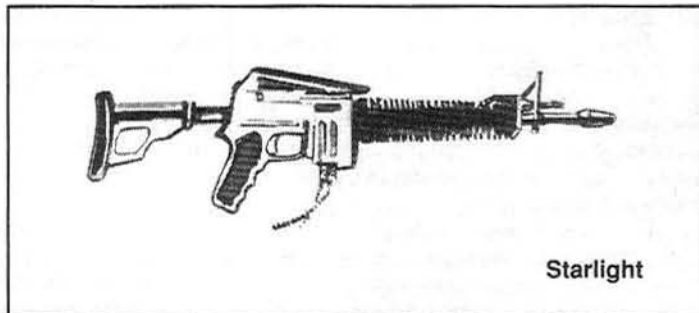
They're becoming harder and harder to find, for throughout human space the breakdown of civilization has ruined the factories and killed or scattered the technicians capable of assembling these legendary weapons. They combine the awesome, high-tech wizardry of modern energy weapons with the range of conventional rifles and the rapid-fire havoc of machine guns. Most combat infantrymen would gladly put up with the disadvantages generally attributed to them—their weight, their clumsiness, and the need for bulky power packs. Battlefield units fortunate enough to be equipped with laser rifles can be as effective, and as feared, as conventional infantry units much larger in size.

Laser rifles have won a considerable reputation for themselves during the past nine hundred years. First introduced as personal infantry combat weapons late in the 21st century, the earliest models were massive, semi-portable energy cannon far more unwieldy than models in use today. The laser rifle reached its current level of sophistication during the height of the Star League era perhaps four centuries later, and designs have changed little since then.

Laser weapons fire beams of coherent light. Power output is measured in megajoules (millions of joules, abbreviated "mj"), and refers to the number of watts of power applied to the target per second. By way of comparison, 5 megajoules represents the energy equivalent to the explosion of 1 kilo of TNT. A laser weapon rated at .8 mj with a .01-second pulse would actually deliver $.8/100 = .008$ megawatts of energy to the target in its 1/100 second of operation.

As with laser pistols (discussed in BattleTechnology Issue 0101), there are two basic categories of laser rifle. Pulse lasers fire extremely short bursts of light, generally lasting on the order of 1/100 of a second. Beam lasers fire a continuous beam. While more powerful and carrying a greater destructive punch than pulse lasers, they require heavy backpacks to meet their power requirements and are prone to power overloads and core chamber burnout. Pulse lasers are less powerful but somewhat more reliable, and they make up for their lack of punch through the capability of cycling a number of shots in a short period of time, in a manner similar to SMGs.

Pulse lasers are more commonly encountered on the modern battlefield than the heavier beam weapons. Neither weapon type is easy to find anymore, however, and personnel skilled in servicing and repairing them are becoming scarce. Several professional scavengers have made reputations and fortunes for themselves by stumbling across forgotten Star League caches of these almost mythical weapons.



Starlight

Optronics M2444A2 Starlight

Weapon Type: Laser Rifle
Manufacturer: General Optronics
Operation: Pulse laser
Weight (w/o magazine): 5.1 kg
Length: 98 cm
Power: Optronics T7R StarPower Belt pack
Power Pack Weight: 2.2 kg
Power Output: 1 megajoule
Typical Shot Output: .045 mw/.01 second
Power Pack Life: 100 pulses at standard output
Effective Range

Short: 60 meters
Medium: 120 meters
Long: 240 meters

Recharge Rate: About 35 hours, depending on power source
Alternate Power Source: Optronics Las-R power mag
Output: .2 mj (20 shots)
Weight: .4 kg
Reload Time: 10 seconds

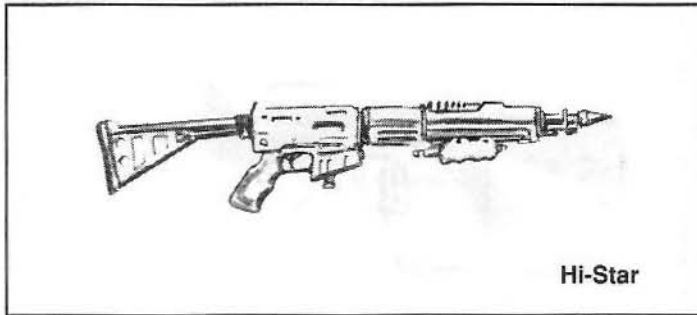
Weapon Reliability: 97%
Base Cost: Cb 1,200
Power Pack Base Cost: Cb 750

Notes:

General Optronics, manufacturer of the renowned M2412A1 Starflash laser pistol, designed and tested the Starlight pulse laser rifle in 2444. The weapon is a prime example of high-tech laser weaponry from the pre-Star League era popularly known as the Age of War, when it was used extensively by Terran Hegemony forces. The basic design remained unchanged throughout succeeding centuries, and by the outbreak of the First Succession War (2785) it was being manufactured under license by various manufacturers on scores of worlds within all of the major houses.

The weapon is heavy and clumsy by later, Star-League standards. The belt-slung power pack, while lighter than most backpack units, is considered a handicap by many infantrymen who prefer to keep such encumbrances slung from their shoulders rather than on their hips where they can be snagged during movement through brush or flat on the ground. Indeed, many belt units have been modified in such a way that they can be slung from the shoulders instead, or carried inside a field-issue backpack.

In all other respects, the Starlight is a good weapon, with fair range for a man-portable laser, and adequate hitting power and beam focus well beyond usual infantry combat ranges.



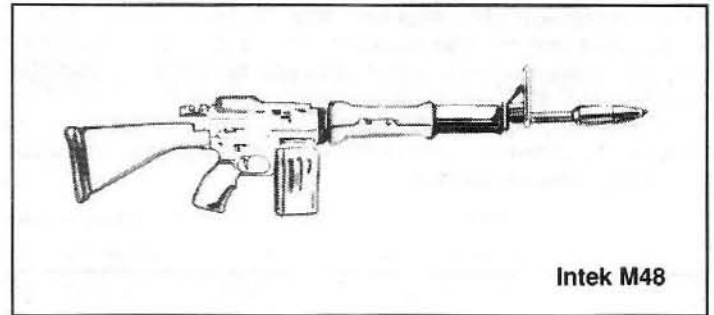
Hi-Star

Martell Hi-Star Laser Rifle

Weapon Type: Pulse Laser Rifle
Manufacturer: Martell Industries
Operation: Pulse laser
Weight (w/o magazine): 4.8 kg
Length: 102 cm
Power: Diverse Electronics Backpack
Power Pack Weight: 15 kg
Power Output: 1 megajoule
Typical Shot Output: .5 mw/.1 second
Power Pack Life: 1 minute at continuous beam
Alternate Power Source: Sunbeam Oneshot Powpac
Output: .3 mj (single shot)
Weight: .2 kg
Reload Time: 10 seconds
Alternate Power Source: Intek Lasercharge magazine
Output: .2 mj (20 shots)
Weight: .5 kg
Reload Time: 10 seconds
Effective Ranges:
Short: 60 meters
Medium: 150 meters
Long: 255 meters
Recharge Rate: About 40 hours, depending on power source
Weapon Reliability: 94% (80%/30 seconds on continuous beam)
Base Cost: Cb 1,250
Power Backpack Base Cost: Cb 1,700
Powpac Reloads: Cb 5 for pack of 10
Magazine Power Pack Reloads: Cb 10

Notes: The Martell Hi-Star was designed specifically as a military pulse laser and has seen service throughout the Inner Sphere since 2745. The heavy (15 kg) Diverse Electronics backpack is a traditional source of grumbling and discontent among the soldiers who have to carry the thing, and the weapon has a notorious reputation for overloading the power core, resulting in a melted tube lining and "cold squeeze"—a failure to fire. Reliability testing shows, however, that overall the Martell pulse laser system is fairly reliable under battlefield conditions. As with many other weapons, its reputation for poor service is probably undeserved, the result of exaggeration by those troops who experienced difficulties with it.

The Hi-Star delivers as much destructive energy to the target as some Mech-mounted small lasers. However, the punch of a single pulse (approximately 500 kw of power) is spread out over a tenth of a second, which makes it somewhat less efficient than typical 1/100-second small laser pulses. Though only moderately effective against heavy armor, it is still a fearsome weapon when directed against lightly-armored troops or small vehicles.



Intek M48

Intek M2448 Laser Rifle

Weapon Type: Laser Rifle
Manufacturer: Intek Industries
Operation: Beam laser
Weight (w/o magazine): 5 kg
Length: 98 cm
Power: Intek Standard Powerpack Mk III
Power Pack Weight: 8.4 kg
Power Output: 4 megajoule
Power Pack Life: 1 minute at continuous beam
Alternate Power Source: Sunbeam Oneshot Powpac
Output: .3 mw (single shot)
Weight: .2 kg
Reload Time: 10 seconds
Alternate Power Source: Intek Lasercharge magazine
Output: .2 mw (20 shots)
Weight: .5 kg
Reload Time: 10 seconds
Effective Ranges:
Short: 60 meters
Medium: 150 meters
Long: 255 meters
Recharge Rate: About 40 hours, depending on power source
Weapon Reliability: 96% (80%/30 seconds on continuous beam)
Base Cost: Cb 1,250
Power Backpack Base Cost: Cb 1,700
Powpac Reloads: Cb 5 for pack of 10
Magazine Power Pack Reloads: Cb 10

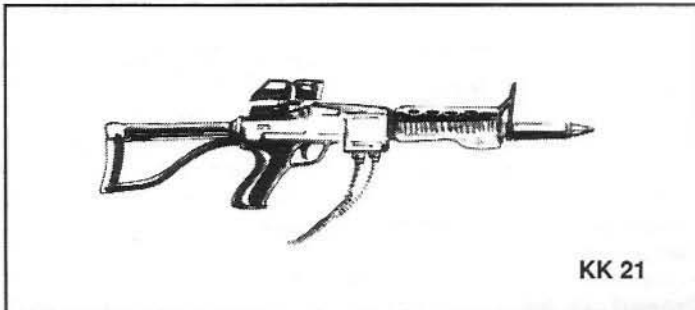
Notes: The Intek Laser Rifle is one of the more common examples of beam laser rifles still encountered on modern battlefields. It is a good, rugged, reliable weapon, identical in design and operation to the original model first marketed in 2448. As originally conceived, a power cable from the base of the Mark III powerpack is plugged into the weapon's receiver core in front of the trigger. The weapon is capable of putting out a continuous beam for about one minute, useful for drilling through heavy armor, but at the risk of a core burnout ruining the weapon. Standard tactical doctrine calls for single, light taps on the trigger, squeezing off single "bursts" of a half-second or less. The backpack holds power enough for up to 100 such shots before needing a recharge.

Standard power pack magazines hold enough power for 20 shots and are reloaded like standard magazines for assault rifles or SMGs. Many units use these instead of the rare and expensive backpacks.

With backpacks and power magazines becoming increasingly hard to find, many planetary and company armories have come up with a substitute, a magazine "powpac" storing power enough for a

single .3-megawatt shot. After each shot, the burned-out magazine is discarded and must be replaced. The advantage is that these magazines are relatively cheap and can be produced in large numbers. The disadvantages are obvious.

The weapon has excellent range for a laser rifle but does not cause as much damage, even within effective ranges, as other laser weaponry of the same class.



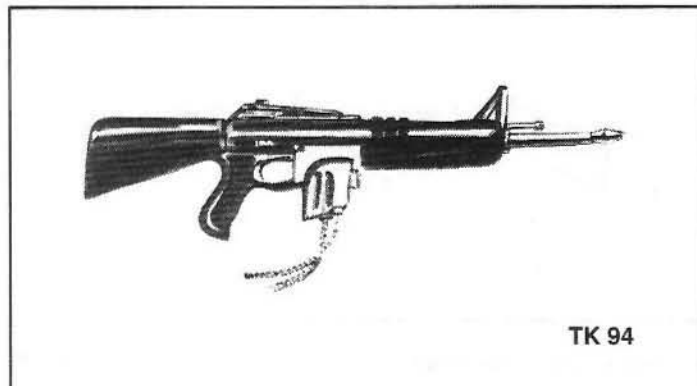
KK 21

Kogyo-Khorsakov Model 2821 Laser Rifle

Weapon Type: Laser Rifle
Manufacturer: Kogyo Industries
Operation: Pulse laser
Weight (w/o magazine): 5.2 kg
Length: 100 cm
Power: Black Dragon PowerPack
Power Pack Weight: 8.8 kg
Power Output: .8 megajoule
Typical Shot Output: .05 mw/.01 second
Power Pack Life: 100 pulses at standard output
Alternate Power Source: Intek Lasercharge magazine
Output: .2 mj (20 shots)
Weight: .5 kg
Reload Time: 10 seconds
Effective Range
Short: 50 meters
Medium: 100 meters
Long: 200 meters
Recharge Rate: About 40 hours, depending on power source
Weapon Reliability: 98%
Base Cost: Cb 1,700
Power Backpack Base Cost: Cb 800

Notes: Designed and manufactured by the same company responsible for the well-known and highly-respected KK 98 laser pistol, the KK 21 laser rifle is most commonly found among forces serving with House Kurita, though captured weapons have made their way to others of the Successor States in recent years. Its extremely simple and rugged design have made it one of the most dependable of all laser rifles available today.

Like many other modern laser rifles, the KK 21 is frequently modified by weapons Techs and armorers to accept the Intek Lasercharge magazines or their equivalent. While not as powerful as backpack chargers, powerpack magazines offer a cheap and relatively available alternative to heavy, expensive, and increasingly scarce backpack power units.



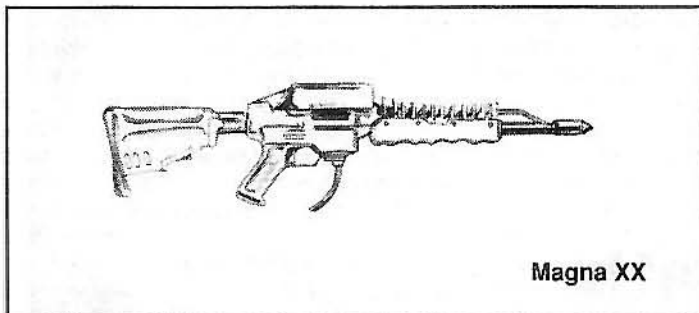
TK 94

Thorvald & Koch TK 94 Laser Rifle

Weapon Type: Pulse Laser Rifle
Manufacturer: Thorvald & Koch
Operation: Pulse laser
Weight (w/o magazine): 5 kg
Length: 104 cm
Power: Sunbeam Electric 12000 shoulder pack
Power Pack Weight: 2.5 kg
Power Output: 1 megajoule
Typical Shot Output: .04 mw/.01 second
Power Pack Life: 100 pulses at standard output
Alternate Power Source: Magna V7T Powerpack
Output: 2 megajoule
Weight: 7.5 kg
Alternate Power Source: Intek Lasercharge magazine
Output: .2 mj (20 shots)
Weight: .5 kg
Reload Time: 10 seconds
Effective Ranges:
Short: 50 meters
Medium: 100 meters
Long: 200 meters
Recharge Rate: About 30 hours, depending on power source
Weapon Reliability: 97%
Base Cost: Cb 1,500
Power Source Base Cost:
Shoulderpack (Sunbeam Electric 12000): Cb 500
Backpack (Magna V7T Powerpack): Cb 1,200
Magazine Power Pack Reloads: Cb 10

Notes: The TK 94 has a well-deserved reputation for durability and hard-hitting effectiveness. Of particular interest is the fact that it uses the same lightweight shoulder pack (the Sunbeam-Electric 12000) used by the TK 70 laser pistol. The shoulder pack has a continuous output of 1 megajoule, with sufficient life for up to 300 standard-setting shots by the TK 70, or up to 100 shots by the TK 94. Multiple power cord outlets allow both weapons to be connected to the same shoulder pack at the same time.

The heavier Magna V7T powerpack (standard for the Magna heavy laser rifle) can be adapted by an experienced Tech for use with the TK 94 with a few hours' work. This does not increase the weapon's effectiveness, but it does increase the number of shots (150 as opposed to 100) before a recharge becomes necessary. The TK 94 can also be adapted to receive Intek Lasercharge magazines, which deliver 20 shots and are then discarded.



Magna XX

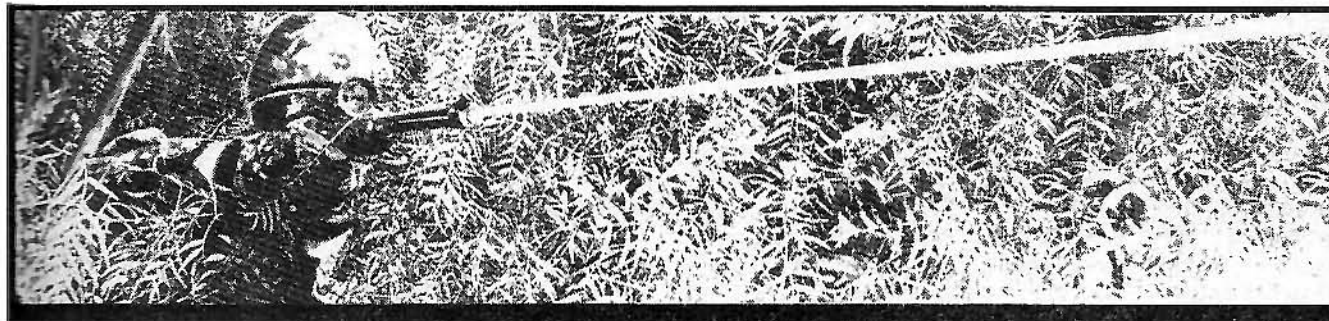
Magna Mark XX Heavy Laser Rifle

- Weapon Type:** Laser Rifle
- Manufacturer:** Magna Industries
- Operation:** Beam laser
- Weight (w/o magazine):** 5 kg
- Length:** 91 cm
- Power:** Magna V7T Powerpack
- Power Pack Weight:** 15 kg
- Power Output:** 2 megajoule
- Power Pack Life:** 1 minute at continuous beam
- Effective Ranges:**
 - Short:** 45 meters
 - Medium:** 105 meters
 - Long:** 150 meters
- Recharge Rate:** About 60 hours, depending on power source
- Weapon Reliability:** 95% (75%/30 seconds on continuous beam)
- Base Cost:** Cb 1,250
- Power Backpack Base Cost:** Cb 1,200

Notes: The Magna laser rifle was designed as a heavy-duty, high-output laser rifle capable of delivering maximum firepower to the target. In terms of sheer destructive power, the Magna is nearly twice as powerful as the Intek rifle, with only a slightly smaller range. Its power pack is heavier and the chance of damage to the weapon during continuous beam output is higher, but some infantrymen prefer the near-legendary "Mag Twenty" over other weapons because of its hard-hitting punch.

One disadvantage is that, due to the design of the power feed bussing and the heavy draw rate, the weapon does not mate well with power magazines. Some weapons have been adapted by armorers in various units and will accept standard magazines such as the Intek Lasercharge mag, but the weapon's higher power requirements result in a delivery of only 8 shots per magazine, instead of the usual 20.

The Magna does not have the range of many laser rifles, but at ranges of less than about 150 meters, it is a fearsome personal weapon.



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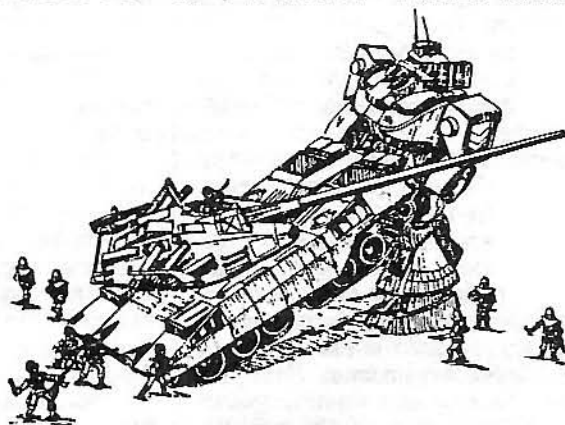
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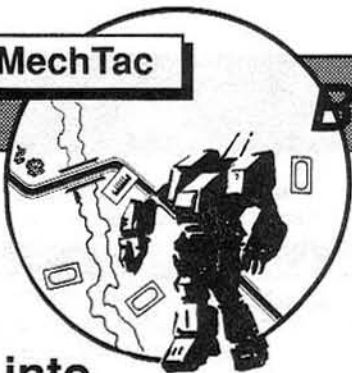


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...into

The Valley of Death

by Lieutenant John Lee

In this issue of *BattleTechnology*, the renowned Colonel Morgan C. Graeme provides an analysis of cavalry tactics in his article, *Cavalry: Tactics and Applications for a New Age*. The article, found on page 34, discusses the use of light cavalry, in particular, light tanks and hovercraft, in 31st century warfare.

The story printed below, submitted by Lieutenant John Lee of MacKenzie's Marauders, arrived at our *BattleTechnology* editorial offices at about the same time as Colonel Graeme's article. Our tactical research staff assures us that this is the best illustration they've seen yet on hownot to use cavalry in modern warfare!

We include it here under our *BattleTips* department heading as a warning against the indiscriminate use of cavalry in *Battle-Mech* combat... and as a tribute to valiant men and women.

Cavalry Charge— Light Armored Cavalry and the Valley of Death!

I won't make apologies for my behavior. Every MechWarrior I knew felt the same way. "The Little People," we dubbed them, or "the Wee Folk," "the Suicide Lights," and other names, more scornful and more uncomplimentary than that. When you're the pilot of a 10-meter tall BattleMech, you're the undisputed king of the modern battlefield. No pun intended: you look down on the motor infantry, the hovercraft, the tanks and other light scout vehicles wrapped in the dust clouds about your armored feet.

Your feelings of superiority become positively insufferable if the little people are local yokels as well. Local planetary militias have the reputation of being unsteady in a fight, poorly trained, poorly led, and more likely than not to bolt at the first sign of an enemy BattleMech.

I'd met the girl in Port Royal the evening after MacKenzie's Marauders touched down. Our introduction wasn't exactly what you would call ordinary. I'd been walking into the Port Royal strip to see what the spacetown night life had to offer and been sidetracked to an alleyway by a hellacious clatter and a high-pitched scream.

She was cornered in the alley's dead end by a pair of grimmers each twice her size. Both the clatter and the shriek were coming from a third grimmer lolling in a cacophony of overturned trash cans, clutching a highly sensitive part of his anatomy with both hands. Evidently, he and his buddies had cornered the girl with the thought of having a little fun. Her answer had incapacitated one of them, and now the other two were mad. Moonlight sparked silver from a vibrodagger in the hand of one of the thugs.

Cursing the idiocy which had made me leave my sidearms in the barracks, I stooped on the run, scooped up the circular lid of a trash can and skimmed it like a saucer. The spinning missile connected with the thug's dagger arm. The white hot shaft of the dagger sliced through the garbage lid like a laser through plastic, but a chunk of metal caught his wrist and the blade spun free, shrieking as it bit the brick of the building wall beyond. The grimmer yelled and spun. In the same instant, the girl's long and shapely leg flashed through the air, and a leather boot caught the knife wielder's partner squarely behind his ear. Then I was in close, the heel of my hand snapping up, connecting with the underside of the thug's lower jaw in a blow driven hard, straight up, delivered from the balls of my feet with all the strength I could muster.

Three up, three down... and that's how I met Verna LeMann.

We found a restaurant and a wandering conversation that covered a lot of ground. I talked about my life as a Mech-



Warrior and a member of MacKenzie's Marauders. She talked about growing up on Royal, about a brother she loved in Princeton, off on the east coast, and of a horror at seeing war come to her world. She had been off-world, she admitted, but had returned after the death of her parents in a Kurita raid. She had been taking care of her brother since.

It was over the remnants of the dinner's final course that we got to talking about BattleMechs and the wee folk. The evening had been going splendidly and I was already anticipating the perfect end to the festivities when the conversation shifted to BattleMechs and cavalry. I started talking about the time I was piloting my *Warhammer* through a rabble of light cavalry during a raid on Barlow's Folly. Our 'Mech company had been moving towards the front and had run headlong into a retreating column of cavalry. A 20-ton *Skulker* wheeled scout tank, its armor more rust than alloy, had stalled in the middle of the highway. I laughed as I described the crew leaping for cover as my *Warhammer's* foot sent the vehicle rolling into a ditch.

Verna's eyes flashed anger. "So what makes 'Mech pilots so almighty superior? You think you've cornered the market on battle prowess or something?"

"Aw, c'mon!" I replied. "Light cavalry is great for scouting and harassing the enemy... blowing up unprotected fuel dumps and kindergartens and stuff like that. But when it comes to a stand-up fight, you'd better call in the BattleMechs... because it's a sure bet the other guy is going to have BattleMechs, and you've gotta have 'Mechs to stop 'Mechs!"

"And that gives you the right to kick some cavalryman's tank into the ditch? That makes you no better than those thugs in the alley!"

I studied Verna over the rim of my glass as I took a drink. "So? What's your interest in it, anyway? All warriors feel that way..."

"What the hell do you mean 'all warriors'? Those tankers don't count, I suppose?"

"Hey, easy, girl! Easy! I have nothing against them. But a MechWarrior is a MechWarrior! Grunts and PBIs and pot pushers just aren't in the same league, right? You bring on the 'Mechs, and the small fry have to leave!"

"So what gives you metal jocks such a goddam superior attitude! You walk in on our planet like you own it... and treat anyone who doesn't have BattleMech armor around them like dirt!"

I was beginning to suspect this girl was more than she looked. She was wearing

civilian clothes, but that Quick-Kill kick I'd seen her throw in the alley had laid a bully twice her mass out cold on the pavement, and she'd damn near crippled another before I'd even arrived. Her lithe movements spoke of battle-sharpened reflexes, of skill and training.

I knew she was a local girl. She'd told me she'd grown up in a suburb of Port Royal, but the local yokels didn't train in Quick-Kill. Hell, I'd seen some of the planetary militia drilling, and it was all they could do to keep from falling over their own feet.

"Hey... what gives?" I asked. Things she'd said, hints gleaned from the way she moved and held her body, were all coming together in a larger picture for me. She wasn't just a local girl. She'd had training. "You're not local militia. I'd be willing to bet you've had some 'Mech training."

"You're so hot," she said as she stood up from the table. "You figure it out."

She left me sitting there. My calculating visions of a warm and cuddly conclusion to the evening swept out the restaurant's door... leaving me to pay the bill.

It was two days later that the Kurita forces hit Royal. They managed to pull one sharp maneuver by plotting their breakout at a non-standard JumpPoint less than two a.u.s out-system from Royal. My company was patrolling out Highway 3 east of Port Royal when they came down, shrieking

atop columns of white fusion flame. MacKenzie's Marauders were itching for a fight, but that fight never came because all of a sudden the word came down that Port Royal was lost and we were pulling out.

The command structure was pretty disjointed by that time. The planetary garrison commander was General Howard O. Martell, a pompous little bastard in a pretty uniform who looked great saluting his troops from the reviewing stand but who was more politician than soldier. Colonel MacKenzie was in direct command of our regiment, of course, but we had been brought to Royal and placed under Martell's over-all command. None of us had a high opinion of the man's fighting abilities, though, and there wasn't a warrior among us who wasn't wondering whether any of us would follow his orders once the beams started flying.

We found ourselves in our first pitched battle three days after the snakes took Port Royal. The Marauders were covering the withdrawal of the main body of Martell's troops towards the High Country. They were streaming past us in no particular order that we could see, ragged soldiers clinging to trucks and jitters and personnel carriers, many of them without weapons.

All together, Martell had perhaps ten thousand men under his command... the remnants of an infantry brigade and one light cavalry battalion, the Royal Grays.

Royal II, generally known and catalogued simply as "Royal," is an Earthlike world located in Davion space less than 8 parsecs from the Kurita Frontier. With a moderate climate and abundant natural resources, Royal supports a population of nearly 800 million, extensive agricultural regions, and a modestly growing electronics and tech-support industry.

In March of 3028, probes by House Draconis forces exposed a serious weakness in Davion's frontier defenses. Units formerly stationed at Royal had been withdrawn in preparation for the widely-publicized summer wargames code named Operation: Galahad '28. By dropping JumpShips into the system at a carefully-plotted nonstandard JumpPoint only two astronomical units from Royal itself, the Draconis raiders were able to surprise the local garrison and establish a foothold along the Vaspasian Coast. The planet's capital, Port Royal, fell to the invaders on April 2.

With regular Davion forces engaged elsewhere, defense of the planet fell to local militia forces. These infantry and light armor units had been bolstered just before the invasion by the timely arrival of MacKenzie's Marauders, a mercenary regiment in the employ of House Davion.

Ground command of the Davion operations was the responsibility of Gen. Howard O. Martell of the Port Royal Defense Legion. Gen. Martell, a political appointee, assumed command of the mercenary unit just as the Kurita forces began a thrust east into the high country above the Vaspasian Coast.

The events detailed in this story occurred during the retreat from Port Royal, on April 5, 3028.

We'd not seen much of the Grays during our stay on the planet so far. They'd been deployed north of Port Royal when the Kurita DropShips grounded and had missed most of the fighting there. They were a mix of vehicles, mostly *Pegasus*, *Saracen*, and *Saladin* hover tanks, with a hodgepodge of wheeled and tracked vehicles tagging along in the rear.

"Ah, sure an' begorra... and here come the wee folk." That affected Irish brogue coming over my 'Mech's comlink could only be Patrick O'Hara. "Shall we catch a few, now, Johnny, and keep 'em as pets?"

"Don't know about you, Pat, but I have trouble picking the blamed things up in a *Warhammer*. I just kick 'em aside, myself."

That brought a chuckle, but then Colonel MacKenzie was on the line. "Quiet and look sharp, people. We're reading movement at three-three-oh, coming our way fast and hard."

My *Hammer's* radar had the target, a twinkling of small metal mountains bearing down on us at sixty clicks per. We swung into line abreast between the highway and the bogies and pushed forward, our weapons armed and at the point.

MacKenzie's Marauders is a good, tight unit. Lots of people, when they first hear our name, assume we're an all-*Marauder* unit, and that's not true, of course. Our unit history says we started out as a company of twelve *Marauders* a couple of centuries ago, but 'Mechs have been lost and been replaced since then. That morning on the plains north of Highway 3, A Company of MacKenzie's Marauders boasted four *Marauders* in the fire lance, plus Colonel MacKenzie's *Marauder* for a total of five. My *Warhammer*, Patrick O'Hara's *Crusader*, and Randolph Kreuger's *JagerMech* completed the command lance behind the Colonel's machine, while two *Stingers* and two *Valkyries* made up the recon lance. B and C companies weren't with us that day. They'd already moved north and south to cover an array of passes into the High Country, guarding our way clear of the coastal plains.

We collided with the Kurita line five clicks north of the highway, and knew we were in trouble right from the beginning. There were twelve of us and two full companies of them. We pulled up to the crest of a low ridge and dueled with them for the better part of ten minutes, but we were taking damage from a trio of *Archers* off our right flank, and a mix of six heavies were spilling around our left in an obvious attempt to slip between us and the infantry column on the road. A quick rush by a light lance of three

Panthers and a *Javelin* managed to cut off Joe Lamonte's *Stinger* and bring him down. We saw the flash of his ejection seat as his 'Mech caught fire in an eruption of flame and black smoke, but either his personal com was out or he was dead when he hit the ground, because we weren't reading any lifesigns from his transmitter once he punched out.

Blake's *Marauder* took a crippling hit in his left arm, and O'Hara's *Crusader* was knocked down twice by LRMs arrowing in from those *Archers*. My *Warhammer* took a couple of hits but was still fighting at full cap.

"There's too many of them," Kreuger shouted over the com. I could hear the steady thud-thud-thud of his *JagerMech's* autocannon over the fuzz of static in the background. "We're not holding them!"

"A Company, fall back!" came MacKenzie's order. "Hold 'em as you move, and fall back!"

By that time, we had more targets painted on our cockpit radars. We were already underdogs by two to one, and the bad guys had reinforcements boiling out of Port Royal. You didn't need to be a master strategist to figure that one out. If we stayed

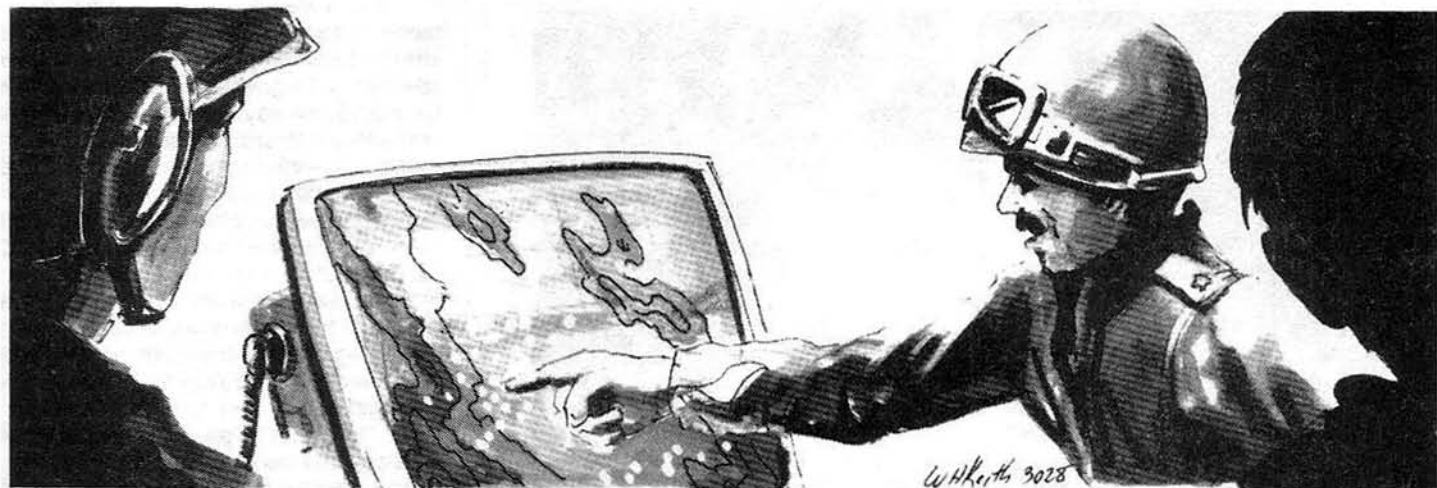
where we were, we'd be surrounded in another hour... and then it would be fight our way out or die.

Instead, we dropped back slowly, keeping up a steady fire. The *Marauders* in our fire lance dropped back first, two to the north, two to the south. Then they held their ground and kept up a steady, thundering fire to left and to right, holding the flankers at bay while the rest of us pulled off the ridge and slipped behind our cover, making for the hills to the east. Then it was our turn to hold while the fire lance dropped back, and it was leapfrog time, line by line, taking turns retreating and fighting as the enemy pressed close behind us. My *Hammer* was realigning as the heat load built up. One of my heat sinks had vanished in a burst of orange flame back on the ridge, and every blast of lightning from my PPCs drove the machine's internal temperature higher.

Then, unexpectedly, miraculously, the pressure was gone. The Kurita 'Mechs had broken off their attack, leaving us retreating unmolested across the plain.

We'd pulled up in a temporary defensive line across Harmony Pass, where Highway 3 cuts through the King Mountains





and into the High Country to the west. It was a good defensive position, with sharp rock walls to north and south, and a fairly-steep drag up which the enemy would have to come if he wanted to get us.

Our action had bought time for the infantry and small stuff to fall back through the pass, but we could tell from our scanner data and the coded radio babble among the Kurita pilots that they were gathering for their next assault. I parked my *Warhammer* in the shade of some trees, dropped my boarding ladder, and climbed down to the ground to stretch my legs. I could hear General Martell's shrill voice rising above the hum and clank of moving machines as I descended to the ground. He was squared off with the Colonel fifty meters away, and his shouts were attracting a crowd.

"You call that a fight, Colonel?" were the first words I heard. "God damn it man, you had the high ground on that ridge, and you backed away and let them take it! What kind of an outfit are you running?"

Colonel MacKenzie's reply was dry ice. "A fighting unit, General... and I intend to keep it that way."

"You ran away..."

"I preserved my unit, General. We were in an untenable position, flanked on both sides by an enemy unit twice our size. We bought you your time to get clear..."

"I always knew you merc bastards weren't worth a Techie's damn! You were brought here to fight, damn it, not show your yellow tails!"

I thought Colonel Mac was going to take that pompous little *schnart* down right then and there. There wasn't a one of us who didn't have battle honors painted on his 'Mech. Martell had enough medals on his jacket to serve as body armor, but there

wasn't one I recognized: gedunk ribbons and attendance awards, every one of them.

Whatever the Colonel was about to say, though, was interrupted by a shout from Diana Vincent from the open cockpit of her *Marauder*. "Company, Colonel! Multiple targets, assault array at ten thousand meters, coming fast!"

One of our Techs had set up a repeater screen by the trees, and I was peering over the Colonel's shoulder as the display came up. The two companies we had tangled with earlier had been reinforced. There were at least 36 'Mechs down the hill, and they were travelling.

for a moment, then shook his head. "No, Sir. It can't be done. Not with one company. I suggest..."

"Damn it, MacKenzie! You're not being paid to suggest! I *order* you to advance!"

The Colonel's voice was low and polite, and very, very formal. "Sir, I respectfully decline the order."

I'd not heard the Colonel refuse a direct order before, though, of course, he had a perfect right to do so. Mercenary units fight by contract, and there is nearly always a clause in the contract which gives the commander that option. It's true. If it weren't set up that way, local commanders and

"Sir, I respectfully decline the order."

The General pointed a shaky finger at the screen. "Colonel, I want you to move in there and stop that column. If they break through this pass, we're finished! *I'm* finished!"

The Colonel turned to look at Martell as if he couldn't quite believe what he'd just heard. "General... that's a nearly a full battalion! We might hold them from a defensive line for a while, but..."

"Did you hear me, Colonel?" The voice grated to a higher pitch. "I want you to advance your company down that slope! Hit them head on, and they'll run!"

I looked at the general in horror. He was throwing our eleven 'Mechs against three times our number, hoping to buy time for his escape.

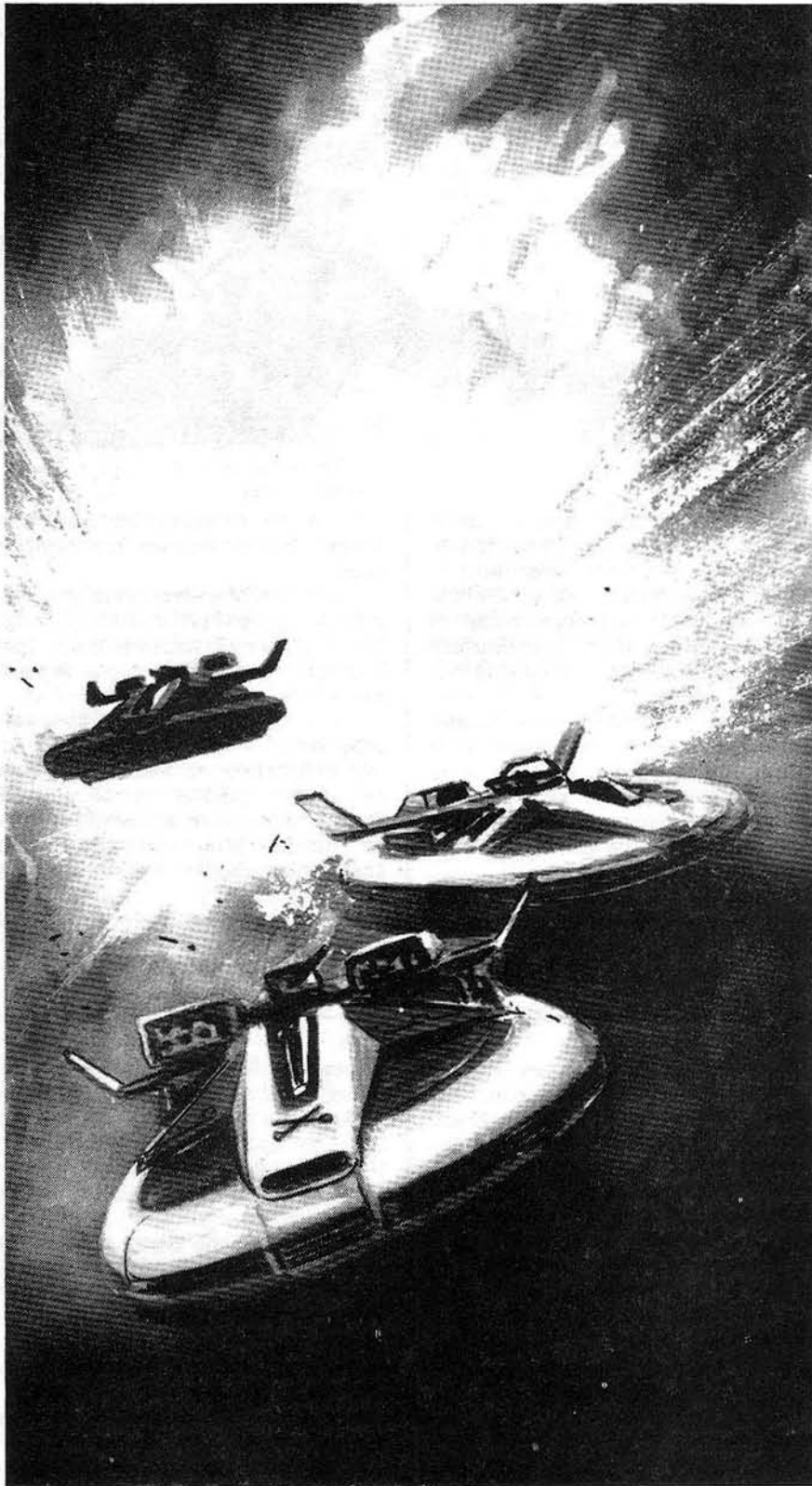
"I wouldn't count on that, General," Colonel Mac replied. He studied the display

regular forces would use the mercs attached to them as cannon fodder and throw-away pieces, with the idea of burning them up before letting their own troops get hurt. Merc units, the good ones, are there to be *used*, not thrown away, and their contracts reflect that.

"Cowards!" the General said. "Yellow merc cowards! If you won't do it, I'll find someone who can!" He looked around at the crowd which had gathered at the repeater screen. "You!" He pointed at someone behind my left shoulder. "Captain! You will form up your unit and advance! You are to stop that enemy column at the bottom of this hill!"

"Sir, my people are too good to throw away."

I turned at the sound of the voice, and my eyes locked with eyes of pale blue.



It was Verna, her hair tucked into a tanker's helmet now, her face grimed and streaked with grease where it hadn't been covered by the goggles which she'd shoved back out of the way. She wore the unit patch of the Royal Grays light cavalry. Captain's bars were pinned to her fatigues, and I felt about ten centimeters tall.

"Are you people cowards too?" the General demanded. "By God, *you* at least I can have shot...!"

"No, Sir!" Her words were edged in fire. "But I am constrained to point out that light cavalry against 'Mechs is not even going to slow them down! You're killing good people for no reason..."

"I'll be the judge of military *reason*, Captain. You will follow orders!"

Her eyes met mine again for the briefest of instants. Then she snapped off a salute and a bitter "Sir!"

"Colonel!" I grabbed MacKenzie's sleeve as the crowd began breaking up. Our boys were already mounting their vehicles, and behind us was the keening whine of hovercraft stirring to life in blasts of sound and roiling dust. "Colonel... we can't let him do that..."

I saw pain in Colonel Mac's eyes. "Not our jurisdiction, Johnny. The Royal Grays are his troops." His eyes followed the girl as she mounted a *Pegasus* parked across the highway from our position. Then he turned on the General. "Sir, don't you think..."

"Get out of my sight, merc!" The words were an open sneer. "We'll show you what *real* men can do! Your unit will hold your position here... if you dare! Cover my infantry's withdrawal!"

I lost the Colonel's reply as Verna's *Pegasus* shrieked to life, stirring above the cushion of air spilling from its plenum chamber. The taped bugle call our regiment used to sound mount up was blaring from a *Marauder's* external speakers close by, and I was pounding gravel to my *'Hammer's* boarding ladder and swarming up and aboard.

As my *Warhammer's* scanner and radar displays came on, the situation began looking even more desperate. The hostiles were gathering at the west end of the valley, advancing steadily up the hill. Three companies of the Royal Grays were already forming up for a charge at the crest of the hill, 30 hovercraft and tracked vehicles facing at least as many BattleMechs below them. The main body of the locals was already in full retreat towards the east, leaving the eleven blips marking A company alone in the valley.

"Hold your positions, boys," the Colonel's voice came over the comlink. "We'll cover the infantry's retreat."

"Colonel!" That was Jordy Blake's voice. "What about the cavalry?"

We all were horrified by what was unfolding before our eyes. There was not a thing the cavalry could possibly do to even slow those behemoths lumbering up the hill towards our position. Computer IDs were coming across my screen: *Orions*, *Archers*, a pair of *Marauders*... A wall of heavy 'Mechs supported by lights and mediums in the rear and flanks.

Verna had been right. Good people were being thrown away for no reason.

"Steady, people," the Colonel replied. "Maybe we can cover them at long range."

The cavalry lunged forward. I heard the Colonel's voice on the general combat frequency. "This is Colonel MacKenzie, calling the Royal Grays!"

"This is Captain LeMann," was the reply. The transmission was harsh with static, and blended with the background roar of her vehicle. "What is it, Colonel?"

"Captain, we may be able to cover you if you don't push too far down the hill. I suggest..."

"This is General Martell. Clear the channel, Colonel. You have your orders, and LeMann has hers!"

Damn! I'd figured that by that time that Martell would have been kilometers away and running for all he was worth, not listening to TacCom. Smoke blossomed white on

hovertanks and *Vedettes* and armored vehicles raced pellmell into a whirlwind of flashing beams and steel and destruction. On the screen, I could see the huddle of blips marking Verna's command sweeping into the center of the enemy line. The Kurita flanks were already curling around, engulfing her unit like some devouring, amoebic monster.

"Colonel!" I said. "We've got to help!"

"Hold your position, Mister."

"But Sir!"

"Hold your position, I said!"

On the screen, the blips marking the hovercraft and tanks were winking out as their transponders failed, one by one. The blip marking an enemy *Orion* began flashing, marking damage. A Kurita *Panther* flashed once, and went out. The locals had drawn blood!

I had never yet disobeyed one of Colonel Mac's orders, but I could not stand by, doing nothing, and watch that splendid woman and her command hurl themselves into oblivion. I charged both my PPCs, brought them to the ready, and sent my *Warhammer* lumbering into motion.

"Lieutenant Lee!" the Colonel snapped. "Get back in position!"

"Sir, I respectfully decline the order."

By the time I hit the battle line, any order which had existed in the Kurita line had vanished. BattleMechs dodged, wove, and lunged as hovercraft snapped at their heels. Missiles arced and stooped, striking armor, gouging craters in fire-charred metal.

turned to face this new attack as I opened up with both PPCs. Two more holes opened up in the enemy 'Mech's side, and I saw fires blazing red through gaps in the machine's torso armor. There was a flash, and the *Orion's* canopy split up the middle. The pilot's ejector assembly hurtled up and away, clear of the fight as the carcass of his heavy 'Mech burned.

The battle was a complete free-for-all now. The battlefield was littered with the wreckage of hovercraft and light tanks, the air choked with the smoke of their burning. A hundred meters away, I saw another *Orion* draw back its foot and strike a smashing blow into the side of a *Galleon* light tank. The 30-ton tracked vehicle lurched and spun with the blow, its medium laser still spearing into its attacker as it shuddered and tipped over. Orange fire balled skyward as its diesel fuel tank was breached. I triggered a volley at the *Orion* as it began stirring the wreckage with its torso-mounted autocannon.

I remembered my telling Verna about kicking the *Skulker* and felt hot shame as I leveled both PPCs and tore into the second *Orion*, bolt upon bolt upon bolt. I caught the Kurita 'Mech in its lightly-armored back, and watched my artificial lightning blast and char through its internal structure. The Royal Grays were putting up a savage fight. They didn't have a chance against the Kurita heavies... but they kept attacking, smashing again and again at the enemy BattleMechs despite their losses.

The Kurita flanks were already curling around, engulfing her unit like some devouring, amoebic monster.

the slope below us, striking at the racing tanks.

My private com channel gave a bleep, and I switched it on. "Lieutenant? This is LeMann."

"Verna! Look..."

"No time. Look... do me a favor?"

"Sure! Anything..."

"My brother... the one I told you about."

"Yeah?"

She gave me an address in Princeton, on the east coast. "Tell him... tell him what happened. And that I tried. Please?"

The roar of explosions thundered over the comlink, and then it was dead. Smoke billowed above the battlefield below us, as

Beams flashed and stabbed. I saw an enemy *Archer* swing with one metal fist at a passing *Saracen* and miss, saw a trio of SRMs leap from a wheeled *Striker* light tank and smash the *Archer* square in the back. A Kurita *Orion* fired paired medium lasers into the *Striker*, loosing a fireball and geysering chunks of white-hot metal. I opened up with my PPCs against the *Orion*, saw hits scoring jagged holes in its torso and left arm. It spun and returned the fire, and we exchanged blow for blow in a slugging match that pounded both our 'Mechs with thunderbolt fury. The damaged *Striker* fired again, this time at the *Orion*. Metal scrap and debris showered from a hit on its right leg. It

My *Warhammer* took a laser bolt in its left arm, staggering me. A pair of snake 'Mechs, an *Archer* and a *Panther*, were closing on me and I had to duck and spin to avoid a bursting salvo of LRMs. Damage lights flashed and beeped across my instrument panel, and I began to realize just how desperate my own situation was.

Another bolt caught me in the right leg, spinning me and knocking me down. I urged my *Hammer* to its feet in time to take a PPC blast in my chest.

This fight was not going to last much longer.

A PPC bolt hit the *Archer* from behind... followed by another... another...

another! Missiles stored on board detonated in a fiery blast which ripped the Kurita *Archer's* hull apart, exposing starcore flame as the heavy died. The *Panther* turned, bringing its PPC up for a shot, but a *Marauder* thundered down the slope, its massive forearm swinging in a roundhouse blow that smashed the 35-ton *Panther* full in its side, crumpling the machine like plastic. I recognized my company commander's insignia as he led the company forward at a dead run down the hill.

And the battle turned.

We analyzed it later, of course, in our simulators, and we know now it was the cavalry charge that made the victory possible. Those neat, precise Kurita battle lines had folded around the Royal Grays when they struck and then dissolved. When MacKenzie's *Marauders* hit the Kurita formation, that formation became a mob, without cohesion or order or plan. Five enemy 'Mechs were actually surrounded between our force and what was left of the Grays, and were picked to pieces or blown apart before they could disengage. The rest began pulling back, uncertain about what was happening. We learned later that the Kurita commander had been in that second *Orion* I nailed. For a critical few minutes, their command control had broken down. When their second-in-command assumed control, he must have figured we were stronger than we looked.

I mean, one company of 'Mechs and a handful of cavalry couldn't be idiotic enough to attack the force he had at his command,

could they? Fearing reinforcements or a trap or a trick, they withdrew, leaving eight 'Mechs junked on the field. We lost Jordy to an *Archer*, and Diana Vincent had to eject when her *Marauder* blew. O'Hara's *Crusader* lost its right arm.

And the Royal Grays were gone, of course.

Oh, there were survivors. Individual pilots and crewmen wandered into our camp on foot for three days after the battle, but only two battered *Pegasus* tanks rejoined our formation at the top of the pass.

Verna's tank was not one of them.

MacKenzie's *Marauders* pulled off planet not long after. A Davion unit of line regulars arrived to take over the fight, and we were moved back to New Ivaarson for rest and a refit. I tried to find Verna's brother in Princeton before we boosted, but the city had been bombed by Draconis AeroSpace raiders, and I never did learn whether he died in the city or was among the tens of thousands of refugees gathered in the camps along the seacoast to the south.

But I did find a neighbor woman who had known Verna. It was she who told me that Verna LeMann had been one of the hottest MechWarriors in the elite, House Davion First Guards. She'd piloted an *Archer*, fought at Harrow's Sun and Deshler, and been awarded the Golden Sunburst First Class by Hanse Davion himself for heroism in combat above and beyond the call of duty. She'd resigned her commission and given up her 'Mech when a Draconis raid on Royal killed her parents. According

to the neighbor, she'd come back to Princeton to take care of her younger brother. She'd joined the militia and helped organize the Royal Grays as a planetary defense force. "Verna always said there was no sense fighting off among the stars if your own home and people were in danger," the woman said. "She loved Royal. I guess she was willing to die for it, and for her brother..."

I heard later the Kurita offensive on Royal stalled. The Dracs never did break through to the highlands, and after some skirmishing with the Davion regulars, they pulled out and didn't come back. So maybe it was Verna who saved her world after all.

I like to think so.

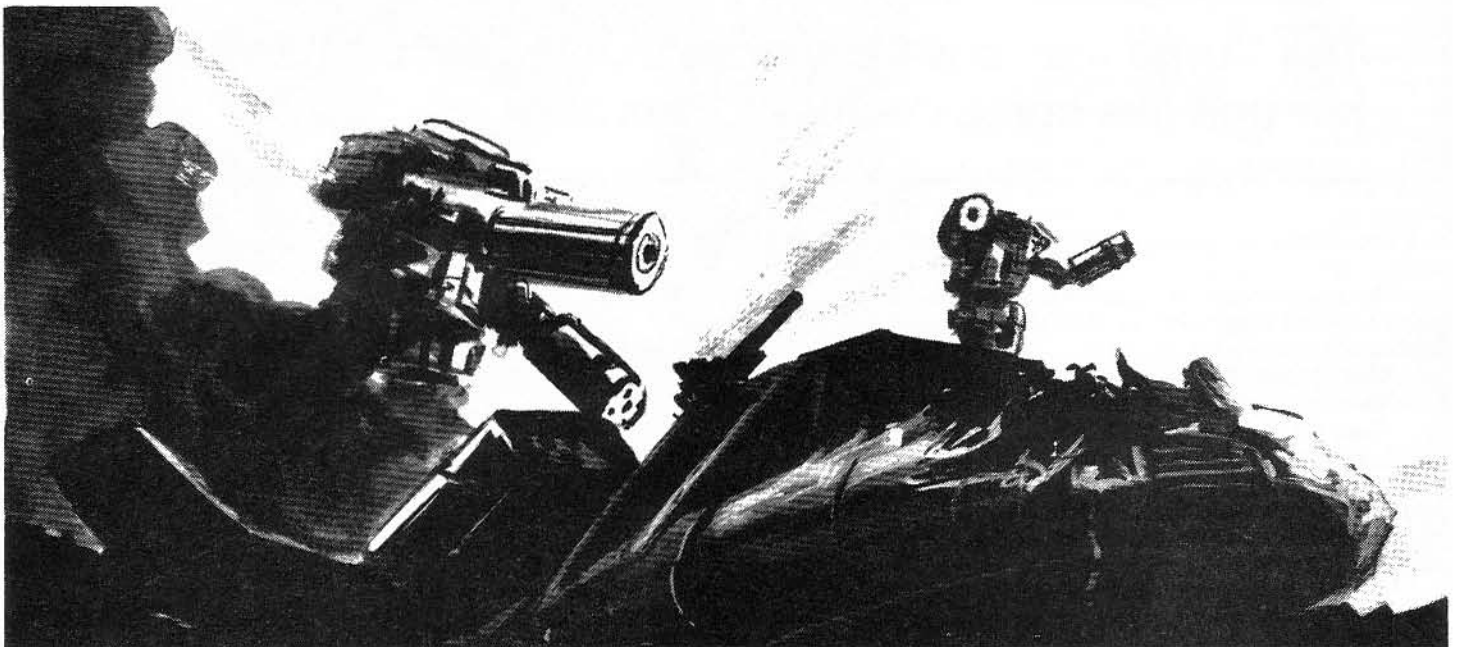
I keep wondering, though, if she might not have survived. There were so many tankers wandering around on foot after the battle. It's possible she ejected from her vehicle but wasn't able to rejoin our line before we pulled out.

I want to know. The Colonel told me later that it had been a toss-up whether I was going to get a medal or a court martial for my part in the battle of Harmony Pass. He compromised in the end and gave me thirty days' leave. I'm sitting here looking at my share of the money for our ticket on Royal and realizing that I could be back on Royal in a week.

I want to find her, want to know that she's still alive.

I want to tell her that I was wrong.

It doesn't take a BattleMech to make a warrior.



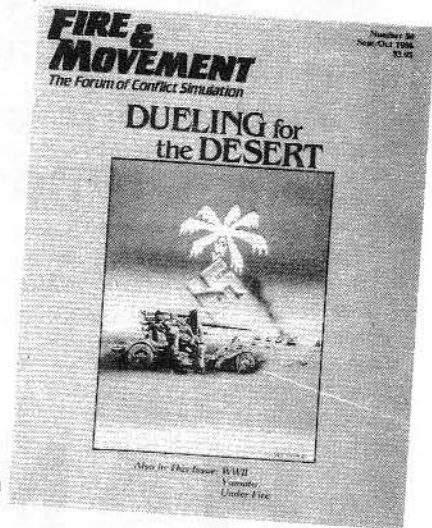
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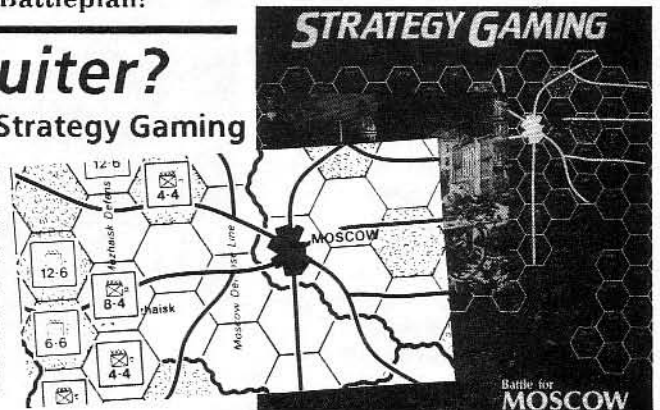
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A BattleTechnology Exclusive

Brandon Corey Interviews...

HANSE DAVION

First Prince of the Federated Suns

The Conscience of a Would-Be King

BattleTechnology is proud to have exclusive rights to the transcript of this recent holovid interview with Prince Hanse Davion. The Prince made room in his schedule for us in the end of March. Our correspondent, Brandon Corey, met the Prince at the palace and conducted the interview in the Prince's private office.

BattleTechnology: We're very glad you could find time to speak with us, Highness.

His Highness, Prince Hanse Davion: I'm always willing to speak with the press, Brandon, though my job often precludes interviews like this. In fact, that an opportunity popped up is virtually a miracle. This year, especially, is busy.

BT: Of course, with Galahad '28 and your wedding falling in August, you must have much to do. (The interviewer pauses as the Prince chuckles.) What do you see as the purpose for the Galahad exercises?

His Highness: Quite plainly, the military operations are designed to put our troops through a series of logistical nightmares. We live in an age when skirmishes have become the order of

the day. Raiders hit planets and have to be driven off. Many worlds see almost constant warfare, but the borders of each nation-state do not change very much. Some pundits have suggested this is because a large-scale invasion is impossible with the current technology, but I believe the Galahad exercises contradict that assumption.

BT: Would you say that Galahads '26 and '27 were successful? If you could, would you reflect upon that question from both a military and a political standpoint?

His Highness: On either front, I would say the exercises were a success. They have pointed out that large-scale troop movements are possible with a certain amount of efficiency. The improvements from Galahad '26 to Galahad '27 proved that what we did back in '26 was not luck. Suddenly the possibility of a massed troop attack comes back into the realm of consideration.

On the political front, I will admit that I, personally, took some flak from certain pacifist groups and citizens alarmed at the cost of the exercises. Even so, I would have to classify the resistance to the exercises as minor.

BT: You would? Even in the light of Duke Michael Hasek-Davion's decision not to participate in Galahad '28? Many people see this as a very obvious rejection of your policy.

His Highness: I find the generally accepted analysis of Michael's action to be flawed. Michael is the supreme commander of the Federated Suns forces in the Capellan March. As such, he has the right to hold his troops back from participation. Michael, apparently, does not want to give Liao the opportunity to raid his holdings during the exercises. I cannot fault him on this. Furthermore, over the last two years, his units have participated in the exercises. I hardly see that as a rejection of the policy.

BT: True enough, but Duke Michael has been one of your most vocal critics when it comes to discussing military affairs. He suggests the exercises do nothing but taunt Liao or Kurita and invite them to attack.

His Highness: This is pure and utter nonsense. I cannot deny that both House Liao and House Kurita have staged raids into our territory during the exercises, but this is nothing unusual. Consider the fact that raids happen all the time. Michael is merely concerned for his citizens.

BT: Duke Michael has also been highly critical of your attitude concerning the Capellan March and its security.

His Highness: For example?

BT: Duke Michael, in a speech at his New Year's celebration, said it had been over a month since Liao had sponsored a terrorist attack on Kittery and you still had not responded militarily.

His Highness: Oh, that attack. As I recall, that involved a team of Maskirovka assassins trying to kill several officers and non-coms.

BT: Speculation had it that their target was Captain Andrew Redburn...

His Highness: Yes, I remember. (Laughs) They'd have stood a better chance attacking New Avalon. Captain Redburn and the men he was with managed to kill or wound all the assassins; and, in the process, they uncovered a Maskirovka cell headquarters. That headquarters yielded a wealth of information that my Ministry of Intelligence, Information and Operations is still sifting through. While that was an attack by Liao forces, they came away far worse off than we did. None of my advisors saw any gain in attacking the St. Ives Commonality so we did not retaliate.

BT: Then how do you explain Duke Michael's attack upon you?

His Highness: I think you overstate things when you call it an attack. Michael merely found posturing necessary to appease some of the more bloodthirsty lords in the Capellan March.

BT: Count Anton Vitios?

His Highness: Among others. It is a pity that some men turn the virtue of vigilance into the vice of vigilantism. They waste far too much time and energy that could be productive in other areas.

BT: One more question about the Galahad exercises, then we can move on. Why are you holding the exercises so close to your wedding? The way Galahad '28 is scheduled you have allowed yourself virtually no time for your honeymoon.

His Highness: Just between the two of us, I arranged the schedule that way so I could have an explanation for not inviting every soldier in the Federated Suns to the wedding. (Laughs) Actually, the operations should really handle themselves. It takes a staff of thousands to coordinate these exercises—I'm just another person in the chain. Were this a real war, on the other hand...

BT: So the Galahad operations are not a prelude to war?

His Highness: Hardly. They just show Liao and Kurita that we have a new way to deal with raids. We can deliver large numbers of troops in a coordinated fashion. No longer will raids result in a few casualties and a hasty retreat for the raiders. Imagine, if you will, what such a coordinated response would

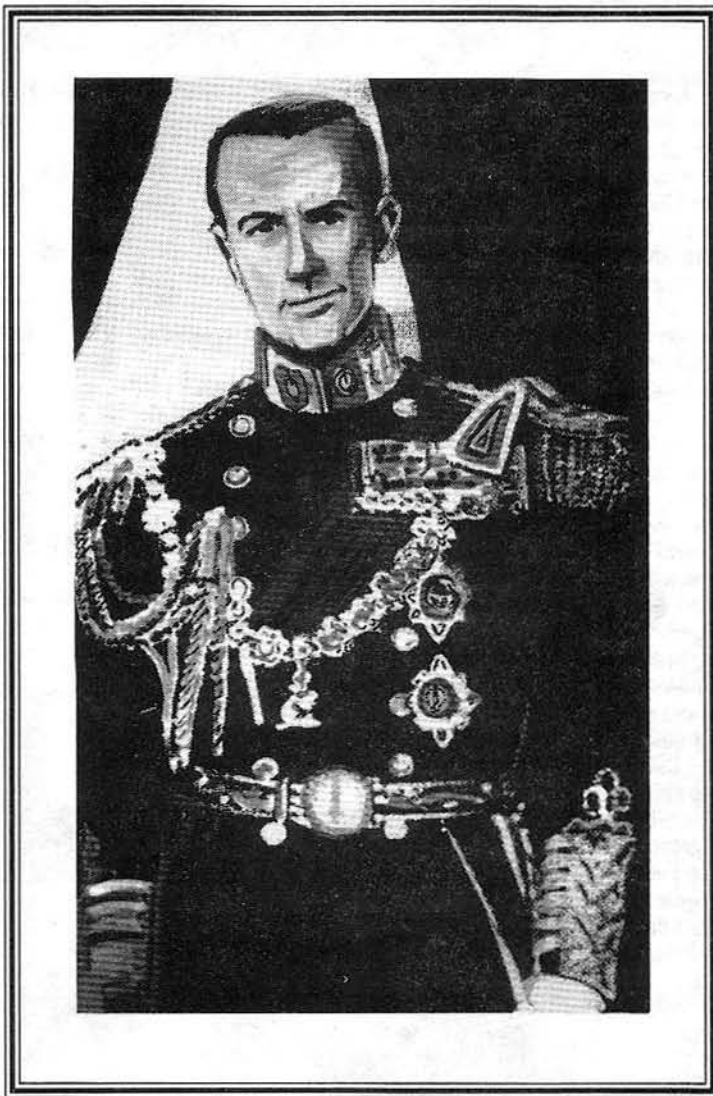
have meant to McCarron's Armored Cavalry when they raided throughout the Capellan March in 3022 and 3023. Brave MechWarriors such as yourself would not have been hurt pursuing what was, at best, a piecemeal response to a serious threat.

BT: Indeed. Let's shift gears for a moment, if we might. You're getting married to a woman who is less than half your age and whom you've only met once. Isn't that unusual?

His Highness: Is it? It is true that purely political marriages have been uncommon, but in my position, I really have no choice. However, in direct answer to your question, I would have to admit this wedding will be unusual.

BT: How so?

His Highness: First and foremost, I believe myself most fortunate in my choice of bride. You mentioned that we've only met once, in person, but we have exchanged hundreds of holodisks. In many ways I think we know each other better than the average couple that weds. On an almost equally important point, we will have the five heads of the Successor States in one place at one time. Aside from Katrina Steiner, I've not met any of them, and I'm looking forward to this gathering.



Hanse Davion

First Prince of the Federated Suns

...wearing the ceremonial uniform of the 1st Regiment of the Royal Guard of the Lyran Commonwealth. His Highness was recently inducted into the unit in anticipation of the formal alliance between the Commonwealth and the Federated Suns.

BT: How do you take care of security with so many important people gathered together?

His Highness: That's not up to me, though I have reviewed the precautions. ComStar is hosting the wedding, and they have guaranteed the safety of all the guests. Only a fool would act rashly in that situation because ComStar's retribution would be devastating.

BT: What retribution? ComStar has no military forces.

His Highness: True, but they are capable of placing a House under complete and total interdiction. If they do that, no messages move in or out of that House's territory. When your military depends upon ComStar for the transmission of intelligence and orders, an interdiction is deadly. To risk such a sanction would be suicidal.

BT: Your friend, Colonel Ardan Sortek, has occasionally expressed his displeasure at what he sees as political decisions on your part. Because of your closeness with him, many believed Colonel Sortek would be your Best Man, but you chose, instead, Morgan Hasek-Davion, your nephew and Duke Michael's son, to stand beside you. Was that a politically motivated choice—one designed to appease forces in the Capellan March?

His Highness: I see nothing inappropriate at all in selecting Morgan to be my Best Man. Morgan has been on New Avalon for the past five years and has served with the Davion Heavy Guards for the past three. We have become quite close, and I felt it quite appropriate for the man who is my heir—at least until my wife blesses me with a child—to be the man to stand beside me at the altar.

BT: Some people have suggested you should have married Morgan to Melissa as they are much closer in age than you and Melissa. In the same vein, many have wondered why you did not marry Katrina Steiner herself—making for a stronger alliance.

His Highness: You have two questions there; I'll deal with them in reverse order. The Archon and I did not choose to marry for a number of reasons. I very much respect the love she still feels for her husband, though he is 18 years dead, and I would do nothing to intrude on what they shared.

BT: But you've pointed out this is a political marriage. Should love then have any part in it?

His Highness: More important than any emotions, since this is a political marriage, is the unification of our two realms. This means my wife will have to bear my children. The Archon, unfortunately, is no longer able to have children. Had that not been the case, who knows...

BT: Who knows indeed? Then why not marry Morgan to Melissa?

His Highness: (Laughs) I like Morgan a

great deal, but not that much. More seriously, I never intended to spend my whole life without marriage and children. How strong could an alliance be when the heir to the Lyran Commonwealth is married to someone outside the direct line of inheritance? It would be unfair to Morgan and could well prove the focus for some divisiveness in the Federated Suns. I would not do that to my people.

BT: You've been on the throne for 15 years. Do you ever wish things had been different?

His Highness: Certainly. I'd give anything if my brother's death on Mallory's World could have been avoided. Moreover, like Ardan Sortek, I sometimes wish things would be less complicated, but I don't think that will happen.

BT: What about the rumors that Yorinaga Kurita, the man who murdered your brother, has returned from internal exile and now heads up a superelite Kurita MechForce?

His Highness: Pure speculation and lots of hot air. If he was the one who killed Ian, and if he is back, I'd like to see him dead—what brother wouldn't want to see his brother's death avenged? Still we have no evidence of his presence, or that of any Kurita superforce.

BT: Would you go after him in your personal Mech?

His Highness: (Laughs) You make it sound like some holodrama. Seriously, it would be foolish for me to even suggest I'd do something that rash. In my position I cannot allow personal concerns to override or dominate my thinking. If

I do, the Federated Suns will suffer.

You know, it's curious. A moment ago, you asked if love should have anything to do with a political marriage. I think it should and very much does. Melissa and I will be wed for the love of our people and to insure them some sort of a future. If we are lucky, we will find personal love as well, but, again, we will not let personal desires destroy what we're doing for our people.

BT: Pretend a hundred years have passed. What would you like to see historians saying about you and your reign?

His Highness: (Laughs) "After a hundred years on the throne, Hanse Davion abdicated to his great-grandson..." More seriously, I think I'd like to be remembered for having turned the slide toward barbarism around. Right now I'm most proud of the New Avalon Institute of Science, and I'm pleased the other Successor States have decided to follow suit in trying to recover the technology our ancestors lost for us. Already we're seeing small factories producing unique Mech designs. A renaissance has begun, and if I am known for nothing else than having fostered it in its infancy, that will be enough for me.

BT: No desire to be First Lord of a new Star League?

His Highness: Remember, I came to this throne reluctantly, and I have enough trouble governing one nation. Why accept even more headaches? (Grins) But if I were offered the position—perhaps as a wedding present—who knows? It would beat honest work...

Brandon Corey graduated from the New Avalon Military Academy in 3015. Assigned to the 5th Deneb Light Cavalry Regiment, he saw much action in the battle of Valencia on Spica. Decorated for bravery, he was rotated to the Davion Heavy Guards and, while serving in that unit, first met Prince Hanse Davion. As a volunteer for the Prince's special strike force, Corey joined the attack against McCarron's Armored Cavalry on Beiten Kaitos. He suffered serious wounds that left him paralyzed from the waist down. Determined to overcome his physical challenge, Corey turned to writing about wars and warriors. The series of articles he wrote about the Major Justin Allard treason trial won him the New Avalon Press Club's coveted Journalist of the Year award for 3027.

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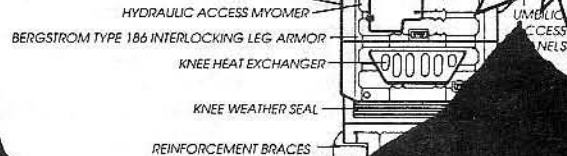
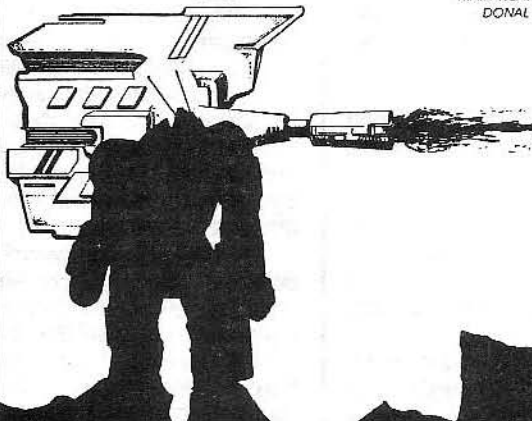
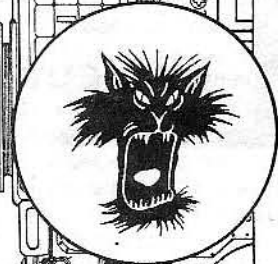
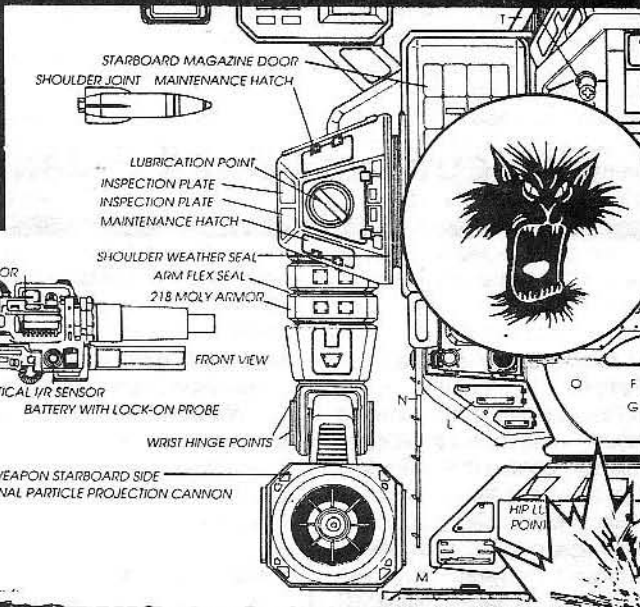
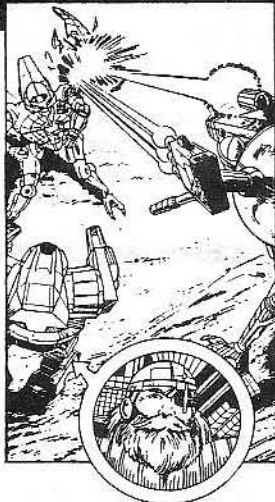
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MAX

by Lieutenant Daryl F. James

We'd just finished our contract on Cassias. I had a few days to kill before lifting off-planet, and Pete's Place seemed like a good place to start. Sometimes I think there must be a factory someplace that manufactures port town dives like Pete's to spec. You know the kind of place: dark, not overly clean, with neon ads on the walls, overpriced rotgut in the patrons, and from someplace overhead music throbbing like PPC thunder.

It was quiet when I went in, though, with only one old soldier sitting at the bar watching Pete wipe down the counter. Even though he was in civvies, I knew that this was a man who moved from world to world, fighting for a living. How? Like calling to like, I guess. When you hang out with them long enough, you get so you can pick them out of a crowd at 20 meters.

I greeted Pete, bought a drink, and started to search the pockets of my fatigues for a smoke. The soldier noticed and passed over a pack and a lighter. I thanked him, sat back, and made the conversation the situation called for, all about the weather and, inevitably, perhaps, the problems of life. He seemed to want to talk, and I didn't mind listening. I've learned over the years that you learn more when you listen rather than talk.

His name was Sam Williams, he told me, and he'd been a Tech for 35 years.

"That's a one hell of a lot of Mehdrek," I said, and he chuckled. I'd served with the

MechTech gang a time or two when times were lean, and I had more than a MechWarrior's usual charge of sympathy for the bolt twisters. It was a filthy job. "Mehdrek" is the composite of lubricant, coolant, grease, and sealer compound that has to be drained from a 'Mech's slider assemblies and joint capsules every time the beasts are serviced.

But don't ever let anyone tell you that Techs aren't worth their weight in unalloyed platinum.

"I enjoy it," he said. "The metal jockies get on my nerves... but I like it. Or I used to."

There was pain there, but I didn't know what. I wondered if I should get him on a different track. "What unit are you with, Sam?"

He eyed my unit flashes and grinned. "For the past fifteen years I've been Colonel Hurvich's personal Tech."

I nearly spilled my drink. No wonder the guy was in civvies! Colonel Hurvich? Hurvich's Hurricanes? The Hurricanes were a merc unit with a pretty fair rep. And the last I'd heard, they were working for House Kurita. Two weeks before, I'd been fighting them toe-to-toe less than 500 clicks north of where we were sitting.

"I...ah...thought the Hurricanes had pulled out." We'd beaten them, in fact, in a running battle just outside of Johannas. It had been a tough fight, and my *Wolverine* still showed the scars. Hurvich's men were good.

"So they did," he replied. "We almost had you guys at Johannas. Pulling that flanking maneuver at Dry Wells was a good move."

"That was my company," I said carefully. What was a Kurita Tech doing *here*? "Company A, Andrews' Avengers."

He nodded. "Thought so. The Colonel knew he couldn't hold that hill above the town once your company came tearing through our flankers. He had to wheel north and save what he could." There was a long pause while he tossed off the last of his drink. "It wasn't much."

"What do you mean? Our salvage parties pegged only five 'Mech carcasses after your people pulled out. That was out of... what? Thirty-six 'Mechs?"

"Thirty. Right. But it cost the Colonel Max."

"Who," I asked, "is Max?" I wasn't sure I liked the direction in which this conversation was going. It was strange enough to be sitting there talking to a man whose buddies I'd been shooting at recently. It was a lot stranger to hear the bitterness in his voice and to wonder if he was thinking that my unit, Andrews' Avengers, was to blame for his misfortunes! I glanced over my shoulder a time or two, suddenly uncomfortably aware of a large, dark, and empty room at my back. I suggested we take a fresh round of drinks to a booth—one in the corner where I could have my back to the wall—and he agreed.

"Max," he explained as we sat down, "is an AS7-D assault 'Mech. An *Atlas*. He's old, but I've spent the past five years totally rebuilding and fine-tuning the systems and chassis. Hell, Max is better than new, now. Some of the parts are getting hard to find, and it took some doing to get them. I've spent so much time with him, he's like a person to me. I don't know where the name came from. He's just... Max."

"He was at Dry Wells."

"That's right. He was the Colonel's 'Mech."

"Was?"

"The Colonel's luck broke with Dry Wells, when we had to abandon our port at Johannas. Now I'm delivering Max to a cheap slimebucket of a captain."

I waited. Williams appeared to be considering whether or not to go on with the story.

"When we lost Johannas, we lost our ride home," he said. "A JumpShip was supposed to be in-system to pick us up in another month, but when we lost the port, the Kurita forces had to pull out faster than expected... and they didn't have room aboard their precious JumpShips for the likes of us... oh, no!"

I nodded sympathy. It was a raw deal, and one I'd heard before. All too often, a mercenary unit was at the mercy of an employer who controlled the JumpShips upon which interstellar trade—and combat—depended. House Kurita was notorious among merc units for tossing them to the wolves when it suited them.

"Anyway, there was this one captain with the Kurita regulars who had it in for mercs in general and us in particular. It happened he had ships... or rather, his family did, and he'd arrange for transport for us... if we met his price."

"Ah!" I was beginning to understand. "And his price was?"

"Max." His mouth twisted in a bitter half-smile. "And me, of course, to look after him."

"So what are you doing here? Your unit must have boosted a week before we took the port."

"They did. They're on their way home by now. No, I'm waiting around here with Max for our new owner to show up."

"You don't sound very happy about it."

"Happy? No. You don't know what this guy is like. I was happy with the Hurricanes... but now I belong to Captain Ferlando Sandoval of the Proserpina Hussars..."

Sandoval!

Electric shocks rushed down my spine and I could feel my hackles rise at the mention of that name.

Oh, yes, I knew the Sandovals quite well. You see, I'm from Delacruz, and the Sandovals control that planet. Control? The word "own" is closer to the truth, since they control three quarters of the industry there. Oh, the name of the Planetary Chairman is an old Kurita pol named Murasaki, but 8 of the 12 men on the Council are Sandovals, and Murasaki himself is a brother-in-law to the old patriarch. My father was with the planetary militia, and it was a guy named Jose Sandoval who had accused him of working for the Davion underground on Delacruz in order to get my mother for himself. She died less than a year after my father met with his "accident," and I was out and growing up the hard way in the streets of Puerto de las Estrellas before I was 15.

I was 18 that night in a bar much like the one we were in now, when I heard Rega Sandoval running off at the mouth about what a great man his uncle Jose was. Okay, so maybe it was too public a place to disagree with the guy... but when he pulled that knife I'd had to defend myself, right? The authorities had cleared me of his death by ruling it self-defense, but the Sandovals didn't see it that way and declared a Blood Feud on me. I'd had to leave in a hurry... and managed to take Rega's *Wolverine* with me as part payment for my troubles. It had been a long, bloody road from Delacruz to the Federated Suns, where I'd found a slot with Andrews' Avengers.

Sam had me by the arm. "You all right, guy?"

"Yeah, but I sure could use another drink."

Sam bought the next round. I managed to stay calm on the outside, but inside I was seething. *Is this some kind of a Sandoval trap? Can I trust this guy? How can I get to the Sandovals one more time?*

Maybe it was the look in his eyes or the way he said "Sandoval," like it left a bad taste in his mouth, but I decided I could trust Sam.

"So I'm stuck," he said at last. "I don't have the money to do anything but go along. All I really know how to do is work on 'Mechs."

"No money? You have an *Atlas*. With a BattleMech, who needs money? You could sign on with any company on the planet... if you didn't mind switching colors from snakes to Davion."

"It's not quite that simple. Not that I'd mind hitting back at Sandoval, see... but he's got Max locked down tight." He frowned. "They've got him hidden and under guard. You know, these past couple of days I've thought about turning him over to your people, believe me... but he's protected. Believe me, he's protected."

"Hmm. An *Atlas*? I can imagine. Why don't you tell me a bit more?"

He did.

There are conventions to warfare, of course. If there weren't, we'd have gone the way of the dinosaurs half a thousand years ago. Those conventions are direct and common sense, most of them: you don't use nukes; you don't slaughter civilians; you honor your solemn agreements with the enemy. Cassias had been a divided world for several years. It's located in Davion



space, right enough, but there'd been a vipers' nest of Kuritists squatting on its north continent and nothing Davion had done had been sufficient to shake them loose. Cassias' planetary militia had kept the nest from spreading, but it had been Andrews' Avengers and a few shiploads of other House Davion merc units which had finally started rolling back the Kurita line on the planet. Our victory at Dry Wells and Johannas had been the blow that settled things. There was still a big Kurita base on the planet, up in the frigid Thorvingian Wastes, but it was only a matter of time now before we starved them into submission.

In the meantime, we held Johannas and the lands around it. Though the northern continent was on a Davion world, its people had been under the Kurita yoke for a long, long time, and the people in power had been Kuritists... at least outwardly. There'd been no revolution when we marched into the city, merely a changing of one set of masters for another. Who could tell whether those cheering crowds *really* saw us as liberators? Some of them, certainly, would stand to lose their positions of power, should our stay become permanent.

It's things like that that make me glad I'm a warrior, and not a politician. I was also glad that Andrews' Avengers were scheduled to pull off planet soon. Guerrilla wars with unhappy civilians can be lots more unpleasant than any stand-up 'Mech fight.

metal to break up his outline and make him look bigger and bulkier than he is. The weapons have been dismounted, of course, and are stored in separate boxes labeled as machine parts."

"So what was the point?"

"There'll be an independent trader calling at the port in a few days. Actually, it'll be Sandoval's own, private DropShip freighter. He'll present a letter of credit to the warehouse for his property... stuff that's already been signed over to his name, including several dozen crates of machine parts and one heavy-duty, industrial lifter. He'll just walk Max out to his ship, load on the crates, and off he'll go."

Just like that. An *Atlas!* One hundred tons of incomparable fighting machine!

Sam was right. Max was safe where he was. An *Atlas* made mighty tempting loot, but there was no way Colonel Andrews was going to sanction a raid on a privately owned warehouse in the center of town. An all-out raid sounded too much like looting, and looting a city after it had formally switched sides was a violation of the Conventions. More to the point, the Colonel didn't need hostile locals in his rear, not when he still had a Kurita fortress ahead of him, in the tundra to the north. Trouble like that in the middle of town was a sure way to win popularity with the natives.

The more I thought about it, though, the itchier I got. I'd known one guy once who

"Who are they?"

He shrugged. "Don't know. Someone in the local underground. There were several rival gangs under the Kuritists, and I imagine it'll be business as usual under Davion now."

"Hmm. Maybe... maybe..."

"What do you have in mind?"

"I'm not sure... but maybe we can arrange to find a new home for Max... one on *this* side of the Kurita frontier."

"Hold it! You want Max, sure... but if you want him, you take me, too."

I nodded. "If you're as good a Tech as you say you are, that'll be no problem." Hell, the Colonel was always complaining that he didn't have enough Techs.

I went on to explain what I had in mind. I could almost see the thoughts moving across his face. *Is this guy for real? Can I trust him, or is this some kind of trap? This could be the break I'm looking for! Can I do this?*

"Can you make that sort of commitment?"

"No," I said. "Honestly, I can't. But Colonel Andrews can. Let's take it up with him."

With our lift-off so close, I knew the Colonel would be in his office at the spaceport compound. When we arrived, he was just finishing lunch and hadn't started back to work. He looked Sam and me over as we entered the office and said, "I think I'm in trouble."

I introduced Sam and sketched out my plan. The Colonel listened carefully, not interrupting. When I'd laid the whole thing out, he asked Sam a question or two, then said, "Would you mind waiting outside please, Sergeant Williams?"

As the door closed, he said, "You've come in here with some wild schemes in the past, but this has got to be an all-time high even for you! I mean, we're not talking a few spare parts of questionable origin here, or a little contraband! We're talking about an *Atlas* and one million C-bills, man!"

"I know it's a lot, Colonel, but I think we could pull it off. I have 300,000 of my own to put in, and we can use my *Wolverine* as collateral for the rest. And just think what we could do with an *Atlas* in the company!" I paused, scared like I'd never been in my life. The 300,000 was my entire share for the Cassias operation... and the *Wolverine* all I owned. But an *Atlas*...

His eyes narrowed. "Daryl, just what do you know about this Williams character, anyway?"

I knew what he was thinking. We'd not seen the *Atlas*. It could all be a scam, with a

An *Atlas!* One hundred tons of incomparable fighting machine!

Our agreement with the Johannas Proctors was simple and concise and designed to prevent a guerrilla war. We would not interfere with their laws or with their leadership. We would refrain from looting and pillaging and the other ancient perquisites of conquering armies, and we would provide them with protection from vindictive Kurita snakes. They, for their part, would happily rejoin the Davion fold.

Max was awaiting his new owner, locked away in a privately-owned warehouse in the center of town, a few blocks away from the spaceport. He was guarded, it seemed, by Sandoval's men, at least a platoon's worth of hired thugs loyal to Sandoval's C-bills.

"He's disguised as a heavy-duty lifter," Sam explained. "We tack-welded sheet

had his *Stinger* shot to scrap around him. He ejected and walked away without a scratch... then turned a laser pistol on himself and burned out his own brains. That 'Mech had been all he had, and when it was gone, he'd had no more reason for living.

A BattleMech, *any* BattleMech, was pure, raw treasure... the whole reason and purpose for some men's lives. And an *Atlas* was even more than that.

"Maybe it needn't work out just that way," I said slowly. "How much is that letter of credit going to cover?"

"A million Cbs."

I whistled.

"It'll look like a legal transaction and let him load his cargo without a customs check or the other formalities. Actually, it'll be payment for Sandoval's local agents."

wild story as bait. In fact, the more I thought about it, the shakier Sam's story sounded.

"I've got a feeling about him, Sir."

"Oh, God..."

"I think Sam's on the level. I can manage the money. I'll need some help from some of the guys, though, to pull this off and keep it inconspicuous..."

"You're going to walk an Atlas down the street, Son? That doesn't sound inconspicuous to me!"

"We'll keep a low profile," I said. "We'll have to keep the *Atlas* out of sight, so the locals don't know it's stolen. I think we can work it out."

The Colonel put his hands on his head, leaned back in his chair, and looked at the ceiling. I didn't say anything more, not when he was in his deep thought mode. After the longest couple of minutes I've ever spent, he said, "Okay, you're on. And I tell you what

I'm going to do. You, Daryl, are in charge of this operation. The responsibility is yours."

"Me, Sir?"

"You, Sir. And God help you if you're wrong, because I sure as hell won't..."

I picked up Sam on the way out, and went to look up my brothers.

Well, they're not flesh-and-blood relations, but they were like family to me when I joined the Avengers. We'd pulled a scam or two in our time. MechWarrior David Dayril was our disguise and camouflage expert, and to the rest of the company, we were the twins, Daryl and Dayril. Larry Castelano was our forgery expert... the guy people in other units came to with Cbs in hand whenever they needed to forge a pass to slip into town. Glenn Adams is our resident computer expert. Me, I'm the scrounger and contact man. The four of us made quite a team and had pulled quite a few, shall we say, unsanctioned operations, and not all of them against the enemy. There was the time when the Colonel needed a KR valve fitting for his *Warhammer's* fusor and there were none to be had, anywhere. Well, that construction gang at the port was hardly using that loader of theirs at all, and we knew it used a KR fitting and...

But then, that's another story.

I found them at the barracks and filled them in on the details. Glenn frowned and turned to Sam. "This... ah... cargo consignment that Sandoval is paying a million Cbs for... it has an inventory number, right?"

"Yes."

"You have it?"

Sam fished in his jacket pocket, pulled out a slip of paper, and handed it to Glenn.

"Give me a second," he said, and he turned to the computer he had set up on the empty packing crates he used for a desk. His fingers clacked across the keyboard for a few moments, as his screen showed a succession of cryptic symbols and lines of code. We took a seat to wait because Glenn had us and the rest of the world tuned out.

"Huh," he said at last.

"Huh, what?" David asked.

"Now that's really sneaky."

"What the hell are you doing?" I asked.

"Running a program I call 'Phantom,'" he replied. "I thought we might be able to use it to crack the inventory control program at the warehouse."

"You're tapped into that warehouse's computer?" Sam asked. He looked a bit bewildered, as though he was beginning to wonder what he'd wandered in on.

"Sure," Glenn said. "I've had this line in for weeks."

"Aha!" I said. "That's where you've been getting the imported scotch!"

"Nowhere but. They'll never miss a few bottles."

"We have a little business on the side," I explained. "Some of the boys in the other units pay well for a bottle of the good stuff, every so often. Glenn here has been having it shipped to them direct... but I didn't know where he was getting it from."

"Yeah, well, I figured we could do the same thing with Max, but it won't work here."

"Why not?"

"They've got a trap in the programming. An alarm. And damned if I can see a way around it."

He went on to explain how the warehouse program worked. "This thing works on two levels. You bring your letter of credit in from the bank, and a guy in the warehouse office scans the transaction number and the value into the computer. The computer checks with the bank to make sure there's enough money there to cover the transaction. It also checks the transaction number with a transaction number already stored in its memory. If it matches, it releases the merchandise. That's the first level, where it reads things."

"Okay, so it can read," I said. "That transaction number... that's the problem, isn't it?"

"Right. It's the number on Sandoval's letter of credit, and we don't know what it is. We'll have a transaction number on our own letter of credit, but it won't match what's in the computer."

"Normally, the way to handle that would be to break into the warehouse computer and change the number to ours. Then, when the computer scanned the number on our letter, it would match. But there's a second level to the warehouse program." He pointed to the screen, where a meaningless ramble of letters and numbers portended something of significance to Glenn. "That son-of-a-gun is set with an electronic tripwire. We try to rewrite that code, and it'll send an alarm."

"To who, the local Proctors?"

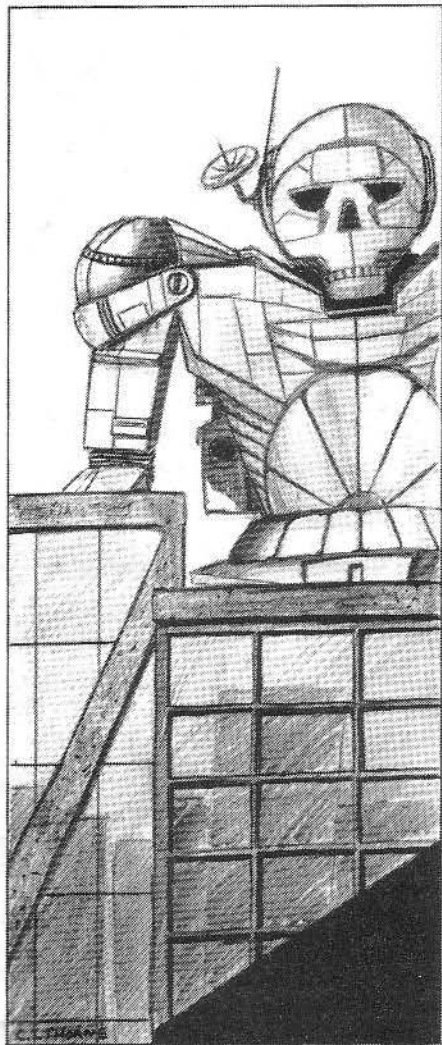
He frowned. "I don't think so. Just a sec..."

His fingers clattered at the keyboard again, blanking lines of print and causing new ones to appear.

"Nope," he said after a moment. "It goes to an unlisted terminal in the city. I've got a search program running, but it'll need some time to track down an address."

"Can we get around it?"

"Hmm. Getting in to change the number is no problem at all. Stopping that alarm... that's the problem. I'd have to take over the whole port warehouse computer from here, and I just don't have the megs for



that. Now there's another approach..." His eyes glazed over as he thought the problem through. "Yeah, I can't stop the alarm, but I might delay it for a while by messing with the port communications system computer."

"For how long?"

"Good question. Twenty... maybe twenty-five minutes. I can make it look like a terminal's down and the back-ups are blown... but that won't stop them forever."

Sam nodded. "That would be enough time. The warehouse is only a few blocks from here."

"Yes, but everything would have to go perfectly, and we'd be cutting it mighty fine. If we have to start jogging that sucker back here, we'd attract a bit of attention." I thought a moment. "Glenn, how long would it take you to change that number?"

"Not long. Four or five minutes to access through Phantom, a few keystrokes to change the number."

"So, we go to the warehouse with our letter of credit. We send you a signal just before we go inside. You change the number and start doing your wizardry with the alarm. We walk in like Sandoval's agents, collect Max, and walk him back to the ship. Anybody sees us, we're just another cargo consignment, bought and paid for, on our way to the port for loading."

"Maybe," Glenn said. "But sooner or later, that alarm is going through. And reinforcements will be on the way."

Larry had pulled out a map of the warehouse compound. His finger probed along the tangle of streets and alleyways surrounding it. "Could we block them off somehow?"

"It'd have to be some distance away from the warehouse," David said. "If they see Max strolling into the port, they'll guess for sure where he's gone."

"It'd help if we knew where the alarm was going," Larry said.

Glenn's computer chose that moment to bleep as its search program came to an end. I peered across Glenn's shoulder and saw the listing of an address.

"You have but to ask," Glenn said. "Allied Import and Export. Fourteen thirty Delta, Chiarro Quadrant..."

"Jimmy the Geek," I said. "Part of the, shall we say, underground color..."

"I'm shocked," David said. "The company you keep..."

"Hey, Twin, I'm the contact man, right? Where do you think we arranged for those surplus lasers they needed over in Captain Langley's company?"

"Sandoval must trust him," David said.

"Sandoval doesn't trust anyone," I replied. "But a million Cbs will buy a lot of

loyalty, and a lot of manpower. He must have his gang watching the place."

"With reinforcements a few minutes away if that alarm is triggered," Glenn said. "Neat. Slick and neat."

"Okay," I said. "Let's make arrangements with the Colonel. We'll need men and equipment for this one."

My mind raced from possibility to possibility, weighing each in turn. *Blocking the road sounds good, but how? A truck? Wouldn't take long for them to move. A wreck with a truck? That's more like it. What if they just walk around it? Fire? Explosion and fire? Don't get carried away now. We could always shoot 'em. Yeah... real low profile, that. How about a hover truck piled high with cargo? Override the safety system and cut one side of the blower system, dumping the cargo. That sounds okay. They might still push past, but some of our boys could be on hand... give 'em an argument... No! They could be chasing the guy that stole the Colonel's truck! I'll need to get a bunch of the boys to go along. Have to clear it with the Colonel.*

Yeah... that might work...

But it had to go off that night. Had to. The Colonel had done some checking with some contacts of his own over at the Port Authority, and learned that the independent DropFreighter *Estrellita* was due in port tomorrow at local dawn.

We had that long to beat Sandoval to his treasure.

I had the letter of credit in my hand late that afternoon as we walked along the street towards the warehouse entrance. The Colonel had come through on that one, arranging for the selling of my *Wolverine* to another merc commander and transferring that money and my share of the Cassias profits to a ComStar facility in town. It felt strange. That letter of credit for one million C-bills represented everything I had in the world, and I was about to trade it away on the wildest gamble I'd ever taken. I was beginning to understand what that dead *Stinger* pilot had felt like. If this failed, I'd be without a Mech... dispossessed. It was not a happy feeling.

And the second thoughts crowded into my mind. *This is too easy. We've missed something! This has got to be a trap!*

The scariest part of the whole set-up was the fact that we had to get Max away clean, without being seen by anyone who could tie us to Andrews' Avengers. Did Jimmy the Geek have his goons patrolling the streets around the warehouse, or was he relying on the booby trap in the computer system? I kept turning the things that could

go wrong over in my mind as Larry, David, Sam and I made our way through the streets of Johanna towards the warehouse.

Then Larry pulled us up short with a hand signal from the corner ahead. "Security guard," he said.

"That's one of the Geek's apes," David said. "I've seen him before, hanging around looking ugly the last time we were there."

"Think he'll recognize us?" I asked. The thug was standing in front of the warehouse door, looking a bit stiff and uncomfortable in the blue pants and jacket of the Cassian Proctor's Security Force. We could try to bluff our way past him, but if he recognized us, people would put two and two together once it was discovered that Max was gone.

Another figure, this one in rough civilian clothes, detached itself from the shadows by the warehouse and moved across the pavement to the side of the guard.

"I'll bet that guy with him has the same boss," I said. "I'll bet money they're hanging around to watch the warehouse."

"What are we going to do about them?" David asked. "We can't just blast them."

Sam opened the flat, metal case he was carrying and pulled something out, tucked the object into the waistband of his pants underneath the jacket he wore, and closed the case. "I'll take care of them," he said. "Two of you give me a 10-second count, then follow me. One of you stay here and cover us." Then he vanished around the corner.

I caught David's eye, questioning, then shrugged. I guess we have to trust him. We gave Sam his 10 seconds, then followed after him, while Larry drew the deadly little hold-out automatic he always carried and prepared to cover us.

As we swung out onto the street in front of the warehouse, Sam glanced back at us over his shoulder, then hunched forward, clutching his case tighter, walking a little faster. As he got closer to the two men, they turned to face him, suspicion heavy on their dull faces.

"Officer!" he called. "Officer! Those two men have been following me! I think they want to rob me!"

The two shifted their attention from Sam to us as the Tech stepped behind them, as if looking for protection. The security guard's hand was already dropping toward the massive black holster strapped to his hip.

Then Sam reached under his jacket and brought up a stunner. We heard the weapon buzz twice in rapid succession, and the two goons slumped to the street.

"Very nice," I said. "Quiet, too." I glanced nervously at the empty windows

lining the street, wondering if anyone there had caught our performance. "David... you and Larry take a walk around the area and see if we have any more company. Sam... give me a hand."

We dragged the two slumbering goons off the street and hid them under some trash in an alley next to the warehouse. Larry and David were back a moment later, giving us the all-clear. There seemed to be nothing about to tie us to the scene.

I keyed my comline open. "This is Red Dog leader to Group," I said softly. "We are in position. Do you copy?"

"Roger," I heard Glenn's voice in the earplug receiver in my ear. "Phantom is running."

Five minutes to access the warehouse computer and change the transaction number. Twenty minutes more before the alarm would go out.

If we were lucky. My plan wasn't looking so good, now.

Larry and David spread out across the street, taking their look-out positions. The next part of the show was up to Sam and me.

And Glenn, back at the compound, pecking away at his keyboard.

"Phantom to Red Dog leader," Glenn's voice said after an agonizing wait. "We have a go!"

That was it! We entered the warehouse. A bored-looking clerk sat behind a desk window near the entrance. I tried to assume an expression of boredom as profound as his as I walked up to the window and handed him the paper.

"Morning, Sam," the clerk said as he took the credit letter from me. "Thought you weren't coming in to pick up your stuff until tomorrow."

"Change of plan," he said. I heard the tightness in his voice.

The clerk inserted the letter in the scanner on his desk and tapped out a command on his console. Nothing happened.

I had a sinking feeling in my middle. *Who is scamming whom? Just how much do we know about Sam... former Kurita Tech... employee of the Sandovals...?*

The clerk smacked the computer with the flat of his hand, then tried again, and the screen lit up with confirmation. "Just have to know how to talk to these things," he said. "First passage to the right, second cage to the right. Need any help?"

"Nope," Sam said.

"Need transport?"

"Nah... that's why I brought this metal jockey along. All I have to do is keep him from wrecking it."

We threaded our way through the warehouse. Wire mesh cages rose on

every side, most piled high with crates and shipping containers, cargo consignments awaiting transport off Cassias to other worlds, or to other parts of the planet. Sam led the way to the cage where he had stored Max.

I don't think I'd realized until that moment just what a job we were trying to pull off. Max was *big*... a literal mountain of metal, twelve meters tall and filling the cage. I could see where the cage door had been cut and reworked, just to walk him inside.

Sam started to reach for the lock to the cage door, then stopped. "Someone was messing with this," he said. "I put some powder with a static charge on the lock and frame when I was here last, and it's gone now."

"The watchman, making his rounds?" I suggested. We were five minutes into our 20-minute countdown already.

"Maybe." He put his case on the floor and opened it.

"You think it's our friends?"

"I hope so," he replied. "We certainly don't need anyone else in on this."

He removed a small pouch with tools in it from his case. He selected one and pushed it into a corner of the lock frame. It popped open and he looked inside. "Someone has added a little extra something."

"Sam, I don't mean to bother you or anything, but the clock is running."

"Yeah, yeah, I know." He went to work on the lock. It took him only a moment to cut some wires and touch two of them together, producing a solid click from the door. It felt like hours.

He smiled as he touched a control and watched the cage door slide open with a whirl of electric motors. "Another alarm trigger," he said. He replaced the tools, then pulled a small device from his case, a rectangular box with a pair of antennae protruding from it.

"Sam..."

"I know."

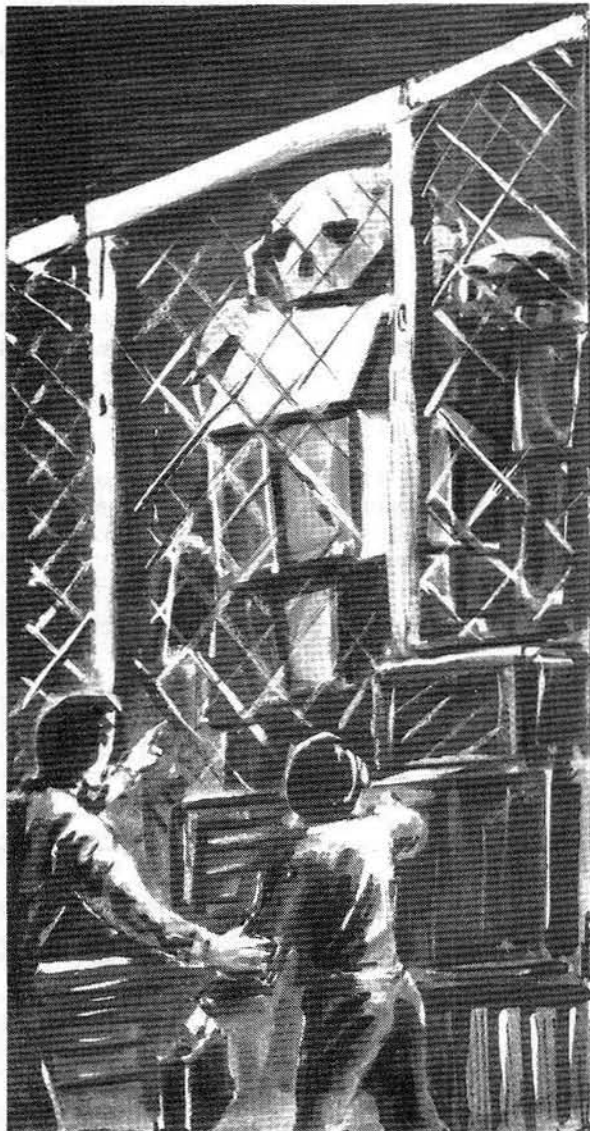
"Ten minutes, Sam!"

"I know." He made a sweep of the cage interior, passing the antennae across Max, across the cage walls.

"Time!" I whispered. We were already behind our schedule, the minutes flicking past. "Time!"

"I'm going as fast as I can."

I looked up at Max, towering above us. Up close, his disguise was useless, a collection of sheet metal plates and assorted junk lightly welded to arms and legs and torso to disguise the combat machine's outline, the whole concoction painted a neutral gray. I could just barely make out the tracings of an older camouflage pattern



concealed beneath the most recent coat of paint.

Sam looked up at the cliff of metal. "What have you got?"

"A tracker," he said. "Something electronic and active to make my sniffer here go 'bleep.' Bring me my case."

He selected a tool, a pair of forceps wrapped with insulated wire, and used them to remove something that looked like a blister in the paint on Max's foot. Gingerly, he carried the bubble of paint across the cage, slipped it through the wire, and placed it on a cargo container in the cage next to ours. "Let them track *that*," he said with a nasty smile. "All clear now. Let's go!"

Sam put everything away in his case, slung it from a strap across his shoulder, then led the way around to Max's left leg. He opened a panel, touched a control, and the boarding ladder slid down out of the tangle of metal above us. He started climbing and I followed after, hand over hand, up past the monster machine's legs, past the clutter of sheet metal around his torso, curving in across the back left shoulder to where Sam was unlocking the massive hatch in the back of Max's head.

We were sixteen minutes into the count.

The hatch swung back with a hiss, he scrambled in, and I squeezed in after him. *If this is a trap, now is the time to spring it.* I thought. Sam reached across the pilot's seat and tapped in an access code.

"I'm setting it for a new operator," he said. "You'll have to tune it yourself."

I slipped into the seat, reached over my head, and brought the massive neurohelmet down on its spaghetti tangle of wiring and cables, positioned it over my head, then lowered it into place.

I hesitated as I reached for the power switch. *He could be an assassin. This could all be an elaborate set-up, just to get me. Who? The Sandovals, of course. Blood feud! Jose Sandoval could have set the whole thing up, just to cook me.*

If he's an assassin, I'm dead meat. I glanced to where Sam was crouching next to me, studying the control readouts with a superhuman intensity. *And if not, I've found a good friend!*

I hit the switch. The familiar surge of power, of sensation flooded through my helmet. Console displays lit up, oscilloscope waveforms fluttered, meshed, then coalesced, as Max's computer sought my brainwave patterns, and conformed to them. Through the neurohelmet, through the nerves in my inner ears, I sensed Max's own sense of balance, sensed his body coming alive around me.

I breathed again.

Sam was shouting in my ear. "Just take it real easy with Max! He handles like a dream!"

I nodded, letting my hands get the feel of the controls in front of me. Gently, I guided Max into a stoop, stretching his arms out and down to gather the crates stacked along one side of the cage. There were three of them, heavy, bulky things. Max straightened with his load as if it were a stack of empty cardboard boxes. I tried a tentative step, then another. I made him duck as we stepped through the enlarged cage door and into the warehouse proper.

Twenty minutes! Please God, just a little longer...

I keyed open the com. "Red Dog Leader to Red Dog One. We're coming out."

"Red Dog One to Leader," David's voice replied in my helmet. "It's clear. Come on!"

Step upon ponderous step, we made our way through the dimly-lit warehouse, careful of the wooden crates in Max's arms. Late afternoon sunlight spilled in from a widening gap in the wall ahead as the clerk at the desk opened the main warehouse door. On the street, I caught sight of Larry and David moving across the street. There was no one else about.

"Max moves like a dream," I said to Sam. "Good God, I think we're actually going to pull this thing off!"

He grinned and nodded, but then another voice was cutting in on the com frequency, urgent and sharp. "Phantom to group! Phantom to group! The message has been delivered! I say again... THE MESSAGE HAS BEEN DELIVERED!"

Alpha! ETA... Shadow Two's position in thirty seconds! Do you copy, Shadow Two?"

"Copy, Shadow One."

"Hound One to Fox One. We're on! Let's go!"

"Fox One to Hound One. Moving! Don't chase too close!"

"Roger that, Fox One."

"Shadow Two to Group! Target passing. ETA Point Alpha, one minute!"

I could follow the entire scene by listening to the radio chatter, playing it out just as we'd planned it that afternoon back at the port. Two of the guys from our Command Lance were Shadow One and Shadow Two... the lookouts to warn of the approach of reinforcements. Fox One was one of the company trucks, piled high with crates of scrap metal, being driven as though it had just been stolen from the spaceport compound. Hound One was our own muscle, a couple more Company A MechWarriors and a dozen riflemen from our support platoon, pretending to chase the truck thief. Most carried handguns, with a scattering of laser pistols and stunners.

"Fox One... I'm going in... *now!*"

"Hound One to Group! The Fox has crashed across the street. Nice scatter on the cargo. We're moving up now... Fox One is out of the truck. Ah! Here come the clowns!"

I had Max up to speed now, striding through the streets towards the port gate. Here and there, townspeople along the street gave us incurious glances as we

The whole plan was coming apart as I listened. They had most of our company back there, cut off and surrounded!

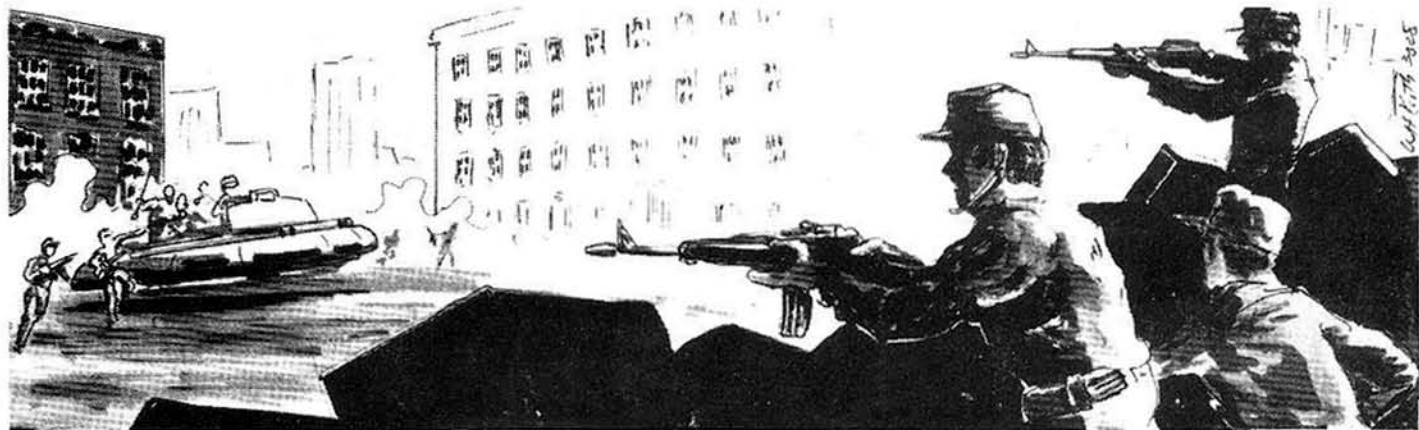
I glanced at my wristset. We were 22 minutes into the countdown, and Glenn, our first line of defense, was out of the fight. Now it was up to the rest of the company to delay reinforcements as long as possible.

We still had a long way to go.

"Shadow One to Group! We have a target, on the move! A brown, open-top hovercraft with six big dudes in it. Point Alpha is the destination. I say again, Point

thundered past. Giant lifters and Loader-Mechs were common sights along the back streets of any spaceport town. They'd never seen anything like Max before, of course... but then, he wouldn't look *entirely* out of place.

"Shadow One to Group! More company coming! Two more hovercraft... and these guys mean business!"



"Hound One to Shadow One. What do you have?"

"Can't tell, Hound... but there's lots of them. I see armored vests and assault rifles."

"Proctors?"

"No uniforms, Hound. Just guns and mean expressions. Shadow to Group! I see a couple of portable SRMs!"

"Oh, *drek*..."

My blood went cold. Petty thugs and gangsters we could handle, but it sounded like a small army was converging on the scene we had staged at Point Alpha. Handguns against assault rifles was not a good thing... and if those jokers were carrying portable rocket launchers, too...

The port gate was just ahead. A few more steps, and I'd be through, with no one the wiser.

"Hey! Those guys are shooting at us! Watch it!"

"Hound One to Group! Hound One to Group! We are under attack! I see two... no, three light civilian hovercraft. Assault rifles and lasers! Watch it! Get down...!"

A confused gabble came from my helmet speakers. I could hear the distant crackle of gunfire over the comline, could hear the nerve-tearing shriek of someone wounded.

"Hound Two to Group! Hound One's been hit! One enemy hovercraft has slipped past our position and moving to our rear! The others have us engaged from the front!"

The whole plan was coming apart as I listened. They had most of our company back there, cut off and surrounded!

"Red Dog Two to Group! Enemy hovercraft at the warehouse now! It's cutting back on Fox and Hound from the rear!" Gunfire chattered. "Red Dog Two to Group! We are under fire!"

I brought Max to a halt, stooped, and gently set the weapons crates on the street at the feet of an astounded woman pedestrian carrying a baby. Then I brought him around and pushed the controls forward, urging the 100-ton behemoth into a lumbering run. I half expected a protest from Sam, but he remained at my side, clinging to the arm of my chair, silent and grim. He could hear the radio chatter coming from the cabin speaker, and knew the score as well as I.

Fox and Hound groups were pinned in the street behind the wreckage of the truck, with two hovercraft in front of them and a third keening up the street at their rear, its blowers kicking up clouds of dust and paper trash from the pavement. I could see civilians scattering down side streets, could see two running figures which could only be Larry and David, trying to outrun the third racing hovercraft towards the company's position.

"We don't have weapons," Sam reminded me.

"I know."

The third hovercraft's pilot must have seen Max coming. How could he miss us? The vehicle skittered around on sharply balanced air jets. I saw a flash from the craft's rear deck, saw a glowing speck arc towards my face, unravelling a twisting string of white as it came.

The missile struck Max in his chest with a flash and a hammerblow shock which scattered shreds of metal in a whirling cloud. A second SRM streaked towards us, close behind the first.

"Hang on!" I yelled at Sam. Max lurched forward, arms and hands extended. The second blast caught Max on his shoulder, but he reached through the flame and shock, metal fingers closing on the hovercraft as its pilot twisted it into a desperate spin to the right. I saw figures leaping from

the rear deck, saw one pale face upturned from the driver's compartment, eyes wide with stark terror. *There goes our low profile*, I thought.

A laser rifle flared and ruby light flickered across Max's face. His hands came together. The hovercraft was a bulky toy less than a quarter of Max's height in length. I could hear the fans keening, could feel the craft's thin hull buckling in Max's grip as I raised the machine up off the street. Desperate gunmen scattered in every direction, leaving their weapons on the pavement.

No one faces an *Atlas* willingly... even when they have a 'Mech around them.

A dozen strides brought me up behind the company, still sheltering behind the barricade of the wrecked truck. Beyond, two hovercraft drifted, uncertain, as figures half-glimpsed through billowing dust scrambled for cover. Three more infantry-portable SRMs fired, their smoke trails streaking through the evening sky. With Max's thick hide, they amounted to pinpricks... but Max was one 'Mech and unarmed. Even he wouldn't last long if the city authorities began mustering their forces... or if these attackers had more reinforcements in reserve.

I shifted the controls. Max brought the captive hovercraft up above his head. No weapons? I wouldn't say so. I snapped the arms down, sending the hovercraft flailing end over end across the barricade and smack into one of the attacking vehicles. Flames blossomed, blinding in the failing twilight, as oily smoke boiled into the sky. The surviving hovercraft sideslipped into a building front, bringing down a shower of concrete which bounced and powdered in the street. By the light of the flames, I could see the boys of the Avengers dropping back supporting the handful who were wounded.

I stood guard with Max, covering their rear as they made it through deserted streets back to the compound. I could hear sirens in the distance through his external sensors, as the city Proctors closed in.

The port storage warehouse Andrews' Avengers used for storing its groundside equipment gaped invitingly as Max strode through the spaceport gate and into the company compound. A small crowd had gathered inside to greet us... everyone, in fact, who had not been in on the operation in person. I saw the Colonel standing there, hands on hips, conveying a definite sense of disapproval.

But the rest of the guys were cheering. Our quartermaster was there with a HandlerMech, a great, open framework of a machine with oversized arms and strut supports. "Lay that thing down, Daryl," I heard him call. "Then get the hell out of there. We don't have much time!"

I guided Max to the ground. From flat on my back, I powered down, pulled off the neurohelmet, and cracked the hatch. Sam wiggled out feet first, and I followed.

The Avengers' Tech crew was already busy, swarming across Max's torso like ants at a carcass. There wouldn't be time to disassemble him completely, but they were going to work at the bolts and fittings at his torso joint, where his legs and lower torso were joined to his upper torso by a broad, 360° track. As I watched, a small company hovercraft keened into the warehouse, and I caught sight of the packing crates containing Max's weapons strapped to the deck.

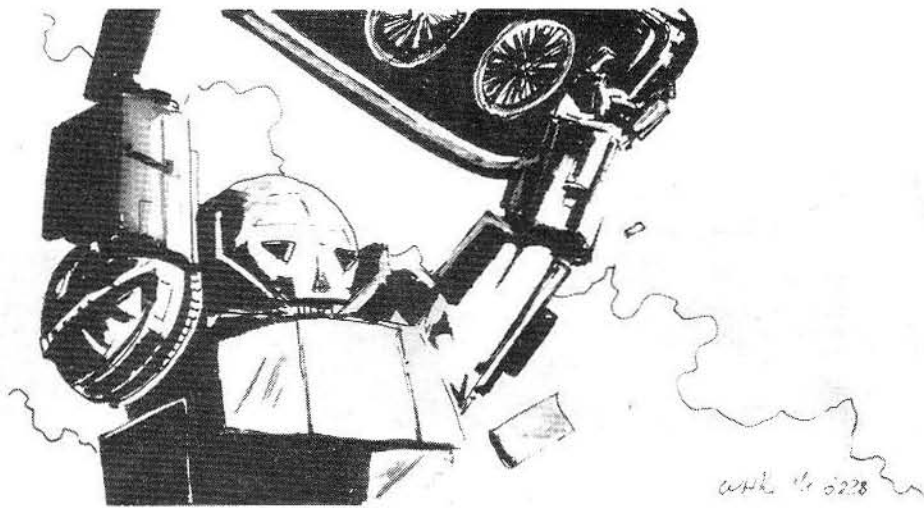
The Colonel came up beside us, fire in his eye. "Nice, low profile, huh?" he said. He was about to say more, but an infantryman came jogging up out of the gathering dark outside.

"Company, Colonel!" he said. "They're on their way here!"

"Snap it up, people!" he bellowed, and they snapped.

Hissing and clanking, the LoaderMech backed Max's upper torso away from the lower. A second Loader appeared and helped Mech-handle the mass of machinery up onto a trailer platform, which trundled it away into the warehouse. A second platform hummed to a stop, and the two Loaders repeated the maneuver with Max's legs. Techs were already scouring the floor with handlights, looking for telltale traces of the operation, but there seemed to be nothing more incriminating than a few black patches of Mechdrek staining the pavement.

And then the local police were there, just outside the warehouse, led by a pom-



pous, be-ribboned and mustached official with *authority* written all over him. The Colonel strode over to meet them. Sam and I glanced at each other, then watched the display. We heard nothing but unintelligible shouts. There was a lot of hand waving on both sides. Sam nudged me in the side, and nodded towards a pair of locals off by themselves. One was discreetly waving the antennae of some sort of electronic device across the area, then shaking his head at his friend.

I edged a bit closer.

The Colonel is one of those individuals who can turn a lovely shade of purple when he gets angry. He was really hitting his stride now. All anyone could do was watch, and hope to stay clear of his path.

"Whoa, there!" he said. Was it imagination, or did he manage to convey the impression that steam was coming from his ears? "Let me go over this just one more time to be sure I have it right! Some lowlife steals one of *my* trucks from this compound. My men chase him. The lowlife wrecks my truck and scatters garbage all over *your* street. A crowd of *your* security people show up and open fire on *my* men in *your* town. They claim they're responding to an alarm from a warehouse they've been hired to protect... claim that my people are stealing a 'Mech that doesn't look like a 'Mech... shoot *my* people..."

"Then they claim the missing BattleMech that doesn't look like a 'Mech is there after all, throwing hovercraft and smashing up your town..."

"MY GOD, WHAT KIND OF A PORT ARE YOU PEOPLE RUNNING HERE?"

It did sound a mite improbable, the way he said it. The be-ribboned fellow looked a

bit taken aback as the echo of the Colonel's shout rang back from the buildings around us.

But the Colonel was just getting started. "You hire rabble and thugs to protect your warehouse! You claim my men stole somebody's BattleMech... while your men were shooting them down in the street! And now... this is the part I love... *it's all my fault?* You want me to pay for my truck, your buildings, their hovercraft, and somebody's missing BattleMech? You want me to turn *my* men over to you for questioning?" For a moment, I thought he was going to explode, and it looked like the man with the ribbons thought so, too, because he took a step back. Beyond the Colonel, I saw the quartermaster step from the warehouse and move his hand in a subtle "OK." The Colonel saw it and nodded. His voice dropped then to a deadly whisper, and I had to strain to catch what he said.

"Take a look to your left, gentlemen. They looked, and so did I. There was a line of BattleMechs there... Johnny's *Thunderbolt*, and Casey's *Stinger*, and Glenn's *Shadow Hawk*. They moved, almost silent in the near dark, deploying across the field.

"That, gentlemen, is what a company of BattleMechs looks like," the Colonel continued. "You're looking for a BattleMech? Take a good look!"

"I... I... I'm sure we can come to a reasonable agreement," the official said. David's *Wasp* lumbered into view, taking up a position near the compound gate.

"Oh, I'm very sure we can, Mr. Chief Proctor. You say an *Atlas* is missing? You claim that I have it here? Well, now, an *Atlas* is a rather large piece of machinery. You want to look through my warehouse, help

yourself! Just remember... anything you unpack, you repack... and my boys are scheduled to boost out of this drekhole at 2300 local. You make me late and I'll forget about Conventions and turn my boys loose on your town.

"I am going to deploy my Recon Lance around this area. You can search for your 'Mech, but any attempt to enter this compound in force, any threat against my boys, will be considered a hostile act... and I will act accordingly." He took a step back and raised his voice. "Recon Lance! Perimeter defense! Execute!"

Larry couldn't resist the temptation to trigger his *Jenner's* jumpjets and vault the gate and the huddle of security people blocking it. David's *Wasp* and Glenn's *Shadow Hawk* were close behind, vaulting the fence and deploying in opposite directions.

The official glanced at his companions. "Ah... we see your point of view, Colonel... and perhaps a mistake has been made. Ah... we will retire to... ah... conduct our investigation and... ah... act accordingly."

"Do you want to search my warehouse for an *Atlas*?"

"Ah... I don't think that will be necessary, Sir..."

"Would you like me to turn out my pockets?"

"No, Sir." They left.

I started to turn to go myself, but I was too late. The Colonel caught my eye, and I saw the anger kindle there anew. "You. My office. NOW!"

From his office window, I could see the hurrying shadows of my mates under the dazzle of the port lights. Our DropShip bay doors were open, and the last of our gear and supplies were being hustled aboard. There were Port Authority people there watching, of course... but they didn't seem anxious to interfere. The hulking shadows of John King's *Thunderbolt* stood alongside the bay ramp, and the authorities no longer seemed prone to argue.

"It was a trap after all," he said as I walked in and closed the door. He tossed something onto his desktop for me to see.

I picked it up. It was a shoulder flash, cut from someone's uniform. "Kurita regular infantry," I said.

"David took it from the jacket one of those thugs was wearing under his armor. Most of them were locals, working for Kurita." He gestured at the patch. "But a few were Kurita officers."

"They were watching Max?"

"Don't look so surprised. You think small-time hoods would take that much

interest in a 'Mech transfer? Or come armed like a small army?"

"What... what did they want?" I felt weak.

"Our best guess is that they were watching the *Atlas* until Sandoval arrived tomorrow. Then they would act in support."

"Of what?"

"What, indeed? Picture what would happen, as our 'Mechs deployed north to face the Kurita fortress up in the tundra country? Picture our boys guarding the port here, most of them out on the town, a few standing sentry go in light 'Mechs... *Stingers*, *Wasps*..." He jerked a thumb towards the DropShip, where loader platforms were wrestling a pair of huge packing crates up the ramp. Each crate must have weighed 50 tons.

"Then an *Atlas* appears, right here, smack in the middle of the port we're depending on for our supply line. What do you think would happen?"

"It would be a massacre. All our supplies, ammo..."

"All gone. Maybe our DropShips too, if the *Atlas* moved fast enough, before the alarm was given. Certainly our command control would be wrecked. The main Davion army, up north, would be cut off, just when the Kurita 'Mechs came boiling out of their fortress. Maybe they planned to bring in reinforcements, too. I don't know. There were several freighters due in tomorrow, along with Sandoval's. It's possible a sizeable contingent of the Proserpina Husars could be on board, ready to disembark in the confusion."

Realization struck me. "Then... then the locals are helping Kurita! The local Proctors, they were in on it!"

"Maybe. Or maybe they were too scared to do anything but cooperate. I imagine there are quite a few Kurita agents still in the woodwork here." He shrugged. "It's not our problem. I'm putting this all in a report and turning it over to General Richardson at Cassias HQ. He can sort things out. I just pray to God we haven't left him with a guerrilla war on his hands" He spun from the window, looking me in the eye. "As for you, wouldn't you say things got a little out of hand tonight?"

"Well... ah..." was all I could manage.

"Low profile... right? 'Keep the *Atlas* out of sight,' right?"

"It seemed like the thing to do at the time, Sir..."

"All I can say, Mister, is that it had better be one hell of a long time before you come in here with any more of your bright ideas!" Then the anger evaporated in a grin. "Un-

less it's something really good! Here." He brought out a bottle of imported scotch and a pair of glasses. "Let's have a drink... *Lieutenant*."

We lifted on schedule and left Cassias behind us, boosting for our rendezvous with our regiment's JumpShip. I heard later that we passed a small fleet of DropShips inbound as we accelerated from orbit, and I hoped that General Richardson was ready for them.

Of course, without Max, their plan wasn't likely to work. I could imagine Fernando Sandoval, hearing the news that his *Atlas* was gone, getting madder and madder as he wondered who had done it.

Someday, I'll meet him and let him know. I've made that promise, to myself, and to Max.

Meanwhile, the Colonel has reshuffled our Company. I'm a lieutenant, now, commanding the Avengers' A Company Fire Lance. I haven't ridden Max into battle yet, but Sam has him tuned to perfection, sweet and sharp and rarin' to go. Me... an officer? Well, stranger things have happened. Back in Johannas, with Company A surrounded and the roof caving in, I'd felt the responsibility like a lead weight around my neck. Those gold lieutenant's bars carried the same responsibility... but somehow they didn't seem as heavy. Hell, I might get used to that kind of responsibility, sharing it with Max.

I think we're going to make out just fine.

Lieutenant Daryl F. James is currently Fire Lance Leader and Executive Officer of Andrews' Avengers, a mercenary unit employed by House Davion along the Kurita border. Though current deployment is secret, Lieutenant James assured BattleTechnology that the Avengers would be seeing action soon, probably as a result of the annual wargame deployments known as Operation: Galahad.

Tech Sam Williams has remained with the unit. He remains the personal Tech of Lieutenant James and has recently been given the key post of Regimental Senior Tech, in charge of the outfit's entire technical staff.

CAVALRY

Tactics and Applications for a New Age

by Colonel Morgan C. Graeme

During the time in earth's history known as the Middle Ages, cavalymen were wealthy knights and nobles, because they were the only members of society who could afford to own horses. The commonly accepted idea of cavalry tactics in that day and age was to line up all of your horsemen and charge headlong into the enemy's cavalry, because they were considered to be the only worthy opponents. The foot soldiers were regarded as part of the scenery.

As time went on, armies became somewhat more standardized and thereby better organized. The role played by cavalry on the battlefield began to change. Heavily armored cavalry still existed in the knights and nobles, but another type of horseman appeared on the battlefield. The new cavalry troops didn't wear the cumbersome plate armor of the knights, nor did they use the heavy lance and broadsword commonly wielded by the heavy cavalry. The lance in particular was shockingly effective in the massed charge which was the favored tactic of the knights. When these new mounted soldiers wore armor at all, it was usually a leather jack or a light chainmail sark. Their weapons were a smaller, lighter lance, a long sword, or an axe. Sometimes these light cavalymen carried bows or javelins, weapons with which to harass and cripple their opponents from a distance—a type of warfare knights considered dishonorable. The horses used by these fighters were also smaller, lighter, and much faster than the huge destriers of the armored knights.

Unlike the mounted knights, the light cavalry did not engage in wild charges. Instead, they were assigned to accomplish specific tasks. Among these tasks were: gather and relay information, disrupt the enemy's communications, destroy the enemy's stores, neutralize enemy cavalry, deny the enemy access to his reserves, disrupt the enemy unit's integrity, and prevent scattered enemy units from reforming.

The armies and the battlefield of the 31st Century are not so different from those of the Middle Ages. Where once rode the armored knights, now MechWarriors thunder across the land in the BattleMechs. And where the light horsemen skirmished with harried formations of heavy infantry, now the newest breed of cavalymen rides his iron steed into battle against his massive, armored foe. He, too, is a light cavalymen, and his mount is a fast-moving armored cavalry vehicle.

For the purpose of this discussion, we may define a light cavalry lance as consisting of 4 fast-moving, armored vehicles, such as the *J. Edgar* or the *Pegasus* hovertank. A typical light cavalry vehicle has a



cruising speed of 70 kph or more and carries an assortment of weapons. Its armor tends to be on the light side, but this is in keeping with the nature of cavalry tactics and applications. Most VTOLs fall into this category as well.

Light recon 'Mechs, like the *Locust* or *Ostscout*, on the other hand, do not actually qualify as light cavalry vehicles, on the basis of their tactical application. Generally, BattleMechs of any weight are most often used in "stand and fight" style combats with other 'Mechs, while light cavalry vehicles are best used for quick hit-and-run operations.

In order to fully appreciate the value of a well-trained, well-organized unit of light cavalry, we should examine each of the applications and tactics in turn.

APPLICATIONS

Gather and relay information:

By sending scout riders ahead and to the sides of an advancing column, a unit commander can extend his eyes and ears for a long way. These men were generally lightly armed and armored, and mounted on the fastest horses available. In this role, light cavalymen roamed far afield from the main body, keeping watch for signs of enemy activity. When traces of the enemy were found, they hastened back to report what they had discovered to their commander. Often, scouting sorties such as these became horse races between scout and enemy patrols. Such patrols were often sent out from fixed positions for exactly the same reason—to gather and relay information.

Today, in the 31st Century, the task of gathering and relaying information has mostly been given over to reconnaissance satellites and aircraft; however, cavalry recon units remain a valuable part of any army. A recon lance of BattleMechs usually consists of 4 light, jump-capable 'Mechs fitted with sophisticated electronic equipment. Non-'Mech recon units are generally made up of fast-moving, lightly-armored vehicles, such as the *Swift Wind* or the *Harrier*. These vehicles, like the scouts of old, move far ahead of the unit they are scouting for. Once contact with the enemy has been made, it is the responsibility of the cavalry commander to assess the strengths of the enemy, determine the makeup and identity of the unit he is observing, etc. Then he must relay all of this information back to the commander of the main body.

During the second battle of Karia on the Davion-held world of Royal, cavalry recon units attached to the invading Kurita forces

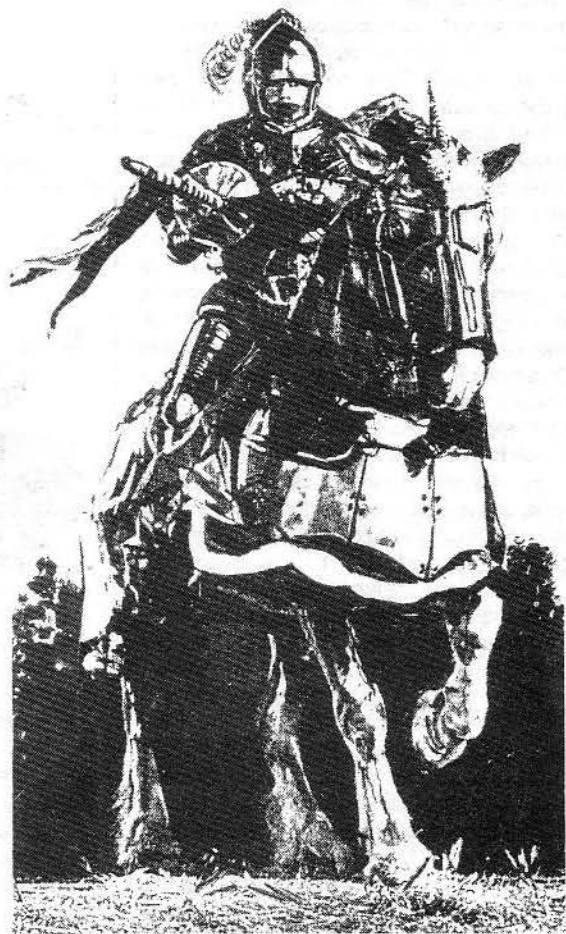
Right: A Medieval armored cavalryman. The armies and the battlefield of the 31st Century are not so different from those of the Middle Ages.

encountered a battalion of heavy and medium 'Mechs moving through the rocky hills north of the city of Karia. After determining the strength and identity of the Davion forces by lying concealed amidst the rocks and observing them for nearly an hour, the recon unit sped back to their own lines. Their report enabled the Combine forces in Karia to alter their defensive position. When the Davion 'Mechs attacked the city, the Kurita forces repulsed them easily. Twice more, the Davion forces attacked, each time from different directions, but each time they were beaten back, because the Kurita cavalry units shadowed them and advised the garrison commander which direction the assault would come from. Karia fell at last when the Davion commander order a massive airstrike on the Kurita positions in and around the city.

Disrupt enemy communications:

If cavalry scouts were the eyes of a Medieval army, then the best way of blinding that army was to eliminate those scouts. Often cavalry scouts from one army would be detailed to run down scouts from the other army to prevent them from relaying their information. Often, too, cavalry units would be used to eliminate post riders, runners, and other messengers carrying communiqués between enemy units. During the American Civil War on earth, cavalry divisions were also responsible for the destruction of railways, telegraph lines, and bridges. Not only did these attacks disrupt communications, but the demolition of rail lines and bridges also delayed or prevented troop movement from one location to another.

In these times of electronic communication, this particular aspect of cavalry tactics has, for the most part, been eliminated.



However, in the case of the second battle of Karia, cited above, had the Davion forces cavalry units of their own, and had those cavalry units caught and destroyed those from the Draconis Combine, the face of the battle would have undergone a radical change. Some tactical experts have even gone so far as to state that the battle for Karia was actually won by two lances of Kurita cavalry vehicles.

Of course, railway lines and bridges remain attractive targets for cavalry raids.

Destroy stores:

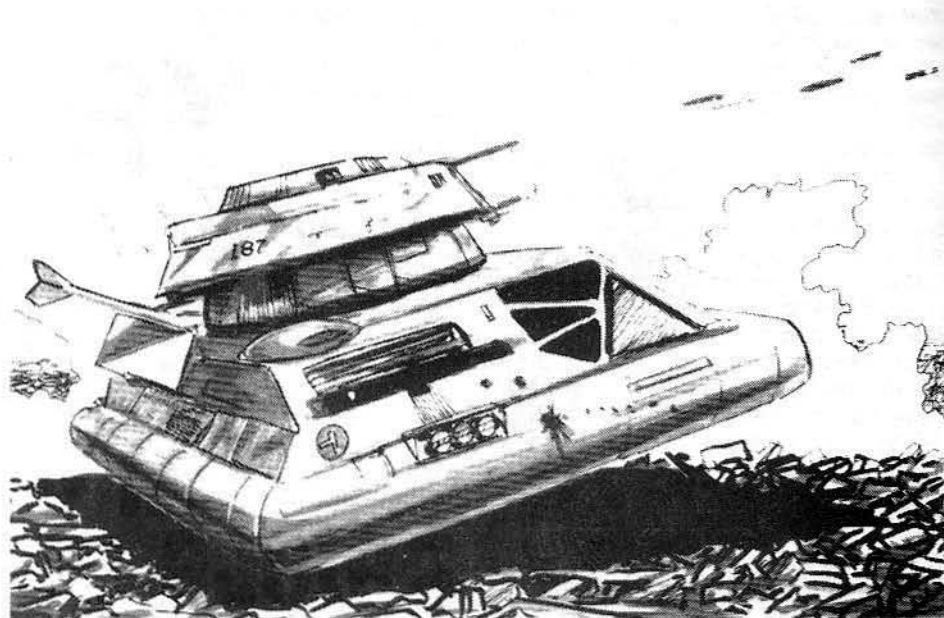
An army without supplies is no army. When a shortage of vital materiel—such as ammunition, replacement parts, clothing, and food—develops, the individual members of an army tend to wander off, foraging for whatever supplies they can find. This is doubly true of mercenaries who, if they do not receive the supplies stipulated in their

contract, have the nasty habit of refusing to fight. Just such an incident occurred when a Steiner cavalry company destroyed several convoys of supply trucks destined for Morrison's Division, a mercenary unit hired by the Draconis Combine to garrison a fortified town in the mountains of New Wessex. The mercenaries had been standing off a siege by the Lyran invaders for many weeks. Supplies of ammunition, spare parts, medical supplies, and food were running short. Four attempts to supply the garrison were foiled by cavalry raids on the convoys. A fifth failed when a *Leopard*-class DropShip was shot down by Commonwealth fighters. At that point, the mercenaries simply laid down their arms and surrendered the beleaguered town to the Steiner forces.

An added bonus to this particular usage of cavalry is the possibility of not destroying but capturing the enemy's supplies for use by friendly forces. If the mercenaries of Morrison's Division had been able to mount a raid on a Steiner supply depot, they might have been able to hold out indefinitely.

Neutralize enemy cavalry:

As this article demonstrates, a well-trained, properly-employed cavalry unit can be an effective tool in any military operation. It is imperative that a cavalry commander learn to deal with his opposite number in the enemy forces. When a cavalry unit is detailed to act as a screen for a heavy unit, the cavalry commander must assess the situation and deploy his cavalry screen in the manner which best fits the potential threat. Usually, this means taking up a position near the center of the heavy unit he has been assigned to protect. If the heavy unit is



to stop or turn aside the onrushing enemy cavalry.

Once an enemy charge has been broken, and the threat of enemy cavalry neutralized, it is imperative that the cavalry screen return to the post and not pursue the fleeing enemy.

A cavalry troop assigned to screen a heavy unit of the Kurita Legion of Vega chased a withdrawing Davion cavalry platoon attached to the Eridani Light Horse for nearly 4 kilometers. They returned to their unit to find that other elements of the Light Horse had attacked and overrun the column in their absence. When the Vegan cavalry tried to escape, the same Davion unit which had decoyed them away from the column caught and defeated them.

situation dictates. Replacements, on the other hand, are generally held in a rear area and are sent up to a unit during a lull in the fighting to take the place of casualties.

A cavalry unit need not actually destroy an enemy's reserves or replacements. In some cases, it is sufficient merely to delay or cripple these reinforcements. The officer in charge of a cavalry platoon assigned to attack enemy reserves had better know his job and had better be capable of responding to any situation which develops, because he will literally be taking his men between the hammer and the anvil. If his penetration of the enemy lines comes too soon, his objective unit will have enough time to respond to the attack and still be useful in the front lines. Too late, and the reserves he has been sent to engage may have already been committed to the battle. If he is unable to quickly destroy or at least contain the reserve unit, a cavalry commander may find that he has no escape route from behind enemy lines. The front line units could even wheel and crush the cavalry between the reserves and themselves.

In February of 3025, during the invasion of Shiloh, a cavalry company operating with the Lyran Commonwealth's 10th Skye Rangers drove through a gap in the lines of the 3rd Northwind Highlanders and attacked the Marik forces being held in reserve. The Steiner cavalry destroyed one light 'Mech and damaged two more before being driven off. Even that was sufficient. The entry of the reserve units was delayed long enough for the Rangers to punch a hole through the Highlanders' lines. The Lyrans committed

A well-trained, properly-employed cavalry unit can be an effective tool in any military operation.

on the march, cavalry screens are placed ahead of and on the flanks of the advancing column. Whatever the deployment of a cavalry screen, when the threat of enemy cavalry is present, the screen commander should wait until the enemy has committed himself to an attack before making his counter-charge. The timing of a counter-charge must be precise. Too soon, and the enemy will have time to alter his own charge. Too late, and there may not be enough momentum to the counter-charge

Deny the enemy access to reserves:

An army's reserves are just as important to it as its supplies. As units and individuals are eliminated, their places are taken by reserves and replacements. Denying the enemy access to his reserves limits the number of enemy effectives which a unit commander will have to face. Usually, reserves are held back not far from the actual line of battle and are committed to the fighting as either the battle plans or the

their own reserves and pushed the defenders back into the fortress-town of Parson (nearly 5 km away from the site of the battle). The Commonwealth forces laid siege to the city. It fell within two weeks. During the siege, three attempts were made to relieve Parson, but all were repulsed by the besieging Lyran forces.

Disrupt enemy unit integrity:

In the days when heavy infantrymen fought from a shield-wall formation, one of the functions of light cavalry troops was to disrupt the integrity, or organization, of such a formation. This was not done by striking at the front of the shield wall—that was a job for the knights. Rather, the light cavalry units would use their speed and maneuverability to get behind the enemy heavies and attack from the rear. Usually when this happened, human nature took over, and some of the men in the shield wall turned around to defend themselves. In doing so, they turned their backs on the infantry with whom they were already engaged. The light cavalry, unable to stand and fight such an opponent, would withdraw, only to strike again at a different place in the shield wall. After a few attacks of this nature, the shield wall's orderly ranks were thrown into complete disarray, making them easy prey.

The same basic principle applies today. As battle lines are drawn, and the armies begin to advance, the light cavalry units sweep around the flank of the enemy formation, striking from behind. Naturally wishing to defend their lightly-armored rear quarters, the 'Mech pilots tend to turn around to face the attack, just like their Medieval counterparts. When this hap-

pens, the cavalry unit withdraws, only to hit again at another part of the formation. The friendly heavy units then attack the enemy 'Mechs frontally.

An excellent example of this application of cavalry tactics occurred during the Battle of Trell. A single 20-ton *Locust*, supported by a platoon of fast hovertanks, all under the command of Grayson Carlyle, engaged some of Hendrik of Oberon's bandits, who were in the employ of the Draconis Combine. While Carlyle, in the *Locust*, engaged the bandits frontally, the lighter hovertanks attacked the bandits' exposed flank outside the city of Trellwan. The unexpected assault caused sufficient confusion among the bandits to permit Carlyle to carry off his objective—a supply depot raid—and escape.

The application of cavalry in this fashion is just as hazardous to the cavalry unit as attacking enemy reserves. In both cases, it is necessary for the light unit to go behind enemy lines, possibly between line units and their reserves. In either case, if a cavalry officer lingers too long in one spot, he runs the serious risk of being cut off from both his path of withdrawal and the heavy unit unit to which he is attached. When this happens, barring exceptional good luck, the cavalry unit is as good as dead.

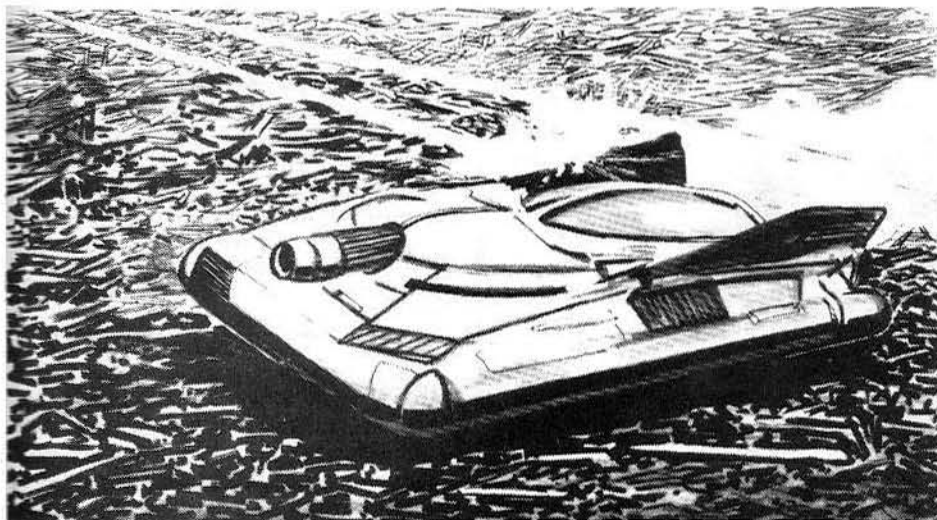
Prevent reformation of enemy units:

In antiquity, cavalry was frequently used to harry enemy units which had been broken in battle. Forces already exhausted by combat, already having suffered heavy casualties or blows to their morale, could rarely stand against a sudden charge from an unexpected quarter. Units already bro-

ken and scattered could be prevented from reforming, and their members run down and eliminated individually.

On the mechanized battlefield of the 31st Century, broken units are fair game for cavalry units. Infantry units driven back from static defenses can be harried and scattered by sharp, quick attacks by highly mobile forces. Even BattleMech units, broken and forced to retreat by combat with other 'Mechs, become prime targets for these tactics. With the high mobility of cavalry vehicles, they can literally run circles around a badly damaged BattleMech and pick it apart. This function becomes especially important during protracted battles and campaigns, when pauses in the fighting might allow an enemy commander to regroup damaged BattleMechs behind his lines and patch them up well enough to allow him to throw them into the line again. The destruction of damaged 'Mechs by cavalry strikes can deprive an enemy commander of an important source of reinforcements at a critical phase of the battle later on.

During the Liao invasion of Second Chance in the Free Worlds League, a large pitched battle was fought in the plains outside of the planetary capital of Barrow and within the city itself. At the beginning of the battle, the Marik commander held back a number of his cavalry platoons. As the battle progressed, he ordered these reserves into action with the purpose of destroying Capellan units which had already been damaged and were withdrawing from the fight. The cavalry vehicles (mostly 35-ton *Pegasus* hovertanks) charged out of concealment. They drove straight into the crippled and retreating Liao 'Mechs. The cavalry attack destroyed a couple of the withdrawing 'Mechs. The remainder fled back in the direction from which they had come, in near panic. When the routed and panic-stricken forces crashed into the Capellan lines, the entire Liao task force was thrown into confusion. Eleven of its 20 'Mechs were destroyed, and four more irreparably damaged. The remaining five were captured, somewhat the worse for wear, by the Marik forces. The Liao invasion force lost 9 heavy tanks and nearly 150 men. In all fairness, it should be noted that most of the damage inflicted on the Liao 'Mechs was done by BattleMechs, either Marik or their own. Had the Marik commander not held back those cavalry platoons, the outcome of the battle would have been anybody's guess. Most experts agree, however, that casualties would have been much higher.



TACTICS

Having discussed a few of the battlefield or strategic applications of light cavalry, we should examine the tactics used in each of those applications. In the same way that applications of cavalry units have not changed much over time, neither have the tactics used by this type of unit been altered in any significant way. The basis of all tactics employed by light cavalry platoons remains the fast hit-and-run attack, usually hitting the enemy from behind. Lightning-swift harassment raids against columns are still the primary function of cavalry troopers. It's easy to see how these quick strikes can turn the tide of a battle when each tactical application is examined individually.

Cavalry scouts have the advantage over regular scout vehicles in that they are generally better armed and armored, while hovercraft like the *J. Edgar* and the *Harrier*

are as fast as, or faster than, the *Swift Wind*. Though it may lack the sophisticated surveillance and communications equipment of the *Swift Wind*, a fast hovertank has a better chance of surviving long enough to relay its information back to its unit's commander.

Generally, scout missions are performed according to a predetermined plan. The unit undertakes a wedge-shaped pattern of back and forth sweeps with its point towards the company to which the scouts are attached and its base towards the enemy's suspected position. The pattern is run working outwards from the main body of the unit. The parallel sweeps are spaced in such a way that the area covered in each sweep overlaps the area covered in the previous one. The reason for this procedure is simple. By working outwards in overlapping sweeps of increasing length, a scout stands the best chance of detecting the

presence of enemy forces in his search arm. Once an enemy has been spotted, a scout's duties are to ascertain the enemy's numbers, the composition of his forces, his relative strength, and his heading. Also, a scout should make an attempt to identify the unit and determine the presence of any notable MechWarriors. House Kurita's "Nightstalkers", for example, are one thing, but the "Black Widow Company" of "Wolf's Dragoons" with Natasha Kerensky in command is quite another matter entirely.

The disruption of communications on the high-tech 31st-century battlefield is mostly a matter of electronic countermeasures. Before a scout is able to transmit information to his unit's command post, however, he must first observe something about which to report. If a scout is spotted and driven off or destroyed before he can communicate any information, then communications have effectively been disrupted. When a cavalry screen is called upon to eliminate scouts, only a few vehicles, two or three from each cavalry platoon, are detached to pursue enemy scouts. These vehicles should attempt to flank their prey, or even circle behind him, thus cutting him off from his escape route, before actually engaging the enemy. If the enemy scout begins to run and the scout killers are unable to catch him, the defending cavalry vehicles should break off their pursuit and return to their own unit. This precaution is taken in the event that the enemy scouts were either bait for an ambush, or a decoy intended to draw off the cavalry screen. Usually, a cavalry unit's orders limit to a kilometer or less the distance a scout killer may pursue a scout.

The elimination of a damaged 'Mech by cavalry vehicles often resembles a scene from a 20th century Western with the Indians mounted on the war ponies riding in circles around the wagon train. Light cavalry vehicles designated to handle crippled 'Mechs should make quick hit-and-run attacks, preferably striking at the enemy's rear quarter where his armor is thinnest and where he has few to no weapons. As soon as the attack has been made, the cavalry vehicle should pull back. If more than one vehicle is attacking a single damaged



Left: Unhorsed

The crewmen of light cavalry vehicles frequently take to the ground when they get caught in clashes between the armored giants.



'Mech, they can sandwich it between them and hammer away. In a situation like this, it is important to remember that even a damaged 'Mech is potentially more than a match for any light cavalry vehicles. If necessary, a damaged 'Mech can be bypassed for the cavalry's own 'Mech units to eliminate.

If the wounded unit is a broken infantry platoon, even light cavalry vehicles will be able to take care of it. The most common means of dealing with broken infantry is the classic overrun. The cavalry unit simply charges straight through the withdrawing or grounded infantry. The gunners may fire at will.

As mentioned earlier, it is possible for an experienced (or merely clever) cavalry officer to use his command to turn the broken enemy units back into their own lines, creating a great deal of confusion in the enemy ranks. This can be accomplished by moving behind the main enemy lines and striking directly at the front facing of a fleeing unit. When the enemy turns away from this new threat, the light cavalry unit simply herds them back into their own

lines, like a sheep dog guiding its flock. As with any other tactic which takes men behind enemy lines, the cavalry troopers should be alert for a possible counterattack by the enemy's reserves or their light cavalry.

When assaulting a supply depot or column, the purpose of the raid should always be kept in mind. Often, the temptation to engage the enemy units defending those stores is very strong. If a raiding party gets bogged down in fighting those units, the momentum of the raid is lost, and the battle becomes a slugging match.

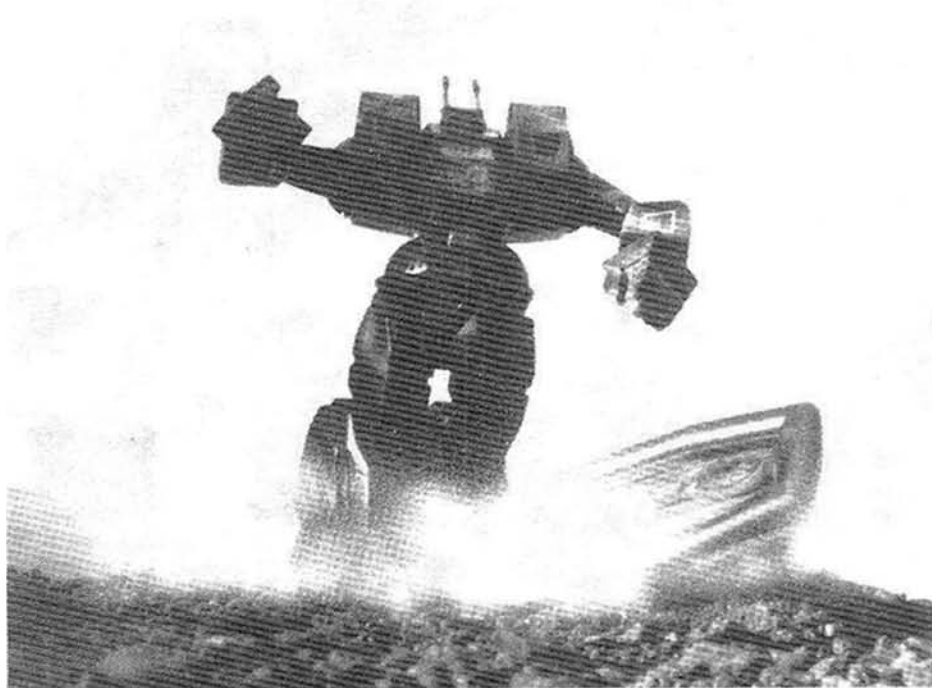
When attacking an advancing column, the first tactical consideration is the presence or absence of a defending cavalry screen. If a defending screen is present, it calls for slightly different tactics. When raiding a screened column, an attempt should be made to draw off the enemy cavalry, permitting one's own cavalry to strike. This can be accomplished by making small harassing raids on both the column and its cavalry screen. Once the enemy cavalry begins pursuit, the main raiding force

launches the real assault on the column. Another method of drawing off enemy cavalry is to hang back and use long-range weapons, such as an LRM or a PPC, to lay down harassing fire. As the enemy comes to suppress the fire, the raiding party quickly moves in.

When staging an attack on a supply column, the commander should take into account the type of terrain over which the unit must operate. A wide, flat plain makes it terribly difficult to achieve surprise, whereas a narrow road through rocky hills is perfect for an ambush. Find terrain that works in favor of the raiders if at all possible.

If the purpose of the raid is the acquisition of supplies, then transport vehicles are necessary. They must stay close enough to avoid enemy attack. They must also be ready to move out on a moment's notice as soon as they are loaded with the newly liberated equipment.

In fighting opposing cavalry units, the same basic tactics apply as when engaging heavy armored 'Mech units. The only difference is that things move much faster. One



tactic involves placing the defending light cavalry behind the line of advancing heavy 'Mechs until they are committed. This shields them from long-range fire which could cripple or destroy them. When the enemy cavalry begins its charge, the cavalry commander should respond immediately by launching his counter-charge. He should aim to meet the oncoming vehicles about midway between the closing ranks. Hitting the enemy from the flank or rear are other possibilities. Generally, the enemy's reply is to fight the cavalry screen or withdraw behind its own heavy unit. Sometimes, a counter-charge will not deter an attacking unit. The enemy cavalry will continue to carry out their original mission. This leaves the cavalry screen to harass the heavy unit, raid supplies left unprotected, etc.

Another tactic involves placing a platoon of vehicles at either end of the heavy unit's line. When the enemy charges, the unit directly facing the charge initiates a counter-charge. At the same time, the platoon on the other end of the line moves behind the heavies to take up a position which permits it to respond to the outcome of the charge/counter-charge.

Nearly identical in actual battlefield tactics are denying the enemy access to his reserves and disrupting unit integrity. When

a hole is made in the enemy ranks, the light cavalry unit charges through, striking at the rear of the assigned target, whether it is the main unit or the reserves. The main difference between the two applications lies in the fact that a unit facing reserves is a unit facing fresh troops. In the case of Battle-Mechs, their internal heat will be low, their ammunition magazines will be full, and their armor won't be damaged. Therefore, it cannot be stressed strongly enough that a cavalry unit should never engage Battle-Mechs frontally. Despite the fact that on a ton-for-ton basis, a light cavalry vehicle can outrun, out-armor, and possibly out-gun, some 'Mechs, cavalry vehicles can't stand toe to toe with 'Mechs and slug it out.

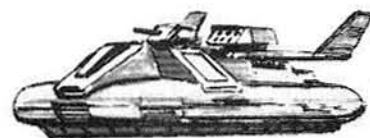
The greatest asset of a cavalry vehicle is its speed. This, combined with its small size, makes a cavalry vehicle more difficult to hit. Size also works to its disadvantage. Weapons fire is more likely to inflict greater damage on the lightly armored vehicle. Using its superior speed, a cavalry vehicle should attack the rear quarter of a heavy armored unit, fire a few shots at the weak back armor, and then withdraw. When the enemy turns to return fire, the cavalry unit again moves to the rear to attack. If the target is a front line unit, this causes the enemy 'Mechs to show their vulnerable backs to the oncoming 'Mechs. If the cav-

alry platoon was ordered to attack the enemy's reserves, the confusion caused will delay the entry of the reserves, possibly long enough to negate their usefulness.

A particularly devastating tactic used to good effect against well-ordered battle lines is called the mass rabble bypass. The mass rabble bypass is a difficult maneuver to pull off. The cavalry makes a seemingly frontal attack on their objective unit. Then, at about 100 meters away, the unit splits up, sweeps around both flanks of the enemy formation, and reforms behind it. Usually, the two ends of the line will curve backwards in an attempt to follow the movement of the cavalry. When the cavalry attacks the rear quarter of the heavy unit, those 'Mechs turn around and become entangled with the 'Mechs which are curling back. Confusion reigns supreme.

Of course, no tactic is foolproof, and for each of the tactics discussed above, there are dozens of things that can go wrong. Speed, daring, and split-second timing are the most basic requirements for a light cavalry unit.

When examined in the light of the applications and tactics discussed in this article, it is easy to see that a well-organized, disciplined, and properly trained unit of light cavalry can be one of the most useful and effective forces on today's mechanized battlefields.



Colonel Morgan C. Graeme is the commanding officer of the 6th Armored Cavalry Division, a mercenary company attached to the 1st Crucis Lancers. Col. Graeme is one of the strongest advocates of light cavalry units and tactics in the Davion military community. He has on occasion given lectures on this subject at the New Avalon Institute of Science. He has fought in four campaigns against the Draconis Combine and two campaigns against the Capellan Confederation, both as a mercenary and as a member of the regular army of the Federated Suns.

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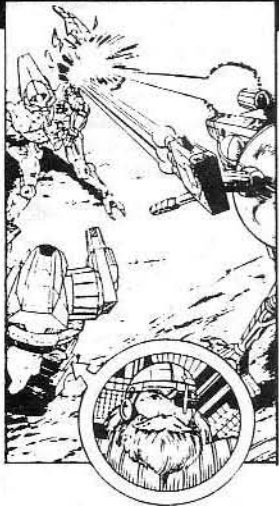
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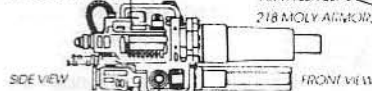


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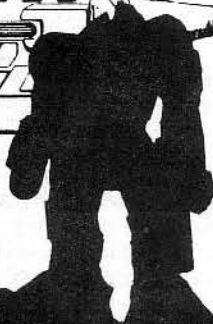
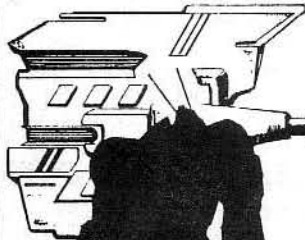
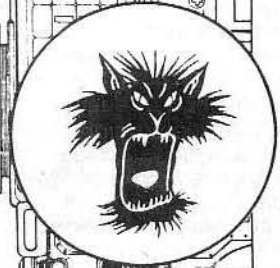
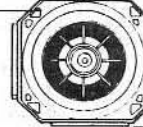
FRONT VIEW

ELECTRO-OPTICAL IIR SENSOR

BATTERY WITH LOCK-ON PROBE

WRIST HINGE POINTS

MAIN WEAPON STARBOARD SIDE
DONAL PARTICLE PROJECTION CANNON



HYDRAULIC ACCESS MYOMER
BERGSTROM TYPE 186 INTERLOCKING LEG ARMOR
KNEE HEAT EXCHANGER
KNEE WEATHER SEAL
REINFORCEMENT BRACES

UMBILICAL ACCESS PANELS



Before they blow the hell out of it.

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Technical Readout

BNC-3S Banshee-S

Overview:

House Steiner's variant on the old Terran Hegemony *Banshee* has recently completed a year of LCAF field trials. The project fielded a carefully selected group of elite Commonwealth MechWarriors headed by Kommandant Laurine White. The *Banshee-S* is a highly modified version intended to modernize the BattleMech in order to enable it to perform its role as a close assault vehicle.

While still one of the heaviest 'Mechs ever fielded, the *Banshee* has held a reputation as a poor battle machine since its introduction in the late 2400s. The complaints focused primarily on the 'Mech's armament, citing inadequate secondary weapons systems. Earlier variants focused on increasing the BattleMech's punch, often resulting in severe heat overloads.

The Steiner variant has addressed the problem at a more basic level. Defiance Industries, under special commission from the LCAF Quartermaster Corps, has created a prototype series of the *Banshee-S* for extensive field tests. The project was conducted with several House Davion scientists on the planning committee. The extant design is based on plans discovered in the files of the Defiance Industries factory complex on Hesperus II.

The fact that modifications have used components currently manufactured in the Lyran Commonwealth wherever possible has fueled speculation that the Lyran Commonwealth is considering full scale production of the *Banshee-S*. The acknowledged existence of vintage Terran Hegemony plans has only contributed to the defense industry rumor mills.

Capabilities: The first step in revitalizing the *Banshee* taken by the Steiner commission was in reducing the size of the power plant. A Pitban 285 fusion unit now powers the BattleMech. This has caused a significant reduction in speed from its original cruising speed of 43.2 kph to its current rating of 32.3 kph. This reduction is less significant than it first appears. The *Banshee-S* would be expected to operate in Steiner assault lances either in conjunction with or as a replacement for the already common AS7-D *Atlas*. The speed rating is entirely field compatible with the *Atlas*. The smaller power plant frees significant additional space for weaponry and other systems.

These space savings have allowed the *Banshee's* autocannon to be upgraded from an Emperor-A to an Emperor-B Class 10. This significantly increases the 'Mech's low heat generation firepower with a minimal reduction in effective range.

The first addition to the *Banshee's* armament is a second PPC. The second particle cannon is a Donal PPC, rather than the Magna Hellstar which is increasingly rare in the Commonwealth. Examination of publicity photos would indicate that the arm assembly, as well as the cannon itself, is of the style manufactured for WHM-6R *Warhammer* BattleMechs. The arm mounting of the particle cannon is expected to provide a greater tactical flexibility for the *Banshee-S's* heavy energy punch.

Riding the right shoulder of the *Banshee-S* is a Harpoon 6-rack missile launcher. The 'Mech carries a full ton of short-range missiles in its torso. While the rigid Starshield armor retained on the design inhibits installation of the blow out ammo storage bins recently developed at the New Avalon Institute of Science, the heavy armor of the *Banshee's* torso is expected to provide sufficient protection.

An entire suite of laser weaponry has been added to the *Banshee-S*. Two Magna Mark II medium class lasers are carried in a dual forearm mount on the right arm. This arrangement retains the 'Mech's battletest for manipulative work. An additional two medium class lasers are mounted in the center torso to provide rear coverage. This feature has received praise from many Steiner generals as overdue acknowledgement of the realities of heavy 'Mech combat. Finally, a second Magna Mark I small laser has been added to the right torso for additional close-in firepower.

All this additional weaponry has significantly increased the *Banshee's* heat burden. The Steiner design, however, incorporates six more heat sinks than does the basic Star League design. While this does not allow full utilization of all available weaponry, it does provide a viable selection at acceptable heat levels.

Retention of the highly respected Star shield armor while increasing the *Banshee's* offensive power has gone a long way to silencing critics. Indeed, Hauptmann-General Karl von Overmeyer, a vociferous opponent of the *Banshee-S* program, was recently interviewed on the DBC's foreFRONT News and said, "We may have a new *Warhammer* here. This BattleMech has all the options and is as big as a proper Steiner machine should be."

Battle History: The evaluation plan for the Steiner variant called for regular frontline deployment of the S model. The twelve BattleMechs assembled under the program were parcelled out among LCAF units expected to see action in the near future. The units initially as-

signed the machines were reported to be less than enthusiastic over the honor. The selection of well-known and respected MechWarriors as pilots for the test vehicles soothed many a commander's ruffled nerves. This shrewd ploy, as well as the knowledge that Kommandant Laurine White, the program head, answered directly to Katrina Steiner, avoided the delays and accidental mishaps that could have plagued the program due to the established prejudice against the *Banshee* design.

As expected, Kommandant White was the first to pilot a *Banshee-S* in combat. In a spoiling raid on New Hope in early 3026, White, while cut off from her assault lance, stumbled on the rally point of the command lance of Duke Reginald's own Hussar Company. Her 'Mech's enhanced firepower caught the Marik forces by surprise. With a superb show of gunnery she killed two of the enemy courier 'Mechs and crippled the commander's *BattleMaster* before being forced to withdraw due to damage sustained in the firefight.

The only *Banshee-S* to be destroyed during the field tests was piloted by Kommandant Corinn Scott. She was assigned to a bandit suppression force code named Highlander. During the transit course along which the components of the task force were to be gathered from worlds currently out of the mainstream of Succession War battles, the Steiner forces were ambushed in the La Grave system. Kommandant Scott and her 'Mech survived the destruction of the DropShip and joined the loyal Commonwealth forces on the planet. Scott, as senior LCAF officer, commanded the ground forces in their resistance to a Kurita-inspired coup. Scott and her *Banshee-S* performed admirably until both were destroyed in a treacherous assassination attempt in 3027.

Such performances by the *Banshee-S* on the battlefield seem to be fulfilling the promise of a rebirth for this 'Mech design.

Variants: The early stages of the S program saw a variant wherein the second PPC was placed next to the first in an over-and-under mount. The extra protection afforded the weapon system by the heavy Starshield armor on the 'Mech's torso was more than offset by the serious heat imbalances caused by the close proximity of two such large energy weapons. The substandard performance of the heat dispersion systems resulted in the prototype 'Mech being broken up to be used in repairing systems in the machines built under the final design.

A second variant was designed to complement the *Banshee-S* by providing a command and control vehicle on a compatible chassis. This version sacrifices armament in favor of specialized communications and computer capabilities. Known as *Banshee-SC*, it retains the original *Banshee* right arm which has a dual medium laser mount on the forearm. The original Magna Hellstar PPC and the rear-mounted lasers are not present. The liberated interior space is filled with sophisticated systems built by Nashan Computers. Details are classified by the LCAF, but the systems are said to be comparable to the Tacticon B-2000 battle computer with its planet-

STATS

Mass: 95 tons
Chassis: Star League XT
Power Plant: Pitban 285
Cruising Speed: 32.3 kph
Maximum Speed: 53.8 kph
Jump Jets: None
Jump Capacity: None
Armor: Starshield
Armament:
1 Imperator-B autocannon
1 Magna Hellstar PPC
1 Donal PPC
1 Harpoon SRM 6-rack
4 Magna Mark II Medium Lasers
2 Magna Mark I Small Lasers
Manufacturer: Star League Weapons Research /Defiance Industries
Communications System: Dalban Commline
Targeting and Tracking System: Dalban HiRez-B

Type: Banshee-S	<i>Tons</i>	
Tonnage:	95 Tons	95
Internal Structure:		9.5
Engine:	Pitban 285	16.5
Walking MPs:	3	
Running MPs:	5	
Jumping MPs:	0	
Heat Sinks:	22	12
Gyro:		3
Cockpit:		3
Armor Factor:	240	15
	<i>Internal Structure</i>	<i>Armor Value</i>
Head	3	9
Center Torso:	30	40/17
Rt./Lt. Torso:	20	30/10
Rt./Lt. Arm:	16	21
Rt./Lt. Leg:	20	26

Weapons and Ammo:				
Type	Loc.	Critical		
AC/10	LT	8	12	
Ammo (AC) 10	LT	1	1	
PPC	RT	3	7	
PPC	LA	3	7	
SRM 6	RT	2	3	
Ammo (SRM) 15	RT	1	1	
Medium Laser	RA	1	1	
Medium Laser	RA	1	1	
Medium Laser	CT(R)	1	1	
Medium Laser	CT(R)	1	1	
Small Laser	H	1	.5	
Small Laser	RT	1	.5	

wide communications capability.
Notable 'Mechs and MechWarriors:

Captain Loscale Ginn

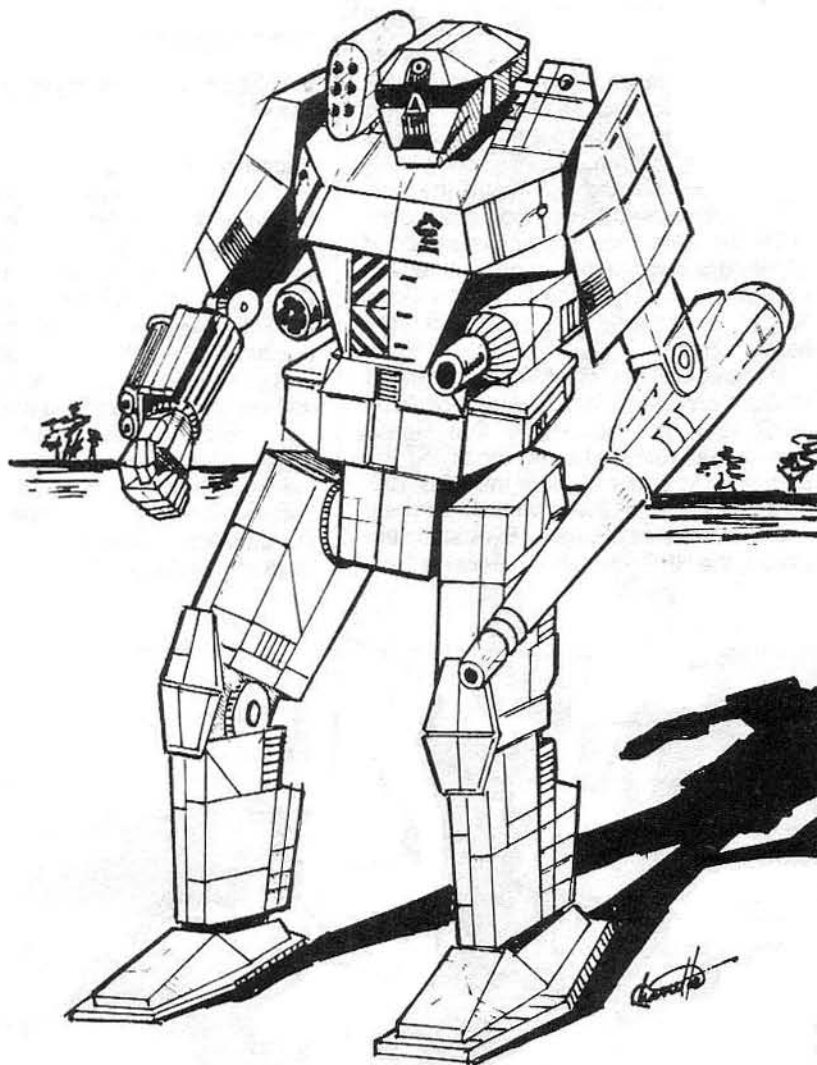
A noted tactician and technician, Captain Ginn was formerly associated with those enigmatic MechWarriors, Team Banzai. Ginn left his position with that mercenary unit, currently in the pay of House Davion, to join the staff of the S project. Reports say that his input was instrumental in the engineering of the SC variant, the prototype of which he piloted in the field test phase of the program. At the conclusion of the tests, he signed an individual contract with Nashan Diversified which lists the 'Mech he pilots, the "Screaming Skull," as his own.

Leutenant Robin King

Leutenant King was twice cited with the Lyran medal of honor during his service with the 12th Donegal Guards. His heroic record and demonstrated ability to pilot unfamiliar 'Mechs with astounding skill led to his selection as a pilot for the field test phase of the S program. King's *Banshee-S*, the "Banrigh," participated in the defense of New Earth against a surprise raid by House Liao forces. In the battle, King demonstrated outstanding courage and tactical flare. He has been credited with four 'Mech kills in that battle. Not one of those kills was rated at less than 55 tons.

Leutenant Jeffery Kasuri

Leutenant Kasuri is another young MechWarrior selected for the program due to his exceptional record and proven aggressiveness. This aggressiveness resulted in his BattleMech, the "Caliban," holding the record for the most repaired in the S program. Kasuri's aggressiveness has led to several altercations when he was outside his 'Mech. These fights were traced to conflicts between himself and various mercenary MechWarriors. His earnestness and combat record have led to criminal charges being dismissed in all of these cases. It is speculated that his assignment to an attack lance of 14th Lyran Guards is something of a disciplinary reprimand since the unit is in a quiet sector.



Combat Salvage

CGR-SB Challenger

History:

In 3025, two Liao battalions staged a raid against the planet Holt in Davion space. The only forces defending the planet were the Hat-in-the-Ring Battalion (HRB) and some local infantry and light armor units. The HRB is a mercenary unit that has a long history of serving House Davion. When Charmichal's recon lance (2 *Spiders* and 2 *Assassins*) captured two of Liao's *Chargers* out on a recon mission, the question was what to do with them. The HRB completely out-maneuvered and out-fought the Liao troops and captured more than a company of 'Mechs before the campaign was over. Of all the captured 'Mechs, no one wanted the *Chargers*. Even *Locust* pilots preferred their 'Mechs, saying they were faster and more heavily armed!

Stuart Bell, the chief Tech, convinced Lt. Col. Forsythe that the *Chargers* could be modified in the same way that House Steiner was rumored to be modifying the *Banshee*. As commander of the HRB, Col. Forsythe knew he had some of the best Techs in the Inner Sphere. Ever since the 2980's, the HRB has had an intensive Tech

recruitment and training program. It is standard procedure in the Tech corps to record every bit of information available on 'Mech production and 'Mech repair. As a result, the HRB has always made minor changes to some of its 'Mechs (for instance, their *Assassins* mount a medium laser and extra armor in place of the SRM launcher), but they had never done anything on this scale before.

Technical Aspects:

Stuart Bell assembled his team and began work immediately. The most difficult part was replacing the massive fusion engine with the more common Pitban 240. Fortunately, Bell was intimately familiar with the P240 since so many 'Mechs use this engine. After months of work and testing, he was satisfied with the engine's performance and set to work modifying the weapons.

In order to get a useful, operational 'Mech quickly, Bell decided that changing the fire control system would be too difficult and unnecessary. Using spares meant for the Battalion's *Riflemen*, he mounted four large lasers (Magna Mk III) and a medium

laser (Magna Mk II) in the head in place of the five small Magna Mk I lasers. He then added heat sinks in the space available and as much armor as the support structure would take. The armor was added in such a way as to maintain the original *Charger* silhouette as much as possible and to disguise the modifications.

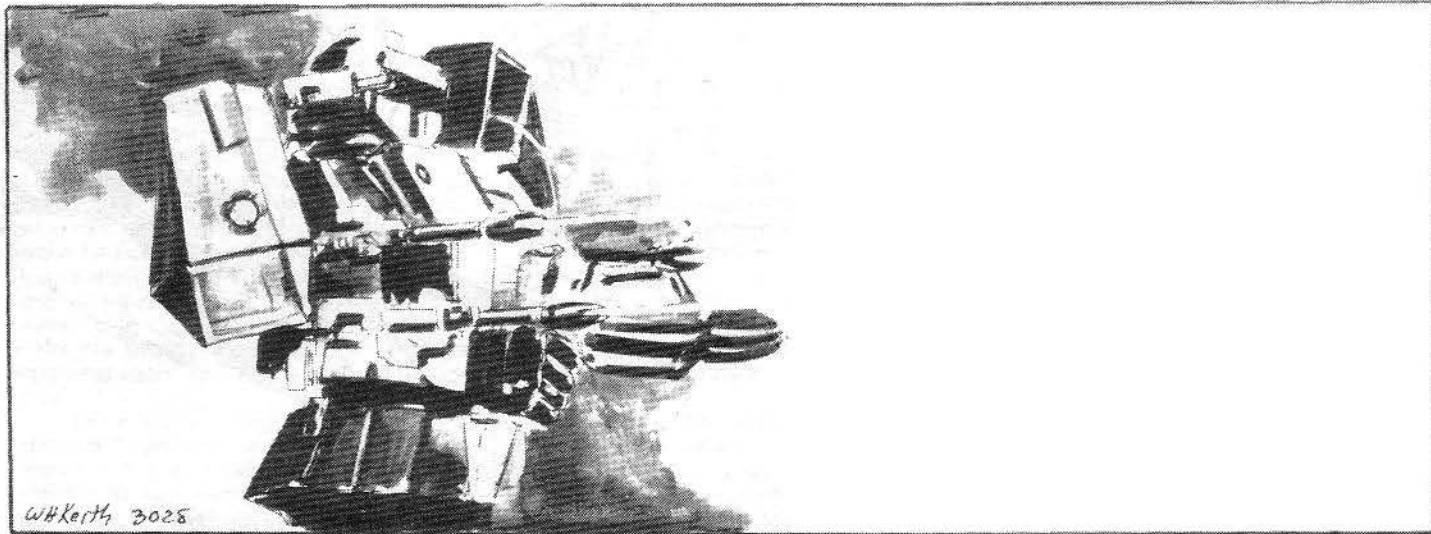
[Note: Stuart Bell is a Certified Master Tech with a Technician Rating of 8. It is recommended that these modifications not be attempted by anyone who does not have a Rating of at least 6 or 7.]

Battle History:

As these things often seem to happen, the HRB household was attacked shortly after the first *Challenger* was completed but before the second *Charger's* modifications began. The two 'Mechs were deployed together to protect a small village where an attack was anticipated. That same night a light lance attacked. The *Challenger* stood its ground while the lance approached it firing their medium lasers and missiles. At a range of 120 meters, the *Challenger* opened fire with all four large lasers, thereby melting the cockpit of the lead *Phoenix Hawk*. The *Charger* then rushed in and attacked a *Stinger* at point blank range. Its kick left the *Stinger* lying on the ground. At this point the rest of the lance withdrew.

Variants:

Some attempts have been made to mount a Donnel PPC in the right arm and/or an LRM 15 launcher in the torso of the *Challenger*. While all these modifications can be done theoretically, they are much more difficult and tend to overtax the Dalban HiRez targeting system.



STATS

Mass: 80 tons

Chassis: Wells 990

Power Plant: Pitban 240

Cruising Speed: 32.4 kph

Maximum Speed: 54.0 kph

Jump Jets: None

Jump Capacity: None

Armor: Durallex Heavy

Armament:

4 Magna Mark III Large Lasers

1 Magna Mark II Medium Laser

Manufacturer: none—modified Wells Technology

Communications System: Tek BattleCom

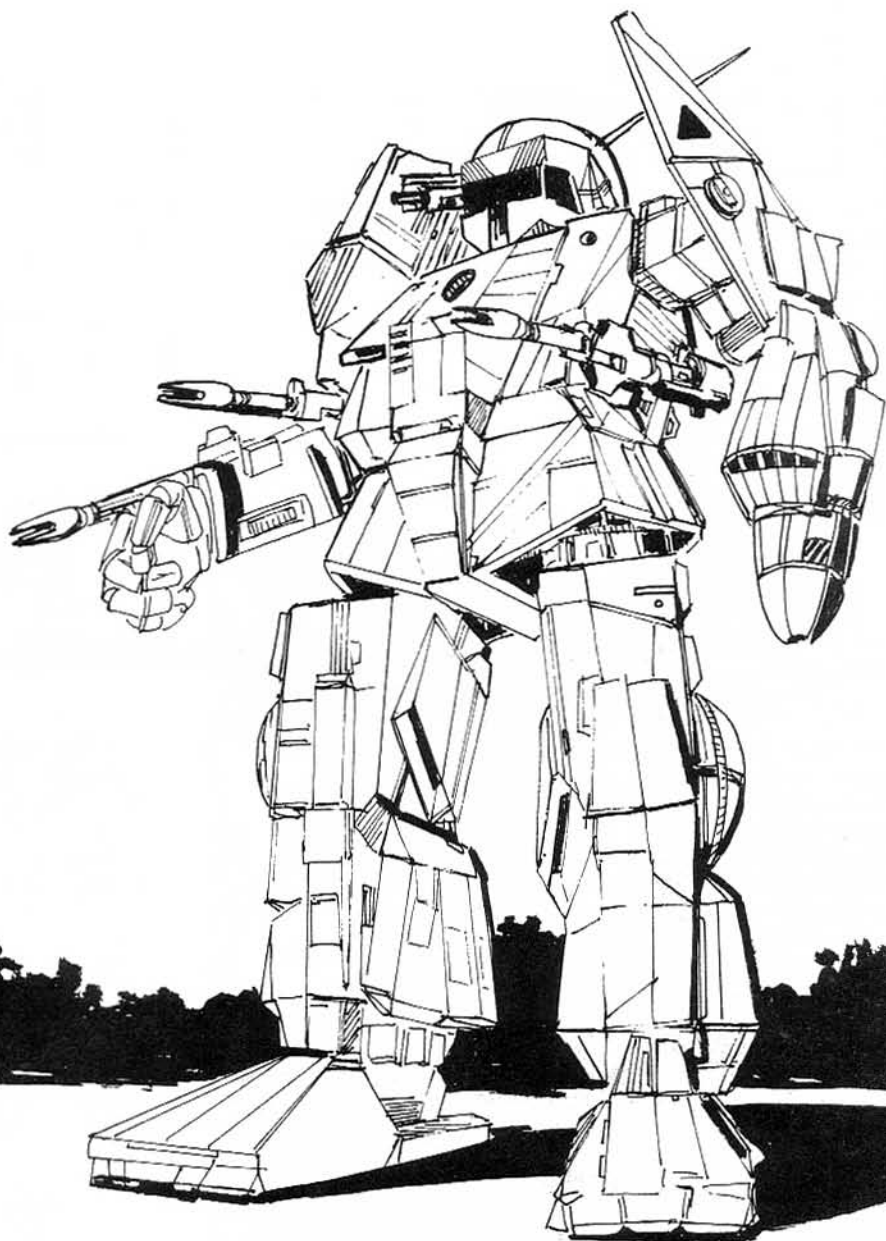
Targeting and Tracking System: Dalban HiRez

Type:	CGR-SB Challenger	<i>Tons</i>
Tonnage:	80 Tons	80
Internal Structure:		8
Engine:	Pitban 240	11.5
Walking MPs:	3	
Running MPs:	5	
Jumping MPs:	0	
Heat Sinks:	28	18
Gyro:		3
Cockpit:		3
Armor Factor:	248	15.5

	<i>Internal Structure</i>	<i>Armor Value</i>
Head	3	9
Center Torso:	25	40/10
Rt./Lt. Torso:	17	24/10
Rt./Lt. Arm:	13	26
Rt./Lt. Leg:	17	34

Weapons and Ammo:

<u>Type</u>	<u>Loc.</u>	<u>Critical</u>	
Large Laser	RA	2	5
Large Laser	LA	2	5
Large Laser	RT	2	5
Large Laser	LT	2	5
Medium Laser	H	1	1



BATTLETECH SIMULATOR

CORRECTION:

**LASERS: BIG,
BIGGER,
BIGGEST**

Past BattleTechnology articles and departments have described the various models and classifications of laser weapons, ranging from the Starflash laser pistol (Sidearms, Issue 0101) to the mammoth Large Lasers mounted on the *Phoenix Hawk* and *Thunderbolt* (as described in BattleMech Weapons, Issue 0201). The subject is an extremely technical one, replete with high-tech jargon and nomenclature; and, inevitably, minor errors are bound to creep into any popular discussion of the field.

Precentor Janos Abu Hassan's article in BattleTechnology, Issue 0201, was a case in point. His article, entitled *BattleMech Weapons: Crisis of Range and Accuracy*, contained a minor error overlooked by BattleTechnology's staff at the time.

Precentor Hassan's article described the basic unit by which the power of lasers is measured as the megajoule, which represents one million watts of energy per second. It went on to discuss the various classes of BattleMech laser weapons: small, medium, and large lasers, each with its own range of destructive potential.

As any MechTech or Warrior knows, of course, most modern BattleMech laser weapons deliver their energy in a single intense, extremely short burst or "pulse" of laser light, often lasting less than one one-hundredth of a second. Thus, a 'Mech's small laser delivers not .8 megajoules of energy, but .8 megawatts, all of it concentrated into that single, intense pulse.

The difference is important when considering other laser weaponry, such as the hand lasers discussed in Issue 0101's Sidearms, and the laser rifles in this issue. A typical laser pistol such as the Optronics M2412A1 "Starflash" has a power output of .5 megajoule; that is, half a megawatt (five hundred kilowatts) of energy is directed against the target over a period of one second. Since the Starflash fires a pulse lasting only one-one hundredth of a second, the actual destructive power directed against the target is only .005 megawatt.

Five kilowatts is a large amount of energy to expend against a small area of a target within a fraction of a second... sufficient to vaporize a small amount of armor or cause hideous damage to unprotected flesh by flash-heating the water contained in cell tissue. However, it is almost insignificant when compared with the output of, say an .8 megawatt small laser mounted by a BattleMech. That weapon delivers eight hundred kilowatts of power in the same space of time as the laser pistol, or 160 times as much energy in the same one one-hundredth of a second. When one looks at these figures and realizes that a small laser is capable of inflicting only a small amount of damage on the armor of a targeted BattleMech, it is easy to see why laser hand weapons are almost useless against 'Mechs!

The following table is presented to compare the power outputs of the three broad categories of laser weaponry:

LASERS COMPARED

WEAPON	Megajoules	Delivery Time	Total megawatts delivered	Energy/second Comparison
Hand Lasers				
M2412A1 Starflash	.5 mj	.01 sec	5 kw	5
Model 2898, KK 98:	.8 mj	.01 sec	8 kw	8
Bereiter 49S Ultra:	.6 mj	.2 sec	6 kw	1.2
TK 70	1 mj	.01 sec	10 kw (10,000 w)	10
Laser Rifles				
Intek M2448	4 mj	beam	4 mw/sec or 40 kw/.01	40
Magna Mark XX	5 mj	beam	5 mw/sec or 50 kw/.01	50
Martell Hi-Star	1 mj	pulse	500 kw/.1 sec	50
TK 94	1 mj	pulse	40 kw/.01 sec	40
BattleMech-mounted Lasers				
Diverse Optics Type 10 Small Laser				
<i>Awesome:</i>	1000 mj	.02 sec	1 mw	50
Harmon Medium Laser				
<i>Shadow Hawk:</i>	2000 mj	.01 sec	2 mw	200
Sunglow Type 2 Heavy laser				
<i>Thunderbolt:</i>	5000 mj	.01 sec	5 mw	500

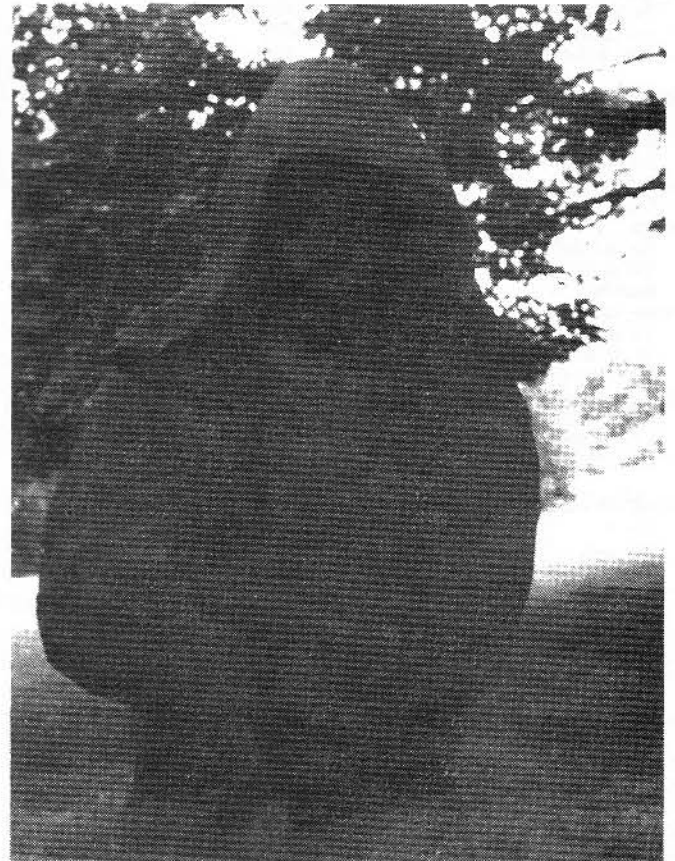
Shown on this table are each laser's power output in megajoules (millions of joules per second); the length of time that laser's pulse actually lasts (fractions of a second); the total amount of energy actually delivered to the target by the pulse (in either thousands [k] or millions [m] of watts); and an energy/time comparison figure. This last allows a direct comparison between the strengths of each type of laser, by correcting the power output for the length of a pulse.

The Bereiter laser pistol listed, for example, has a .6 mj output which delivers 6 kilowatts of energy to the target. However, those 6 kilowatts are spread out across a full two-tenths of a second, rather than compressed into a more typical one one-hundredth of a second, resulting in less effectiveness in penetrating armor or damaging a moving target.

The Precentor's article in our last issue of BattleTechnology, then, should refer to megawatt lasers, rather than to megajoules.

BattleTechnology Magazine recognizes the fact, however, that ComStar Precentors are incapable of error in any discussion involving science or technology, and therefore accepts full responsibility for the error unwittingly transmitted through the learned Precentor's article in Issue 0201. Any inconvenience to BattleTechnology's readership, or any embarrassment caused the noble Precentor by this error, is deeply regretted.

Right: Precentor Janos Abu Hassan, the learned author of "BattleMech Weapons: Crisis of Range and Accuracy" in Issue 0201 of BattleTechnology.
Precentors are always right.



RANGED COMBAT: LASER RIFLE UPDATE

Rules Variant 0102-A describes an optional system for extending the range of various personal weapons to realistic distances. Under this system, Extreme Range for laser rifles is determined by multiplying the weapon's Long Range by 4. Maximum Range is determined by multiplying the Extreme Range by 1.5.

Targets at Extreme Range have a To-Hit Modifier of +8. Targets at Maximum range have a To-Hit Modifier of +12.

Each laser rifle listed in this issue's Sidearms department is listed below, together with all range figures and the amount of damage it causes at various ranges. Damage figures vary with the power supply available. Note, too, that damage caused by laser rifles falls off sharply with range.

Ranges are given in meters. To convert to hexes for use in MechWarrior, divide range by 5. Damage is given in numbers of 6-sided dice, with modifiers. For example, 4D6 + 2 means roll four 6-sided dice and add 2 to the result.

Optronics M2444A2 Starlight

Short: 60 meters
Medium: 120 meters
Long: 240 meters
Extreme: 960 meters
Maximum: 1440 meters

Damage:
To 240 meters: 4D6 - 2
241 to 900 meters: 3D6 - 2
Over 900 meters: 2D6 - 2

Damage, Optronics Las-R power Mag

To 240 meters: 2D6 + 2
241 to 900 meters: 2D6
Over 900 meters: 1D6

Martell Hi-Star Laser Rifle

Short: 30 meters
Medium: 70 meters
Long: 140 meters
Extreme: 560 meters
Maximum: 840 meters

Damage:
To 140 meters: 3D6 + 2
141 to 500 meters: 2D6 + 2
Over 500 meters: 2D6

Damage, Sunbeam Oneshot Powpac

To 140 meters: 2D6 + 2
141 to 500 meters: 1D6 + 2
Over 500 meters: 1D6

Damage, Intek Lasercharge magazine

To 140 meters: 2D6
141 to 500 meters: 2D6 - 1
Over 500 meters: 1D6

Intek M2448 Laser Rifle

Short: 60 meters
Medium: 150 meters
Long: 255 meters
Extreme: 1020 meters
Maximum: 1530 meters

Damage:
To 250 meters: 2D6 + 2
251 to 1000 meters: 2D6
Over 1000 meters: 1D6

Damage, Sunbeam Oneshot Powpac:

To 250 meters: 2D6
251 to 1000 meters: 1D6 + 2
Over 1000 meters: 1D6

Damage, Intek Lasercharge magazine:

To 250 meters: 2D6
251 to 1000 meters: 2D6 - 1
Over 1000 meters: 1D6

Kogyo-Khorsakov Model 2821 Laser Rifle

Short: 50 meters
Medium: 100 meters
Long: 200 meters
Extreme: 800 meters
Maximum: 1200 meters

Damage:

To 200 meters: 4D6
201 to 800 meters: 3D6
Over 800 meters: 2D6

Damage, Intek Lasercharge magazine

To 200 meters: 2D6
201 to 800 meters: 2D6 - 1
Over 800 meters: 1D6

Thorvald & Koch TK 94 Laser Rifle

Short: 50 meters
Medium: 100 meters
Long: 200 meters
Extreme: 800 meters
Maximum: 1200 meters

Damage:

To 200 meters: 4D6
201 to 800 meters: 3D6
Over 800 meters: 2D6

Damage, Magna V7T Powerpack:

To 200 meters: 4D6
201 to 800 meters: 3D6
Over 800 meters: 2D6

Damage, Intek Lasercharge magazine

To 200 meters: 2D6
201 to 800 meters: 2D6 - 1
Over 800 meters: 1D6

Magna Mark XX Heavy Laser Rifle

Short: 45 meters
Medium: 105 meters
Long: 150 meters
Extreme: 600 meters
Maximum: 900 meters

Damage

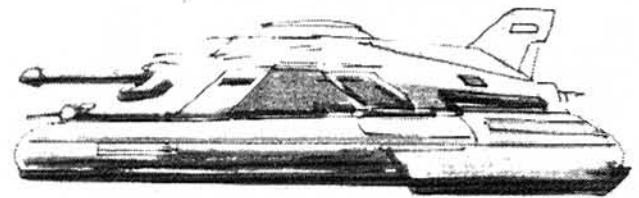
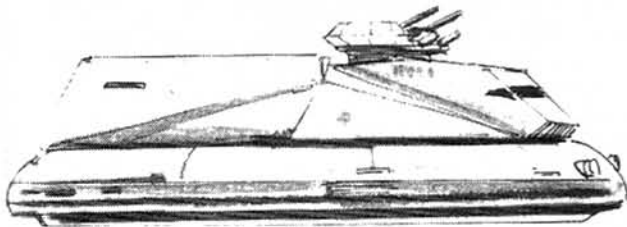
To 150 meters: 4D6 + 2
151 to 600 meters: 3D6
Over 600 meters: 2D6

Damage, Intek Lasercharge magazine:

To 150 meters: 3D6
151 to 600 meters: 2D6 - 1
Over 600 meters: 1D6

CAVALRY VEHICLES

The scenario, Strike at Wittengate, is presented on page 50 as an example of the application of cavalry tactics on the modern, BattleMech-dominated battlefield. Two new cavalry-recon armored vehicles are introduced in that scenario. Their stats are presented here.



Whirlwind

Movement Type:	Hover	
Tonnage:	45	
Cruise Speed:	8	
Flank Speed:	12	
Engine:	6.0	
Rating:	125	
Type:	Fusion	
Control:	2.25	
Lift Equipment:	4.5	
Power Amplifier:	0	
Heat Sinks:	10 (0)	
Internal Structure:	4.5	
Turret:	1.4	
Armor:	6.5	
Loc	Points	
Front	22	
Lt/Rt	20/20	
Back	20	
Turret	22	
Weapons and Ammo:		
AC/2	Turret	6
AC/2	Turret	6
Med Laser	Turret	1
Med Laser	Turret	1
Ammo (90)	Hull	2

Notes: The Whirlwind doubles as a scout hover tank and an armored personnel carrier. Three tons are allotted to cargo space which can carry a platoon of infantry under somewhat cramped conditions.

Harrier

Movement Type:	Hover	
Tonnage:	50	
Cruise Speed:	10	
Flank Speed:	15	
Engine:	21.0	
Rating:	265	
Type:	Fusion	
Control:	2.5	
Lift Equipment:	5.0	
Power Amplifier:	0	
Heat Sinks:	12 (2.0)	
Internal Structure:	5.0	
Turret:	0	
Armor:	5.5	
Loc	Points	
Front	30	
Lt/Rt	20/20	
Back	18	
Turret	0	
Weapons and Ammo:		
Large Laser	Front	5.0
SRM 4	Front	2.0
Ammo (15)	Hull	1.0
Med Laser	Rear	1.0

Notes: The Harrier is a general-purpose, heavy hover tank, designed for long-range cavalry recon and BattleMech support operations.

Strike at Wittengate

Cavalry Raid on Harpster

The dry, waist-high grass of Harpster's Anglic Steppes raced by under a brass sky fading into twilight. Wind snapped and snickered around us, felt rather than heard above the keening of our fans. There was a mutter of arty off to the south, where Brion's Legion had run afoul of the Hussar's big guns. The Colonel had told us off for a hunting party.

At least, that was what he called it.

The 4th Cavalry had not participated much in the fun since our set-down on Harpster. As always, the big boys had stolen most of the show, a BattleMech grappling match which had shifted this way and that across Anglica, where the Ceti Hussars had established their foothold.

Wittengate was a crossroads out on the steppes where the Dracs were supposed to have set up an ammo and supply dump. Intel was spotty—isn't it always?—but reports suggested that a lot of the Drac logistical support had been moving in and out of Wittengate, and the place was well-placed strategically, far enough behind the snake lines to be safe, far enough up to keep their 'Mechs supplied.

Only the head dragons hadn't been counting on us.

All of the boys were excited. The orders had come down that afternoon that we were going to circle the Drac forces facing us, disengage, then make a long-range sweep behind the enemy lines to Wittengate. If we moved like lightning, we might find the Kurita supply dump there when we reached it, long after dark.

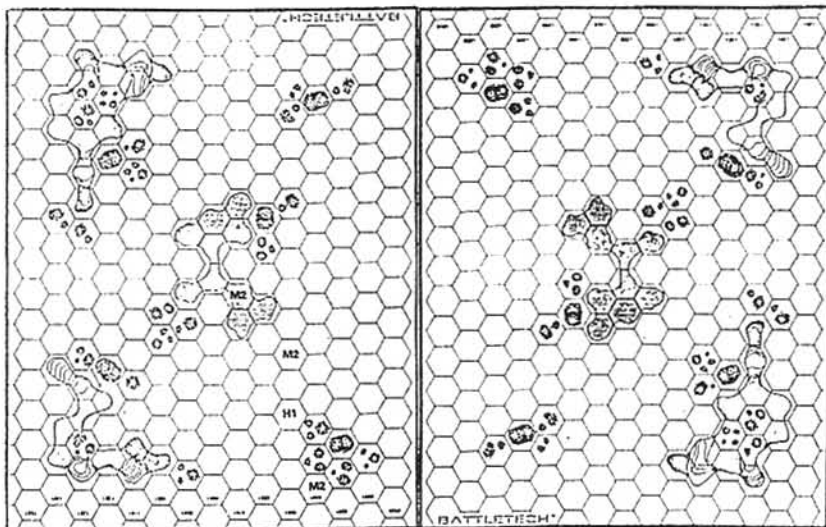
It was the sort of operation that veteran cavalrymen dream of.

Too bad, it was also the sort of operation that leaves a lot of veteran cavalrymen dead...

Boots and Saddles:

*A Cavalryman's Perspective
of the 'Mech Wars
Captain Kelly Caldwell, C Troop,
4th Cavalry, 2nd Ceti Hussars*

North



South

Game Set-Up

Use the basic BattleTech mapboard, treating all water hexes as level 0—solid ground.

Use one CityTech H1 building in hex 0504 to represent the supply depot. One M2 building is placed in each of the following hexes: 0506, 0401, 0708.

Attacking Forces:

Elements of the 4th light cavalry company of the 2nd Ceti Hussars.

- 1 50-ton *Condor* hovertank
- 1 30-ton *Pegasus* hovertank
- 2 40-ton *Whirlwind* hovertanks
- 1 50-ton *Harrier* hovertank
- 2 heavy trucks
- 2 rifle platoons (riding in the trucks)

Defending Forces:

Security detachment of Brion's Legion.

- 1 45-ton *Phoenix Hawk*
- 1 55-ton *Wolverine*
- 1 rifle platoon (foot)
- the supply depot

The Defender sets up first; the Attacker moves first. The Attacker enters the board from the north edge—hexes 1117 through 1517.

Objective: Capture supplies and/or destroy the supply depot.

Situation: Midnight, August 16, 3027 Wittengate, Harpster

Special Rules

To load supplies, a truck must occupy the same hex as the supply depot with a friendly infantry platoon. The depot houses 100 factors of supplies. A truck may carry 28 factors, which may be loaded by the infantry at a rate of 1 factor per damage rating per turn. The squad's current damage rating is used. Example: an undamaged rifle platoon may load 7 factors per turn, while one which has suffered 9 casualties may only load 5 factors per turn.

Each infantry platoon also carries incendiary satchel charges which will destroy 1D6 x 6 factors worth of supplies per platoon. These charges must be planted in the depot hex by the platoon, to the exclusion of any other activity that turn. The charges will explode during the weapons fire phase of the second turn following. Once the charges have been set, they may be removed by an infantry platoon occupying the same hex as the charges. The platoon must be of equal or greater strength than the platoon which planted the charges, and must make a roll of 9+ on 2D6.

If the supply depot takes any weapons fire, one-quarter (rounded up) of the damage taken by the building is passed on to the supplies inside. For example, if the depot is struck by a PPC, the supplies inside suffer 3 factors of damage.

Weapons fire may set fire to the building normally according to the CityTech rules.

If a truck is destroyed, any supplies it may have been carrying are also destroyed.

Night rules are in effect. Apply a -1 DM to all attack and piloting rolls for 'Mechs and vehicles, and a -2 DM to attack rolls for all infantry platoons. (Note: this modifier does not affect the planting or disarming of the incendiary satchel charges.)

Each *Whirlwind* can carry either 28 factors of supplies or 1 infantry platoon. They can be loaded with supplies in the same manner as trucks.

Victory Conditions

The following point schedule is used to determine the winner of this action:

- +2 for each supply factor destroyed in the depot
- +3 for each supply factor captured and taken off the north edge of the board
- +50 if the *Phoenix Hawk* is destroyed
- +60 if the *Wolverine* is destroyed
- +1 for each Kurita infantryman killed
- 1 for each supply factor left intact in the depot
- 2 for each supply factor destroyed while in a truck
- 1 per ton of each cavalry vehicle destroyed
- 10 for each truck destroyed
- 1 for each Davion infantryman killed

Total Points	Result
250+	Spectacular Davion Victory
175 to 249	Decisive Davion Victory
50 to 174	Marginal Davion Victory
-49 to +49	Draw—no clear victory
-50 to -174	Decisive Kurita Victory
-175+	Spectacular Kurita Victory

The technical data for the new light cavalry vehicles used in this simulation are listed on page 49.

On August 16, 3027, elements of House Davion's 2nd Ceti Hussars 4th Cavalry company were detailed to make a smash-and-grab raid on a supply depot held by a security detachment of Brion's Legion on Harpster in the Draconis March.

Five light cavalry vehicles and two heavy trucks carrying two rifle platoons attacked the depot at Wittengate just after sunset, with orders to capture as much materiel as they could and to destroy the rest. As the attack began, two Kurita 'Mechs met the cavalry, hoping to fend off the attacking Davion vehicles.

While the defending 'Mechs battled the reinforced cavalry lance, the trucks, escorted by one of the 40-ton *Whirlwinds*, sneaked into the depot. The infantry platoons began loading supplies. Before the trucks were finished loading, the cavalry lance commander ordered the trucks to pull out and destroy the dump. The infantrymen planted incendiary charges and sped away.

Reports revealed that one Kurita 'Mech, a 45-ton *Phoenix Hawk*, had been destroyed, and the other, a 55-ton *Wolverine*, had been damaged. Of the attacking cavalry vehicles, a 50-ton *Condor* was badly damaged and two vehicles were destroyed—a 50-ton *Harrier*, and a 40-ton *Whirlwind*.

The supplies gained in the raid bought the Davion forces on Harpster enough time for reinforcements to arrive and push the Kuritas back across the border.



CLASH AT PORT ROYAL

DELAYING ACTION BY HIGHWAY 3

"There go the 'Mechs!"

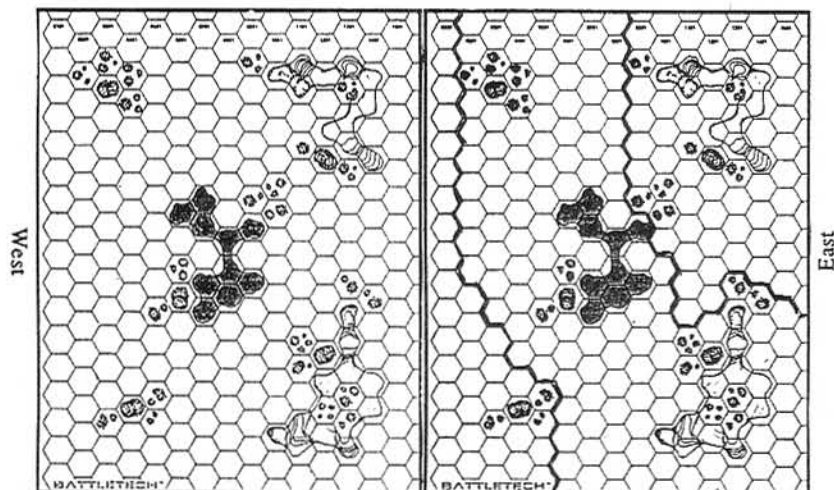
God, I can't say how glad we were to see those metal monsters forming line abreast and trudging back the way we'd come. Our battalion had fought for hours against the Kurita 'Mechs in the rubble around the Port Royal spaceport and we'd not more than scratched their armor in a few places. Old 'Blood 'n' Guts' Martell, the Military Marvel, had called it right for a change. We were hanging loose in the city, our flanks exposed, our rear exposed... we had to git!

Somehow, whatever cohesion the planetary defense forces had had before the retreat was completely gone by the time we got clear of the city. Highway 3 was a solid mass of vehicles... trucks piled high with kids and personal belongings, hovercraft draped with ragged-looking soldiers, light armored vehicles wallowing along with the flow like wood chips dragged along by the outgoing tide. The King Mountains were ranged ahead of us. We didn't think about it; we knew instinctively: safety lay that way.

Only then the Kurita 'Mechs began deploying east of Port Royal. There were a bunch of them... a couple companies' worth at least, and they were coming on fast. If they reached the highway, they'd wade through the refugees like snarkhounds through a herd of gazels. The retreat would become a rout... and the rout would become a disaster.

Twelve 'Mechs from the mercenary unit that had grounded a week before were nearby. When they started forming up, I began to think we might have a chance...

Excerpted from *I Was There: Stories of Warriors and Their War*
Edited by William H. Keith, Jr.
Exeter Press, Exeter



GAME SET-UP

Lay out the two BattleMech mapsheets as shown. All terrain printed the map is considered to be flat, open ground. The terrain marked on the map above is considered to be a ridge, consisting of high, open ground at Level 1.

Defender

The Defender consists of Company A, MacKenzie's Marauders:

Command Lance

- Colonel Gregg MacKenzie's *Marauder*
Piloting 3, Gunnery 2
- Lieutenant Johnny Lee's *Warhammer*
Piloting 3, Gunnery 3
- MechWarrior Patrick O'Hara's *Crusader*
Piloting 4, Gunnery 3
- MechWarrior Randolph Kreuger's *JagerMech*
Piloting 4, Gunnery 4

Fire Lance

- Lieutenant Diana Vincent's *Marauder*
Piloting 3, Gunnery 3
- MechWarrior Jordy Blake's *Marauder*
Piloting 3, Gunnery 4
- MechWarrior Natalie Forester's *Marauder*
Piloting 4, Gunnery 4
- MechWarrior Daniel Cutter's *Marauder*
Piloting 5, Gunnery 4

Recon Lance

- Lieutenant Sergei Matsutov's *Valkyrie*
Piloting 4, Gunnery 3
- MechWarrior Erik Christoferson's *Valkyrie*
Piloting 4, Gunnery 4
- MechWarrior Joe Lamonte's *Stinger*
Piloting 4, Gunnery 5
- MechWarrior Cindy Strella's *Stinger*
Piloting 4, Gunnery 5

Situation: Mid-day, April 5, 3028 Royal II

Attacker

The attackers are elements of the First Battalion, 3rd Benjamin Regulars:

	First Company	Second Company
Command Lance	<i>Orion</i> <i>Thunderbolt</i> <i>Crusader</i> <i>Shadow Hawk</i>	<i>Dragon</i> <i>Archer</i> <i>Orion</i> <i>Dervish</i>
Fire Lance	<i>Archer</i> <i>Archer</i> <i>Catapult (Kurita variant)</i> <i>Trebuchet</i>	<i>Rifleman</i> <i>Catapult (Kurita variant)</i> <i>Dragon</i> <i>Hunchback</i>
Recon Lance	<i>Javelin</i> <i>Panther</i> <i>Panther</i> <i>Stinger</i>	<i>Panther</i> <i>Javelin</i> <i>Javelin</i> <i>Stinger</i>

All Kurita MechWarriors in this scenario are considered to have Piloting 4, Gunnery 4.

All 'Mechs are in perfect condition. The Defender enters the board from the east side of the map. The Attacker enters from the west. The Attacker moves and deploys first.

Victory Conditions

The Defenders must hold off the attacking force as long as possible, while avoiding (if possible) their own destruction. The Attacker wins 1 point for every ton of Defender 'Mech destroyed or left abandoned on the field, plus 5 points for every one of his own 'Mechs he exits off the east edge of the mapboard before Turn 15.

The Defender wins 1 point for every ton of Attacker 'Mech destroyed, plus 5 points for every turn past Turn 8 he prevents *any* enemy 'Mechs from exiting the east edge of the mapboard.

The Kurita discovery that defensive forces had been withdrawn from the Royal system to participate in wargame maneuvers (Operation: Galahad '28) near the Liao border was a heaven-sent opportunity for them. It is uncertain just how they planned to exploit their gains in Davion space, but at the very least, a Kurita conquest of Royal would prove to be a painful thorn in Davion's side in the Draconis Marches. The Royal system stands astride the supply and shipment routes between the sector capitol at Robinson and the worlds of the Galtor Salient. Galtor III, long the focus of Davion-Kurita struggles in the area, would certainly fall to Kurita forces if the supply net to Robinson were cut.

Acting swiftly, and by deploying their DropShips in a precisely-calculated, non-standard Jump in-system, the Kurita forces were able to catch the Royal garrison by surprise. There was only infantry in the planetary capital of Port Royal when Kurita commandos seized the spaceport for the advance landings by Draconis DropShips. The classic 'Mech versus infantry firefight reduced much of Port Royal to rubble, and resulted in the ignominious retreat of the local infantry under General Martell.

Defeat would have been transformed into utter disaster if the Kurita 'Mechs had been able to strike the infantry again, while it was retreating in column along an open highway east of the city. Air strikes had harassed the column throughout the morning of April 5. The Kurita regimental commander decided that a strike by two 'Mech companies would scatter the infantry beyond any hope of recovery, as well as allowing large quantities of military supplies to fall into his force's hands.

Unfortunately, the Kurita commander had not counted on the presence of a single company of heavy BattleMech mercenaries, in the employ of House Davion.



The Battle of Harmony Pass

THE VALLEY OF DEATH

General Katusov: "I don't understand, General. Could you describe the situation for the Board, please?"

General Martell: "The situation was absolutely hopeless, General! I had nothing but incompetents to work with. Incompetents and disobedient traitors!"

General Shamir: "What do you mean?"

General Martell: "The forces under my command, General! Dregs and scrapings of the planetary defense forces. And one understrength regiment of traitorous mercenary scum!"

General Katusov: "Those are strong words, General. Strong accusations."

General Martell: "Words cannot describe my feelings at that confrontation, Sir! The merc unit..."

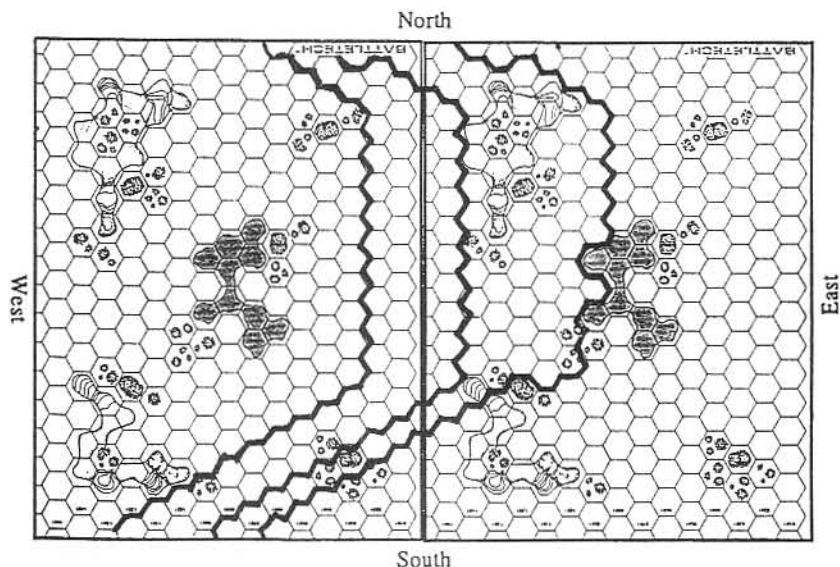
General Shamir: "You refer to the unit known as 'MacKenzie's Marauders?'"

General Martell: "Yeah. The traitorous dogs..."

General Shamir: "In what way were the mercenary forces under your command 'traitorous dogs?'"

General Martell: "They disobeyed orders. First they refused to advance to positions which I pointed out to them. Then, once my own forces had gone in and begun maneuvers which I was personally directing, they disregarded orders I had given them to hold their position..."

*Transcript
from the official Board of Inquiry
examining events during and
after the Royal Campaign
New Ivaarson, April, 3028*



GAME SET-UP

Lay out the two BattleTech mapsheets as shown. All terrain printed on the map is treated as empty, open terrain. The lines shown above show terrain elevations. The ground furthest to the west is at Level 0. The next is Level 1, and so on.

Defender

The Defender consists of Company A, MacKenzie's Marauders, plus elements of the Royal Gray light cavalry militia forces. For a historical set-up, the Defender uses the same line-up presented in the Port Royal Scenario, with the following changes:

Eliminate Lamonte's *Stinger*.

Add 32 points of damage to Blake's *Marauder's* left arm.

Add 12 points of damage to O'Hara's *Crusader* (randomly distributed).

Add 8 points of damage each to Lee's *Warhammer* and Cutter's *Marauder* (randomly distributed).

As an alternative, simply play this scenario after the completion of the Port Royal Scenario, carrying over the damage to each 'Mech engaged without allowing time for repairs.

In addition, the Defender forces include 3 companies of the Royal Grays light cavalry:

- 10 *Pegasus* scout hover tanks
- 4 *Saracen* medium hover tanks
- 4 *Saladin* assault hover tanks
- 4 *Vedette* light tanks
- 4 *Scorpion* light tanks
- 2 *Scimitar* medium hover tanks
- 2 *Striker* light tanks

Stats for these vehicles can be found in the BattleTech Technical Readout 3026 (Vehicles and Personal Equipment) from FASA.

**Situation: Mid-afternoon, April 5, 3028
Harmony Pass, Royal II**

Attacker

The Attacker's forces consist of elements of the First Battalion, 3rd Benjamin Regulars. This will consist of the two Kurita companies listed in the Port Royal scenario. For a historical set-up, randomly distribute 50 points of damage among the Kurita 'Mechs. As an alternative, simply begin this scenario with all damage sustained by the Kurita forces in the previous scenario.

In addition, a third company of 'Mechs is acting as a reserve force behind the first two companies. This will consist of the following:

Command Lance	Fire Lance	Recon Lance
<i>Warhammer</i>	<i>Dragon</i>	<i>Javelin</i>
<i>Dragon</i>	<i>Dragon</i>	<i>Spider</i>
<i>Rifleman</i>	<i>Archer</i>	<i>Stinger</i>
<i>Rifleman</i>	<i>Shadow Hawk</i>	<i>Wasp</i>

The reserve company is not deployed until after Turn 15, and then only if at least 100 tons of Davion 'Mechs have been destroyed or disabled.

The Defender sets up first anywhere along the east half of the mapboard. The Attacker (minus the reserves) enters on Turn 1 anywhere along the west map edge. The reserves may enter on the west map edge after Turn 15, if sufficient Davion tonnage has been disabled or destroyed.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

The Attacker wins if he exits at least 18 'Mechs (half his force) off the east edge of the mapboard before Turn 21, or if he destroys or disables all of the Davion 'Mechs before Turn 21. He must destroy 100 tons' worth of Davion 'Mechs (cavalry excluded) in order to be allowed to bring his reserve company onto the map. This represents the Kurita commander's uncertainty about the nature of the Davion attack.

The Defender wins if he avoids the Kurita victory conditions.

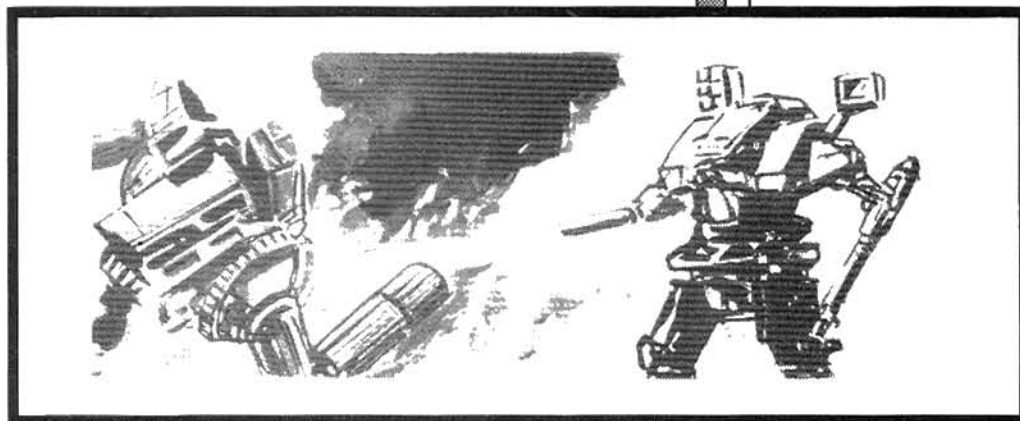
The cavalry forces *must* advance during Turn 1 and must continue to advance until they can engage the Kurita 'Mechs. The Defender may advance his 'Mechs or hold them in place at the top of the hill, as the player wishes.

As a variant, the Defender may have full control of the Royal Grays cavalry, using them for attack or defense, as he prefers.

The surviving Davion planetary defense forces on Royal found themselves forced to withdraw east across the King Mountains after their defeat at Port Royal. The mountains are high and ice-peaked, in places rising 9,000 meters above the coastal plain. To the east lies the rugged plateau known locally as the High Country. The King Mountains are pierced at various places by east-west passes. Highway 3, the main road east from Port Royal, passes through the easiest of these passes, just west of the town of Harmony.

On April 5, 3028, A Company of MacKenzie's Marauders found itself holding Harmony Pass against a vastly superior force of Kurita BattleMechs. The local commander's decision to employ three companies of light cavalry against enemy BattleMechs (after the mercenary forces refused his order to attack) has been widely criticized as a prime example of how not to use cavalry. In the subsequent engagement, the cavalry unit, the Royal Grays, suffered an astonishing 80% casualties, while losing all but 2 of the 30 vehicles employed. (One of these was later declared unsalvageable and junked.) The attack served to distract the Kurita forces, however, from the deployment of a company-strength attack by the mercenary Battle-Mech forces, which inflicted sufficient damage on the enemy that the Kurita forces withdrew in disarray.

The Kurita forces were not able to mount a second attempt to penetrate the High Country and were soon forced to abandon their foothold on the planet.



Dragonslayers on Guard

THE BATTLE OF SECOND VOLTA

Romulus is a stark and unforgiving world: desert, for the most part, mingled with cold and rugged mountains, vast, forbidding badlands haunted by *vagus* and *shimirin*, and small and briny seas. It lies in the half-forgotten, peripheral realms of House Steiner, near the border with House Kurita and near the thin, ragged edge of civilization. Outward lie the miserable worlds of Hendrik, and the cold night of Star's End. A near neighbor is the feudal kingly of Trel I, and the night sky is made strange by the sprawl of Dark Nebula, and the pock-faced and tide-locked globe of the planet's near twin Remus.

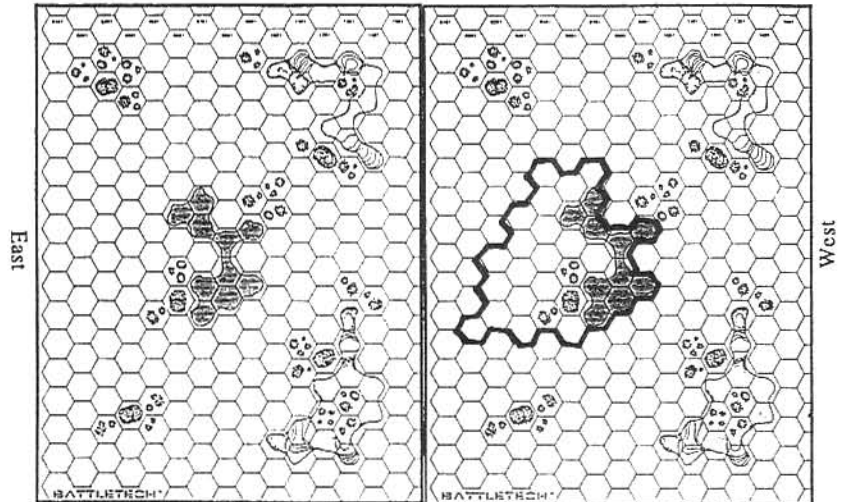
Romulus and Remus produce little of value for export to other worlds, save the one resource which is always in demand: men. Severe climates and rugged conditions have produced a breed of men inured to hardship. The principal source of income on these worlds is men, soldiers shipped as mercenaries to serve on other worlds.

But late in 3027, it was men of other worlds who came to Romulus.

Volta is what passes as a major city on Romulus, a desert caravan trade center of perhaps 20,000 people, located at an oasis lake at the rim of the ancient Vorunnen Erg. A salt flat beyond the city serves as one of the planet's principal DropShip grounding fields. In 3027, elements of the 2nd An Ting Regiment, searching for weakness within the Steiner frontier defenses, descended on Romulus' night side and seized Volta and the surrounding desert flats. Though the raiders did not land in full regimental strength—it is estimated that only four companies of BattleMechs actually took part in the assault—the threat of Draconis regulars establishing a military foothold on Steiner's peripheral flank was severe enough to demand an immediate response. With no regular units available, the mercenary unit known as the Dragonslayers was sent in instead.

The Dragonslayers arrived some two weeks after the Kurita forces...

A History of the Successor State Wars
Barnard Press
Tharkad 3028



GAME SET-UP

Lay out the BattleTech maps as shown, or use a large sheet of blank hex paper. All terrain is considered to be Level 0 and open. All lakes and elevations on the printed mapsheets are ignored.

However, the lines shown on the map above should be marked in. The area enclosed by the lines represents the Volta oasis, a soft-bottomed lake approximately 250 meters across. All oasis hexes are at Depth 1—approximately knee-deep on a 'Mech.

Defender

The Defender consists of elements of the 2nd An Ting Regiment (Combine) detailed to hold the only major water reservoir in the area. His forces include Company C of the An Ting Tigers:

Command Lance

Captain Isoru Hashimoto: *Veteran Dragon*

Piloting 5, Gunnery 4

MechWarrior Valery Kubachev: *Veteran Dragon*

Piloting 5, Gunnery 5

MechWarrior Sharon Fitzpatrick: *Veteran Rifleman*

Piloting 6, Gunnery 6

Fire Lance

Lieutenant Charles Winefred: *Veteran Dragon*

Piloting 5, Gunnery 5

MechWarrior Kathy O'Sullivan: *Veteran Archer*

Piloting 5, Gunnery 4

MechWarrior Toshiro Kanawabe: *Veteran Wolverine*

Piloting 5, Gunnery 4

Recon Lance

Lieutenant Honey Fairchilde: *Veteran Panther*

Piloting 4, Gunnery 5

MechWarrior "Death Wish" Takaki: *Regular Locust*

Piloting 6, Gunnery 6

**Situation: 1550 hours, November 4, 3027
Romulus**

Attacker

The Attacker consists of the mercenary Dragonslayers, in the service of House Steiner. Their orders are to seize and hold the Volta Oasis.

Command Lance:

- Colonel George Conrad: *Elite Warhammer*
Piloting 4, Gunnery 4
- MechWarrior Lucille Cartier: *Veteran Centurion*
Piloting 5, Gunnery 5
- MechWarrior Robert Burns: *Veteran Shadow Hawk*
Piloting 5, Gunnery 4
- MechWarrior Fraser MacCandless: *Veteran Phoenix Hawk*
Piloting 5, Gunnery 6

Fire Lance

- Captain Victor Jennings: *Veteran Archer*
Piloting 5, Gunnery 5
- MechWarrior Loni Landers: *Veteran Rifleman*
Piloting 4, Gunnery 5
- MechWarrior William Anders: *Veteran Valkyrie*
Piloting 5, Gunnery 5

Recon Lance

- Vikki delaPaz: *Regular Phoenix Hawk*
Piloting 5, Gunnery 5
- Douglas McDonald: *Regular Stinger*
Piloting 5, Gunnery 6

The Defender sets up first, anywhere on the map. The Attacker enters the mapboard from the east on Turn 1. The Attacker may, if he chooses, bring his 'Mechs in during subsequent turns as well, but at least one 'Mech must enter on Turn 1, and all 'Mechs must enter from the east edge of the board.

All BattleMechs begin the scenario in perfect condition. Both sides have suffered combat losses at the point when this scenario begins, but both sides have had time to make repairs to damaged 'Mechs since the last combat.

Victory Conditions

The side which controls the oasis at the end of 20 turns is declared the winner. "Control" is defined as having at least 1 operational BattleMech in or within 3 hexes of the oasis for three consecutive turns, with no enemy 'Mechs meeting the same conditions. "Operational" is defined as any BattleMech which is still able both to fire weapons and to move.

As a more complex alternative, victory may be determined by scoring 1 point per ton for each destroyed or crippled BattleMech (i.e., 70 points for a *Warhammer*, 60 for a *Dragon*, etc.). In addition, 100 points are awarded to the side which possesses the oasis at the end of 20 turns.

Control of the important water source of the Voltan Reservoir was considered vital to the control of the town of Volta some three kilometers distant. Seized by Draco forces early in the invasion, the oasis/reservoir became the focal point in the struggle between the Kurita invaders and the Dragonslayer mercenaries.

Since the Kurita forces needed only to maintain control of the oasis, the shape of the battle was determined in large part by the Steiner attackers. Although their actual numbers were nearly equal, the Dragonslayers outnumbered their Kurita foes by a comfortable margin in terms of 'Mech tonnage. This meant that 'Mechs crippled during the approach phase of the battle left a correspondingly larger hole in the Attacker's line. Colonel Conrad decided that the best solution was a quick rush to place as many of his 'Mechs close in among the enemy as possible. The Kurita forces adopted a flexible, in-depth defense, allowing their front line to drop back while firing, until they reached positions defined by a second supporting line several hundred meters to the rear. The aim was to cripple as many Steiner 'Mechs as possible, then rush the survivors and overwhelm them by weight of numbers.

This simulation allows a comparison of the two strategies... as well as the evolution of new ones.

The Dragonslayers mercenary regiment is discussed in the Hiring Hall column starting on page 6 of this issue of *BattleTechnology*. The Battle of Second Volta was the most recent major engagement of the Dragonslayers. 'Mechs surviving this scenario can be considered to constitute the present combat strength of the Dragonslayer regiment.



Letters to the Editor

Dear BattleTechnology:

I am a devoted fan of your magazine, the more so since my receipt of your last issue. All of the guys in my unit like BattleTechnology. The stories are good, and the pieces on 'Mech strategy and tactics find a practical application in our own work.

We were impressed to see the change in your last issue (0201). It was heftier, thicker, and more substantial. Why is this important? Well, not long after my subscription came at mail call, the alert went up as Liao raiders came in, a sneak raid on our positions on Frazer. I was running for my *Shadow Hawk* when a Liao Transit stooped below the cloud deck, spitting AC shells. Something slammed into my chest and knocked me to the ferrocrete, stunned. I wasn't aware of much of anything until some hours later when I came to in the base infirmary. They handed me a fist-sized chunk of twisted metal and told me it was a piece of shrapnel from one of the exploding AC shells.

The thing was, it smacked me right where I had BattleTechnology folded up and stuffed inside my battlejacket. I got a hell of a bruise and one of my ribs was busted, but the medics told me that that thing would have torn clear through me if it hadn't been for your magazine.

So thanks a lot, and keep up the good work!

Truly yours,
Sgt. Sergio Ramandez,
Frazer Free Defense League
F.P.O. Frazer

PS By the way... do you think I could have another subscription copy of Issue 0202? The one you sent me is a bit smunched from "Fifth Kill" to the end of the magazine—S.R.

Dear BattleTechnology:

Just received my first copy of BattleTechnology, two months late, but you know how the StarMail system is. Everyone in the family has read it and all my buddies in my patrol group liked it, too.

I used to be a MechWarrior until 3023. While on a pirate patrol, I was ambushed and knocked over, resulting in me getting a back injury and my *Locust* "Bouncing Betty" lying face down in the rocks. Fortunately, the other members of my battle group, Lt. Hodges' lance of the old Black Jack battalion, were close enough to me to rescue me and save Betty from any real damage or begin snatched. My oldest son, Erick, now drives Betty. With two kills and four assists, he's still green but has the stuff needed.

In my 16 years' service, I saw some action, numerous skirmishes, a few raids (including the raid on Brimstone in 3015), and nine months' front line duty at Souviem where I was wounded twice. At the time of my injury, I was a sergeant with 7 kills and 12 assists. Perhaps in the future I can send some of my stories from when I was a real warrior for use in your fine magazine.

"Sgt. Willie" Smith, A-Ret, M.
C. S. P. Unit 14
Agi-Zones 24-34

INCOMING!

In the next,
action-packed issue
of BattleTechnology...

- Celestial Wisdom from Maxmilian Liao
—An exclusive BattleTechnology interview with the Chancellor of the Capellan Confederation
- Liao at Solaris:
—Homefield advantage... or more?
The Capellan Confederation plays to win at the Solaris Games
- Howl of the North Wind
—A veteran MechWarrior of the famed Northwind Highlanders tells of his brush with death and the 1st Lancers!
- Worldbook: Mira
—This world called "wonderful" on the Davion frontier is a frequent target of Liao raids
- Plus other feature articles; regular columns; battle simulations; news from the Inner Sphere...

AND MUCH, MUCH MORE!
DON'T MISS IT!

WANT ADS

WANTED—Editorial offices of prestigious newsmagazine seeks mercenary soldiers with frontline experience. 'Mech experience not necessary. Perimeter and base security ticket involves some risk, possibility of travel, good pay.
Contact: DROP 1223, Highport, Exeter

WANTED: A FEW GOOD MEN to serve in a veteran, battle-proven unit. Men with five years' combat experience preferred: MechWarriors or infantry. Weapons, full kit, and uniforms provided. Kurita scum need not apply.
Contact: DROP 71, Highport, Exeter

WANTED—Eyewitnesses to accident which occurred approximately 2 pm local, April 12, near intersection of Freeport Ave. and Joy Street near spaceport entrance. Seeking identity of pilot of unmarked *Griffin* which stepped on a late-model sports speeder parked in spaceport waiting zone. Reward.
Contact DROP 2315, Highport Exeter

FOR SALE—Used laser pistol. Bereiter Arms 49S "Ultra." Good condition. Used once. Cb 50 or best offer.
Contact DROP 9287, Highport, Exeter

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