

TACTICAL NUKE

These lines are written by Iain MacAllan, Tactical ‘Officer’ of the Battletech-Chapter ‘The Griffins’, aka *Ikarus*, ‘House Commander’* of Liao. (* not to be mixed up with House leader/chancellor, for that I am not.)

My intent is to give some – hopefully – useful advice for players who are rather new to the Battletech board-game, and who wish to improve their skills in the game (or for those who play since years, but get trashed on a regular basis :)).

I do assume however, that the reader has some solid basic knowledge of Battletech, as this is NOT an introduction to the rules of the game but rather an introduction of how to build good tactics and strategies with these rules.

Some parts of this work deal specifically with MegaMek (MM), the free on-line-version of the Battletech board-game. These parts are written in *italic*.

The number of different possibilities and situations in Battletech is infinite (considering all those different maps and Mechs, and the people involved, not to forget the bloody dice/RNG). It is clearly impossible to cover all of them here. So I try to stay as general as possible, and I hope to do so without getting too abstract...

While writing these lines down, I vaguely remembered Sun Tzu’s “The Art of War” and included a single citation along with the obscure hint that much of his work can be applied to Battletech. A friend of mine, to whom I gave this for proof reading, urged me to include more of it here (so, if you feel bored by it, blame him ☺). However, I followed his advice and decided to dig it up. In doing this, I found even more parallels than I thought, and included some of them here.

So, who is – or rather was – this ‘Sun Tzu’? He was a Chinese (“Liao”! ☺) general, who lived around 500 B.C. A collection of essays on the art of war is attributed to him. Sun Tzu wrote this earliest – and still the most revered – military treatise in the world. This masterpiece is best known as ‘The Art of War’.

It includes many commentaries by later Chinese philosophers. The core text was probably written by one person during a time of expanding feudal conflicts, but the exact century is uncertain. Most authorities now support a date early in the ‘Warring States’ period (c.453–221 B.C.).

Knowledge of Sun Tzu reached Europe shortly before the French Revolution in the form of a summary translation by Father J. J. M. Amiot, a French Jesuit priest. It is said that even Napoleon studied it (however, he did not always pay attention, as it seems).

If you want to know how the guys who defeated Napoleon thought of war, I recommend you to read Clausewitz: ”Vom Kriege.” (“Of war”). Clausewitz was a member of the Prussian General Staff under the leadership of Gneisenau.

You can even buy it as a bundle ☺: “The Book of War : Sun-Tzu's "The Art of War" & Karl Von Clausewitz's "On War" (Paperback)”.

However, I will only use the freely available translation of ‘The Art of War’ (translated by Lionel Giles in 1910).

Surprisingly, ‘The Art of War’ can also be applied to business, sports, diplomacy and even aspects of personal lives. However, upon closer inspection, the surprise vanishes, as for whatever nontrivial ‘things’ we want to achieve in our life, we need some kind of ‘strategy’ and ‘tactics’ and these obey more or less the same rules, albeit being less martial in nature. With proper abstraction, interpretation and adaptation, ‘The Art of War’ can be applied to almost all kinds of situations and problems.

However, the level of abstraction necessary for the application of Sun Tzu to the game of Battletech is rather low, as we are essentially confronted with exactly the same problems.

Sun Tzus’ aim was to teach ‘soldiers’ how to become great generals, officers and fighters – or, in the language of our game: Mechwarriors and Mechcommanders. So, what is the hallmark of such a great – or rather clever – fighter, according to Sun Tzu?

WHAT THE ANCIENTS CALLED A CLEVER FIGHTER IS ONE WHO NOT ONLY WINS, BUT EXCELS IN WINNING WITH EASE. HENCE HIS VICTORIES BRING HIM NEITHER REPUTATION FOR WISDOM NOR CREDIT FOR COURAGE.

THE GENERAL WHO ADVANCES WITHOUT COVETING FAME AND RETREATS WITHOUT FEARING DISGRACE, WHOSE ONLY THOUGHT IS TO PROTECT HIS COUNTRY AND DO GOOD SERVICE FOR HIS SOVEREIGN, IS THE JEWEL OF THE KINGDOM.

Side remark: After the final defeat of Napoleon mainly the English, Russian and Austrian troops paraded in Paris. Most Prussian soldiers were too dirty for this and thus not allowed to participate – because they came more or less straight from the battlefields. So much for reputation and credit...

HE WINS HIS BATTLES BY MAKING NO MISTAKES. MAKING NO MISTAKES IS WHAT ESTABLISHES THE CERTAINTY OF VICTORY, FOR IT MEANS CONQUERING AN ENEMY THAT IS ALREADY DEFEATED.

HENCE THE SKILFUL FIGHTER PUTS HIMSELF INTO A POSITION WHICH MAKES DEFEAT IMPOSSIBLE, AND DOES NOT MISS THE MOMENT FOR DEFEATING THE ENEMY.

THEREFORE THE GOOD FIGHTER WILL BE TERRIBLE IN HIS ONSET, AND PROMPT IN HIS DECISION...

All citations from Sun Tzu in this article will appear in this font in the following; please note that they are rearranged compared to the original text, according to their relevance for our purposes here. You can find the full and complete version either on our homepage, or on various other websites.

BATTLETECH SKILLS

There are many aspects in Battletech for which skill is important. These are presented here roughly in the order in which they appear in a game, not according to their importance:

- 1. Building good lances/armies**
- 2. *Ok, now that we have our lance, lets start looking for trouble, shall we?***
- 3. Prepare for Battle.**
- 4. Of Terrain, Strategy, Tactics and Deployment**
- 5. Formations**
- 6. Initiative**
- 7. The movement phase – Or: Why, where, when and how to move a Mech.**
- 8. The weapon attack phase/heat issues**
- 9. Physical attacks**
- 10. How to make it all work**
- 11. Vehicles and infantry**
- 12. Bigger games**
- 13. Final words**

List of abbreviations:

The following abbreviations are commonly used here:

BTH: Base-to-hit number (minimum number required with a 2D6 roll for success).

LOS: Line-of-Sight.

RNG: Random number generator.

Apart from those, standard Battletech abbreviations are used (e.g. LT for left torso, etc.).

1. Building good lances/armies

Or: How to create a good team of Mechs that support and augment each other with their abilities (armour, fire-power, speed, heat management, and so forth), balanced by a reasonable BV.

HAVING COLLECTED AN ARMY AND CONCENTRATED HIS FORCES, HE (the general) MUST BLEND AND HARMONIZE THE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS THEREOF BEFORE PITCHING HIS CAMP.

THE CLEVER COMBATANT LOOKS TO THE EFFECT OF COMBINED ENERGY, AND DOES NOT REQUIRE TOO MUCH FROM INDIVIDUALS. HENCE HIS ABILITY TO PICK OUT THE RIGHT MEN AND UTILIZE COMBINED ENERGY.

So, how can I recognise such a good team?

- How well can the team do against another lance that is long-ranged/short-ranged/all-round?
- How well are the Mechs suited for the terrain I am going to play on? In hills/jungle I need highly manoeuvrable Mechs, all with jump jets. These JJ are wasted BV on plains, however, and I could instead get a lot more armour and fire-power for them...
- What other (mean!) Mechs could I (or my opponent, for that matter) get for the same BV? Do I stand a chance against those?
- Suppose I have long-range or vulnerable Mechs. Can I protect them?
- Suppose I have short-range-Mechs. Can I support them?
- Suppose the opponent has fast Mechs. Can I chase them down or kill them from afar?
- ...

Alone from this short list, it should be clear why there can be no 'best lance'. There are many lances, which are particularly good for a certain purpose/situation. However, instead of giving a load of good lances, I'll just pick one and explain the reasoning behind its composition.

MegaMek: Just keep in mind that it is always a good idea to keep two lances of the same BV, one for plains (0-2 jumpers), and one for hills/woods/jungle (all jumpers). The reason for this will be explained later.

But let us first have a look at the basic **types of Mechs**, shall we?:

a) Long-range platform, e.g. Archer or Awesome. Well, what should I say: lots of long-range fire-power, bad at short range. Remember that you can shoot LRMs indirectly, with a suitable spotter (preferably Infantry), if you have no direct Line-Of-Sight (LOS).

Use: keep them at long, and preferably at medium range, and blast away... Good positions offer some cover (e.g. woods) and a good overview of the battlefield.

Counter: move such that you block (or at least hinder by woods and/or smoke) LOS to such Mechs while closing in, stay out of their optimum distances, e.g. move to 15 (not 14=medium) or 8 (not 7=short) hexes to LRM-Mechs, use speed (high movement-to-hit modifier) and cover (woods, smoke), so it is hard for your opponent to hit you.

Close in, and destroy in close-combat. OR: out-gun him, if you have more LRMs and PPCs than your opponent.

b) Close-Combat, e.g. Battlemaster, Grasshopper, Victor: devastating at short range, little or no long-range potential. Get in and kill.

Use: get in, make sure you receive not more fire/damage than necessary (see above). Do not rush the opponent with a single Mech, he will just die. Rush him consequently or don't do it at all.

Counter: approach these Mechs (carefully). Now I hear you scream: WHAT? WHY? Because: in this way you get them earlier at your medium range. Keep them there as long as possible. Plus you then have made room for yourself to retreat to. Do not wait for them and do not let them trap you in a corner.

c) All-rounder: A good mixture of fire-power (long-and short-range), armour and speed, e.g. Thunderbolt, Hunchback-J, Catapult,...

Use: very versatile. They can dish it out from afar, or close-in (although usually not as good as the 'specialists'), good at supporting either Long - range Mechs (by providing much needed short-range potential, while adding long-range fire of their own) or for supporting close-combat Mechs (giving covering fire during close-in, and adding punch in CC).

Counters: more difficult. Outmanoeuvre them, out-gun them, out-range them, gang up on them. Highly situation dependent. Clever use of specialists or other all-rounders recommended.

d) Backstabber: The rear is always the weakest part of a Mech. Backstabbers are highly mobile Mechs, with some fire-power. The aim is to get into the rear of other Mechs (esp. those with thin rear-armour such as Hunchback), and cause serious internal damage, or even destruction. Examples: Phoenix Hawk, Spider, etc.

Use: try to get where you want, in the opponents rear. But be careful during the approach. Good timing (see later) is essential here.

Counter: Use your own fast Mechs to put pressure on them, always be aware where they can get with their movement and deny them your rears. If you can reasonably hit them, say on 8+ or better, try to kill them, even if you have 'better' targets.

e) Initiative- and BV-sink: Cheap Mechs, very low BV. This allows you to spend more BV on your other Mechs. They have limited uses, but may be used as backstabbers, e.g. Wasp, Stinger, Locust, etc.

Use: Do not expect them to do too much for you. Move them early on, so your powerful Mechs can react to the opponents moves. Do not send them 'in' too early, they are too fragile for this. And if you loose them, you have an initiative-disadvantage (see below).

Counter: as they are usually no real threat, you can more or less ignore them. As they are easily killed, however, seize any opportunity to take them out of commission, thus taking away a precious initiative unit from the opponent

There are many other Battlefield-roles for Mechs, but the ones mentioned above are the most common. It is of vital importance that you do not only recognise the roles of the Mechs you use, but also that you use them appropriately.

Also analyse your opponents Mechs, and you will get an idea of how he will probably try to beat you (if he uses them correctly, which you should always assume).

You should also familiarize yourself with the strengths and weaknesses of each Mechdesign. Try to maximise your strengths and minimize your weaknesses, while trying to minimize the opponents strengths and take maximum advantage of his weaknesses. Just two examples (also see the 'sample lance' below):

- **Trebuchet:** has only LRM-ammo in LT. at the beginning of the fight, switch the launchers to feed from that torso (*default is RT in MM*). Otherwise a single critical hit to LT will kill the Mech.
- **Hunchback:** rear-armor is 4/5/4. An ordinary ML will punch through the side Torsi, possibly disabling the AC20 or hitting ammo (BOOOOMMM!). So better make sure you don't get backstabbed.

Ok, now you know some basic stuff about Mechs. But usually we don't play with single Mechs, right? We use 4 or more Mechs. So according to which criteria should you choose your Mechs?

Well, as mentioned above, that depends on many, many factors. What it boils down to is the following: A lance has to be a good team. This team can be geared more towards close-combat or long-range, more suited for plains or hills/woods, etc... So there is no such thing like 'THE BEST LANCE', but there are many, many good lances. Unfortunately there are at least as many, if not by far more, bad lances around.

But now, without further ado, here is our sample lance:

Warhammer WHM-6R,
 Crusader CRD-3R,
 Phoenix Hawk PXH-1,
 Spider SDR-5V.

It actually isn't a very good or special lance, but it will serve us well to explain and understand some basic things. In fact, it's rather basic and unimaginative. Now, let's have a closer look:

- As half of the Mechs are jump-capable, this lance is OK for most kinds of terrain, and especially suited for plains with a moderate amount of hills and woods.
- The Crusader (all-round Mech) is the only Mech in this lance with a substantial amount of armor. So if you have to present a target to the opponent (e.g. because you lost initiative), pick him. He has good all-round fire-power, either at long-range, or at short-range. However, he only has 10 heat sinks, so be careful what you fire. The SRMs are located in the legs, which has a lot of drawbacks: you cannot enlarge/change their arc-of-fire by torso-twisting, like you can do with torso- or arm-mounted weapons, and you cannot shoot them if you are in Partial Cover (PC). Also, if you want to kick, remember to shoot no more than one of the SRMs. The only crit locations in the side torsi are the ammo-slots for the LRMs. Coupled with measly 6 points of armor in the rear of these locations, that means you have to watch out for opposing backstabbers.
- The Warhammer (all-round Mech) packs two PPCs, one of the best weapons in BT, as it dishes out 10 damage to one location with long range, and no need for ammunition. The Warhammer also has a solid array of close-combat weapons. The price for this are first a comparatively 'low' (18) number of heat sinks. So think carefully what you fire, and also think about where you will likely want to move and what you will likely want to fire next turn. The main weakness, however, is the bad armor, especially on the legs. So avoid getting into physical combat with heavy opponents. The Warhammer can give it, but it can't take it...

- The Phoenix Hawk is of course our backstabber. Before getting in any backs, however, he can provide fire-support with his large laser. Keep in mind that he has only 6 armour in the head, so don't go into partial cover (PC) and don't let a Mech with 65+ tons punch you. The Phoenix Hawk has only 10 heat sinks, so be careful what you fire, esp. after having jumped... Together with the Spider, it can discourage any backstabbing attempts on our Crusader. Apart from all that, the Phoenix Hawk is our fast 'cavalry', as it can quickly give support wherever it is needed most, and is our no. 1 choice for handling unexpected circumstances.
- The SDR has many roles here: initiative-sink, backstabber, generally annoying and irritating the opponent, spotter for the Crusaders LRMs in difficult terrain,...

So, is this a good lance? Hmm. Well, it's not great, it is more like a Krusty Burger (The Simpsons TM): It's not just 'good', it's 'good enough' :).

So now that I've shown you how to make a mediocre lance, how do you get a great one? I am afraid, I can't really help you there. Too much depends on playing style and personal preference. I am a guerrilla* player myself, which means highly mobile Mechs, low armour, medium fire-power, horribly high BV for what you get in armour and fire-power. I have fun with it, and win more often than not. But if you are not familiar with such lances and the style required to play them, you will get horribly mangled...

[* Guerrilla warfare: fighting by groups of irregular troops (guerrillas) within areas occupied by the enemy. The tactics of guerrilla warfare stress deception and ambush, as opposed to mass confrontation, and succeed best in an irregular, rugged, terrain, using hit-and-run attacks.]

Just one more tip: a really good lance is able to cope with many different situations, maps, and opponents. But a 'good' lance is nothing without the appropriate player: so build lances that fit your style (for this you have to find that style in the first place by trial-and-error, I am afraid).

It is quite common to build lances with the highest punch/armour for the BV. I myself prefer to use Mechs I really like...

Finally, some classical mistakes that can occur while building a lance/force:

- There are some 'Uber'-Mechs which are so expensive BV-wise, that you only get complete crap for your remaining BV. If – say – your Imp gets killed by a lucky PPC shot to his cockpit, your unit is history.
- Pure close-combat unit without any long-range support /long-range energy-weapons. Any fast Mechs will elude you and backstab you, while long-range weapons batter your armour away.
- Pure long-range unit, 'preferably' only with LRMs. Your opponent will rush your positions, and crush you. Remember that moving forward, one is usually faster than moving backwards in Battletech; and somewhere, there is that map edge...

So, aren't there any 'rough' guidelines? Hmm, you can try one of those two possibilities for a start; from there you have to find your own style:

- Pick a balanced mix of long- and short-range specialists, and fill the gaps with backstabbers and such.

- Build the core of your forces out of all-rounders and fill up with backstabbers and specialists.

Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages. However, the second one is better for beginners, as it is more forgiving and is a bit more flexible.

In both cases, check if your selection makes a good team according to the criteria listed above.

So, have fun finding your own 'perfect' lance. However, if you are unsure about the quality (or manner of use) of your lance, ask experienced players for their opinion.

2. Ok, now that we have our lance, lets start looking for trouble, shall we? (Megamek-only...)

We can get into trouble either by attacking or by getting attacked.

First consider the case that we are attacking. This means you can choose the planet you want to attack. Like I said before, our lance is OK for most kinds of terrain, and especially suited for plains with a moderate amount of hills and woods. So you choose such an appropriate planet. Either go to the house board/forum and have a look at the planets listed there as targets (with Campaign-> Planet Status), or look at all the planets which you can attack (with Commander -> Front line -> Range calculator, and again Campaign-> Planet Status). Since you choose the target (and also because you cannot change it any more while attacking), you should be happy with your lance...

This is different when you get attacked. In the attack message it says which planet is attacked. It is very important that you take the time to check that planets terrain (again with Campaign -> Planet Status). Like I said, you should always have two lances with the same BV, one for plains, one for hills/jungle. Now you know why, I guess? Right! You pick the one that is best suited for the terrain of the planet under attack.

The next information you get is the BV of the attacker. If you got 'blinded', feel free to raise your BV above that of the attacker (up to a maximum of +150); don't do this in an arranged game however, there you try to make your BV as equal to the attacker as possible.

3. Prepare for Battle.

CAREFULLY COMPARE THE OPPOSING ARMY WITH YOUR OWN, SO THAT YOU MAY KNOW WHERE STRENGTH IS SUPERABUNDANT AND WHERE IT IS DEFICIENT.

MM: Before the battle begins, you see the configuration screen. There you can

have a close look at your opponents forces. Figure out the strengths/weaknesses of your opponent (long-range/short-range/mobility, etc.).

Here you can also configure your units. Select one of your Mechs, click the 'configure unit'-button. Then a menu appears. I always disable auto-eject on my Catapults and similar Mechs; otherwise a hit to an ammo location with just one shot left takes out the Mech by ejection, although it would have survived the ammo explosion...

Next we roll for choosing sides. If your opponent wins, you have to follow suit. That's it. However, if you win, you can choose to either decrease or increase the distance between you and your opponent by choosing your starting position. If your lance is better at close-combat than your opponents', choose either E or W, so you can get to grips with him fast.

If it is the other way round, go for a greater distance, choosing either the corners (NE, etc.), if you have a long-range lance, or N/S, if you have an all-round lance; the latter is usually my choice.

4. Of Terrain, Strategy, Tactics and Deployment

SUN TZU SAID: WE MAY DISTINGUISH SIX KINDS OF **TERRAIN**, TO WIT: (1) ACCESSIBLE GROUND; (2) ENTANGLING GROUND; (3) TEMPORIZING GROUND; (4) NARROW PASSES; (5) PRECIPITOUS HEIGHTS; (6) POSITIONS AT A GREAT DISTANCE FROM THE ENEMY.

GROUND WHICH CAN BE FREELY TRAVERSED BY BOTH SIDES IS CALLED ACCESSIBLE. WITH REGARD TO GROUND OF THIS NATURE, BE BEFORE THE ENEMY IN OCCUPYING THE RAISED AND SUNNY SPOTS, AND CAREFULLY GUARD YOUR LINE OF SUPPLIES. THEN YOU WILL BE ABLE TO FIGHT WITH ADVANTAGE.

GROUND WHICH CAN BE ABANDONED BUT IS HARD TO RE-OCCUPY IS CALLED ENTANGLING. FROM A POSITION OF THIS SORT, IF THE ENEMY IS UNPREPARED, YOU MAY SALLY FORTH AND DEFEAT HIM. BUT IF THE ENEMY IS PREPARED FOR YOUR COMING, AND YOU FAIL TO DEFEAT HIM, THEN, RETURN BEING IMPOSSIBLE, DISASTER WILL ENSUE.

WHEN THE POSITION IS SUCH THAT NEITHER SIDE WILL GAIN BY MAKING THE FIRST MOVE, IT IS CALLED TEMPORISING GROUND. IN A POSITION OF THIS SORT, EVEN THOUGH THE ENEMY SHOULD OFFER US AN ATTRACTIVE BAIT, IT WILL BE ADVISABLE NOT TO STIR FORTH, BUT RATHER TO RETREAT, THUS ENTICING THE ENEMY IN HIS TURN; THEN, WHEN PART OF HIS ARMY HAS COME OUT, WE MAY DELIVER OUR ATTACK WITH ADVANTAGE.

WITH REGARD TO NARROW PASSES, IF YOU CAN OCCUPY THEM FIRST, LET THEM BE STRONGLY GARRISONED AND AWAIT THE ADVENT OF THE ENEMY. SHOULD THE ARMY FORESTALL YOU IN OCCUPYING A PASS, DO NOT GO AFTER HIM IF THE PASS IS FULLY GARRISONED, BUT ONLY IF IT IS WEAKLY GARRISONED.

WITH REGARD TO PRECIPITOUS HEIGHTS, IF YOU ARE BEFOREHAND WITH YOUR ADVERSARY, YOU SHOULD OCCUPY THE RAISED AND SUNNY SPOTS, AND THERE WAIT FOR HIM TO COME UP. IF THE ENEMY HAS OCCUPIED THEM BEFORE YOU, DO NOT FOLLOW HIM, BUT RETREAT AND TRY TO ENTICE HIM AWAY.

IF YOU ARE SITUATED AT A GREAT DISTANCE FROM THE ENEMY, AND THE STRENGTH OF THE TWO ARMIES IS EQUAL, IT IS NOT EASY TO PROVOKE A BATTLE, AND FIGHTING WILL BE TO YOUR DISADVANTAGE.

THESE SIX ARE THE PRINCIPLES CONNECTED WITH EARTH. THE GENERAL WHO HAS ATTAINED A RESPONSIBLE POST MUST BE CAREFUL TO STUDY THEM.

Upon close inspection of a Battletech Map, you will be able to distinguish and identify such terrains, now that you know what to look for...

Do so, as you see a new Battlefield for the first time. Take a close look at it, before you place any of your Mechs.

- Where are good positions (woods, partial cover) for you and for the opponent.
- Where can you (or the opponent) approach, if desired; where is such an approach hindered by hills, rough, etc.?
- Where are good 'fire-lanes', and where will be chances that LOS can get blocked?
- ...

THE NATURAL FORMATION OF THE COUNTRY IS THE SOLDIER'S BEST ALLY; BUT A POWER OF ESTIMATING THE ADVERSARY, OF CONTROLLING THE FORCES OF VICTORY, AND OF SHREWDLY CALCULATING DIFFICULTIES, DANGERS AND DISTANCES, CONSTITUTES THE TEST OF A GREAT GENERAL.

By now, you should already have thought up your general strategy, i.e. if you want to approach, or keep some distance, if you want to rush or if you want to camp or something in between. You should also have given some thought on what your opponent is likely going to do, if he uses his forces properly (and here I assume that we are up against a good player, so he will know what he is doing). Choose some possible positions/routes you might take. The choice which one of those you actually take will become clearer as Mech after Mech get deployed.

A word about STRATEGY and TACTICS might be in order here, before we come to the deployment proper.

Basically it boils down to is this: In strategy you decide WHAT you want to do (e.g. camp, rush, pick this or that target first, etc.), i.e. your short- and long-term goals. It is a matter of tactics HOW, i.e. by which means, you try to achieve these goals.

Simple Example: 'strategy': I want my ARC to get in a good position and fire away. Tactics: I deploy him 'here', so I can get 'there' in reasonable time, moving such and such.

To get more general, lets see what Sun Tzu has to say on it:

TO SECURE OURSELVES AGAINST DEFEAT LIES IN OUR OWN HANDS, BUT THE OPPORTUNITY OF DEFEATING THE ENEMY IS PROVIDED BY THE ENEMY HIMSELF.

THUS THE GOOD FIGHTER IS ABLE TO SECURE HIMSELF AGAINST DEFEAT, BUT CANNOT MAKE CERTAIN OF DEFEATING THE ENEMY.

SECURITY AGAINST DEFEAT IMPLIES DEFENSIVE TACTICS; ABILITY TO DEFEAT THE ENEMY MEANS TAKING THE OFFENSIVE.

THEREFORE THE CLEVER COMBATANT IMPOSES HIS WILL ON THE ENEMY, BUT DOES NOT ALLOW THE ENEMY'S WILL TO BE IMPOSED ON HIM.

BY HOLDING OUT ADVANTAGES TO HIM, HE CAN CAUSE THE ENEMY TO APPROACH OF HIS OWN ACCORD; OR, BY INFLECTING DAMAGE, HE CAN MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE ENEMY TO DRAW NEAR.

HOLD OUT BAITS TO ENTICE THE ENEMY. FEIGN DISORDER, AND CRUSH HIM.

THUS ONE WHO IS SKILFUL AT KEEPING THE ENEMY ON THE MOVE MAINTAINS DECEITFUL APPEARANCES, ACCORDING TO WHICH THE ENEMY WILL ACT. HE SACRIFICES SOMETHING, THAT THE ENEMY MAY SNATCH AT IT.

IF HE IS SECURE AT ALL POINTS, BE PREPARED FOR HIM. IF HE IS IN SUPERIOR STRENGTH, EVADE HIM.

IF YOUR OPPONENT IS OF CHOLERIC TEMPER, SEEK TO IRRITATE HIM. PRETEND TO BE WEAK, THAT HE MAY GROW ARROGANT.

IF HE IS TAKING HIS EASE, GIVE HIM NO REST. IF HIS FORCES ARE UNITED, SEPARATE THEM.

ATTACK HIM WHERE HE IS UNPREPARED, APPEAR WHERE YOU ARE NOT EXPECTED.

ACCORDING AS CIRCUMSTANCES ARE FAVOURABLE, ONE SHOULD MODIFY ONE'S PLANS.

SUCCESS IN WARFARE IS GAINED BY CAREFULLY ACCOMMODATING OURSELVES TO THE ENEMY'S PURPOSE.

HE WHO CAN MODIFY HIS TACTICS IN RELATION TO HIS OPPONENT AND THEREBY SUCCEED IN WINNING, MAY BE CALLED A HEAVEN-BORN CAPTAIN.

HE WHO KNOWS THESE THINGS, AND IN FIGHTING PUTS HIS KNOWLEDGE INTO PRACTICE, WILL WIN HIS BATTLES. HE WHO KNOWS THEM NOT, NOR PRACTICES THEM, WILL SURELY BE DEFEATED.

Keep in mind that Battletech is a fast-flowing game, where you constantly have to react to new situations (e.g. due to the bloody dice/RNG) and adjust your strategy and tactics accordingly. A plan that was perfectly good and clever two turns ago, might be stupid and foolish under the current circumstances.

However, this does NOT mean that you should move like there was no tomorrow... always ask yourself before you put the die at the Mech* (*you hit 'done' in the movement phase*): where can I get from there in the next turn, and how can my opponents Mechs react to this move in this and the next turn...

(* it is common practice in board-game to put a die next to a Mech, indicating its to-hit-modifier; very handy, especially in larger battles. In our group we also include any terrain-modifiers from woods, etc., as the terrain is covered by the Mechs base...)

But now, back to deployment:

Suppose you have done all this tough thinking business, and you have found some nice spots for your heavy Mechs, where you want them to be in the near future. But do you deploy them now? NO! Let me explain:

- Always deploy your light, fast Mechs first (I usually put them on one or both flanks, depending on the situation). They are fast enough to get where you really want them to be in no time. Keep your opponent guessing about your true intents.
- Your heavies/assaults carry most of the punch and armour of your forces. However, they are slow. So if you deploy them wrong, they will take a long time to undo this mistake. Dictate the flow of the game, don't let your opponent do his. Let him expose his plans first and react accordingly – in other words, seize the initiative.

As deployment progresses, it will become clearer and clearer where your opponent wants to go, which allows you to choose the best spots under these circumstances.

ROUSE HIM, AND LEARN THE PRINCIPLE OF HIS ACTIVITY OR INACTIVITY. FORCE HIM TO REVEAL HIMSELF, SO AS TO FIND OUT HIS VULNERABLE SPOTS.

ALL WARFARE IS BASED ON DECEPTION. HENCE, WHEN ABLE TO ATTACK, WE MUST SEEM UNABLE; WHEN USING OUR FORCES, WE MUST SEEM INACTIVE; WHEN WE ARE NEAR, WE MUST MAKE THE ENEMY BELIEVE WE ARE FAR AWAY; WHEN FAR AWAY, WE MUST MAKE HIM BELIEVE WE ARE NEAR.

5. Formations

AMID THE TURMOIL AND TUMULT OF BATTLE, THERE MAY BE SEEMING DISORDER AND YET NO REAL DISORDER AT ALL; AMID CONFUSION AND CHAOS, YOUR ARRAY MAY BE WITHOUT HEAD OR TAIL, YET IT WILL BE PROOF AGAINST DEFEAT.

SIMULATED DISORDER POSTULATES PERFECT DISCIPLINE, SIMULATED FEAR POSTULATES COURAGE; SIMULATED WEAKNESS POSTULATES STRENGTH.

HIDING ORDER BENEATH THE CLOAK OF DISORDER IS SIMPLY A QUESTION OF SUBDIVISION; CONCEALING COURAGE UNDER A SHOW OF TIMIDITY PRESUPPOSES A FUND OF LATENT ENERGY; MASKING STRENGTH WITH WEAKNESS IS TO BE EFFECTED BY TACTICAL DISPOSITIONS.

There are a lot of ‘formations’, i.e. ways in which to ‘order’ or group your Mechs. Here are some examples:

a) ‘No Plan’: the Mechs stumble over the battlefield to and fro, with no apparent purpose. That’s what we do not want.

b) ‘Phalanx’: The Mechs form a tight group.

Pros: a block of tough Mechs is a massive concentration of armour and fire-power, and hard to attack head-on.

Cons: it is inflexible. After you have moved one Mech, the others either have to follow suit, or your formation breaks apart.

c) ‘Hammer and anvil’: part of the army forms a smallish phalanx (say 2 Mechs), the other ones (the fast ones) circle around the opponents position, and together they try to smash him in a deadly crossfire. Much more flexible than phalanx.

d) ‘Prongs’: like ‘hammer and anvil’, except you have an anchor of two Mechs, with one Mech on each flank. Even more flexible than hammer and anvil, but now your flank ‘forces’, consisting of only one Mech, are rather weak and unsupported.

e) ‘Anarchy’: each Mech moves separately from the others, picking targets of opportunity, and spontaneously they all gang up on isolated Mechs. Only recommendable for guerrilla forces with only fast Mechs (5/8/5 and faster).

Keep in mind that the choice of formation is not for eternity. As Clausewitz said:
‘March separately, strike in unison’.

For example, you can benefit from having a phalanx without its disadvantages, if you keep a loose formation early on – for flexibility – and establish the tight formation when it becomes advantageous...

WHETHER TO CONCENTRATE OR TO DIVIDE YOUR TROOPS, MUST BE DECIDED BY CIRCUMSTANCES.

LET YOUR RAPIDITY BE THAT OF THE WIND, YOUR COMPACTNESS THAT OF THE FOREST. IN RAIDING AND PLUNDERING BE LIKE FIRE, IN IMMOVABILITY LIKE A MOUNTAIN.

6. Initiative

Before movement, initiative is rolled. It determines who has to go first and who has the opportunity to react to the opponents move. You all know that. So why do I bother you with that?

Because often I see how people get the great advantage of having won initiative and throw it away. With initiative, it is far easier to get offensive, while losing initiative means you must in general be more careful and defensive in your moves.

So, if you win initiative, try to get as much out of it as you can. If you lose it, try to move in such a fashion that your opponents benefits from initiative are minimised. How this can be achieved will get clearer when we come to the movement section.

However, I want to stress some points already here:

Initiative is vital, and having one unit (or even more) less than your opponent is a serious disadvantage, as he then can (with his last move(s)) respond to one of your units with two of his. We want to get in such an advantageous position ourselves!

So, if you have the opportunity to take out an opponents Mech (or other initiative unit, such as tank) for good, by all means, do it! (*Infantry is not an initiative unit in MM*)

There is also something I like to think of as ‘global’ and ‘local’ initiative.

Global initiative means you have won the initiative roll, which means you move the last unit(s) on the field.

Local initiative refers to a specific situation in a part of the battlefield, involving not all, but only some Mechs; an example might be the best way to illustrate this:

Lets say we have a situation where two Mechs from each side are closely engaged in combat, while the other Mechs are somewhere else (they do not interest us for the moment). Suppose you have won initiative. You can use that to great benefit in this situation, by moving your last Mech(s) here. However, if you move one (or yet worse: both) of your Mechs involved there early on, while your opponents still can move both of his, you have made a huge mistake.

Although you have won global initiative, you have granted your opponent local initiative (or superiority).

So, when you win global initiative, always move your Mechs in an order that gives you also most, preferably all, of the relevant local initiatives. If you lose global initiative, try to wrest at least some local initiative from your opponent.

LET YOUR PLANS BE DARK AND IMPENETRABLE AS NIGHT, AND WHEN YOU MOVE, FALL LIKE A THUNDERBOLT.

IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, IN THE MIDST OF DIFFICULTIES WE ARE ALWAYS READY TO SEIZE AN ADVANTAGE, WE MAY EXTRICATE OURSELVES FROM MISFORTUNE.

7. The movement phase – Or: Why, where, when and how to move a Mech.

All these questions are not only somewhat entangled, but also situation-dependant to the extreme. However, I will try to deal with them as separately, generally and clearly as possible.

TO ENSURE THAT YOUR WHOLE HOST MAY WITHSTAND THE BRUNT OF THE ENEMY'S ATTACK AND REMAIN UNSHAKEN — THIS IS EFFECTED BY MANOEUVRES DIRECT AND INDIRECT.

IN BATTLE, THERE ARE NOT MORE THAN TWO METHODS OF ATTACK — THE DIRECT AND THE INDIRECT; YET THESE TWO IN COMBINATION GIVE RISE TO AN ENDLESS SERIES OF MANOEUVRES.

IN ALL FIGHTING, THE DIRECT METHOD MAY BE USED FOR JOINING BATTLE, BUT INDIRECT METHODS WILL BE NEEDED IN ORDER TO SECURE VICTORY.

MANOEUVRING WITH AN ARMY IS ADVANTAGEOUS; WITH AN UNDISCIPLINED MULTITUDE, MOST DANGEROUS.

Why should you move a Mech?

YOU MAY ADVANCE AND BE ABSOLUTELY IRRESISTIBLE, IF YOU MAKE FOR THE ENEMY'S WEAK POINTS; YOU MAY RETIRE AND BE SAFE FROM PURSUIT IF YOUR MOVEMENTS ARE MORE RAPID THAN THOSE OF THE ENEMY.

There are two key factors that need to be considered here:

- If you leave the Mech where it is, can it contribute to the team-effort of the lance by threatening (and hopefully damaging) opponents, does it have (or will it most likely get) targets?
- If you leave the Mech where it is, will it not be severely endangered by one (or worse: several) opposing Mechs that have already moved or are still able to move, and: does the Mech have good cover (woods/PC, etc.) and/or better range than the opponent?

If not all answers to the questions above are 'yes', you should seriously consider to move the Mech.

While it is not always possible to satisfy both conditions perfectly at the same time, an ideal move should maximise the threat your Mech poses to opposing Mechs, while minimising the threats to himself.

Which factor is more important depends on the Mech and situation at hand.

For example, it is more important that a brand new Awesome or Imp deals damage to the enemy than avoiding all enemy fire on him. This does of course not mean, that you should not worry at all about which Mechs will shoot him (which weapons, how many weapons, what are the base-to-hit numbers (BTH)?).

For a generally fragile (e.g. our Spider) or badly damaged Mech, it is more important to keep it alive and useful than dealing damage, and so on...

Where should you move the Mech?

APPEAR AT POINTS WHICH THE ENEMY MUST HASTEN TO DEFEND; MARCH SWIFTLY TO PLACES WHERE YOU ARE NOT EXPECTED.

AN ARMY MAY MARCH GREAT DISTANCES WITHOUT DISTRESS, IF IT MARCHES THROUGH COUNTRY WHERE THE ENEMY IS NOT.

HENCE THAT GENERAL IS SKILFUL IN ATTACK WHOSE OPPONENT DOES NOT KNOW WHAT TO DEFEND; AND HE IS SKILFUL IN DEFENCE WHOSE OPPONENT DOES NOT KNOW WHAT TO ATTACK.

IF WE WISH TO FIGHT, THE ENEMY CAN BE FORCED TO AN ENGAGEMENT EVEN THOUGH HE BE SHELTERED BEHIND A HIGH RAMPART AND A DEEP DITCH. ALL WE NEED DO IS ATTACK SOME OTHER PLACE THAT HE WILL BE OBLIGED TO RELIEVE.

IF WE DO NOT WISH TO FIGHT, WE CAN PREVENT THE ENEMY FROM ENGAGING US EVEN THOUGH THE LINES OF OUR ENCAMPMENT BE MERELY TRACED OUT ON THE GROUND. ALL WE NEED DO IS TO THROW SOMETHING ODD AND UNACCOUNTABLE IN HIS WAY.

THE SPOT WHERE WE INTEND TO FIGHT MUST NOT BE MADE KNOWN; FOR THEN THE ENEMY WILL HAVE TO PREPARE AGAINST A POSSIBLE ATTACK AT SEVERAL DIFFERENT POINTS; AND HIS FORCES BEING THUS DISTRIBUTED IN MANY DIRECTIONS, THE NUMBERS WE SHALL HAVE TO FACE AT ANY GIVEN POINT WILL BE PROPORTIONATELY FEW.

Well, basically I have already answered the question above: an ideal move should maximise the threat your Mech poses to opposing Mechs, while minimising the threats to himself.

So, lets deal with this in more detail.

How can you **maximise the threat your Mech poses to the enemy**? Well, that's the easy part...

- Choose a target.
- Get (or stay) in 'ideal' (medium or even better: short) range for our primary weapon systems to the designated target. For this to be effective, it is of course better, if the target has already moved or if it cannot escape our ideal range due to its limited movement capabilities or terrain.
- Hit him where it hurts most: backstabbers try to get into the back, other Mechs can also try to hit him on a side that is already badly damaged.
- Move such that you can also harm the opponent with physical attacks (kicks, punches, etc.)

But how can you **minimise threats to your Mech** in return? Now, that is more tricky, as many more factors are involved.

- **Use cover.** I like to distinguish between dynamic and static cover. Dynamic cover is the BTH-modifier your opponent gets depending on how many hexes you have moved (+1 more if you jumped). Static cover is provided by woods and/or smoke and partial cover

your Mech ends up in. Of course, these two can be combined to give maximum protection.

- **A word on partial cover** here: sure, you are +3 more difficult to hit, but there is a 1 in 6 chance that your head is hit, normally it is only 1 in 36. So I recommend that you never stay (or move) in PC, if you then get hit on 9+ or better (or by many/'nasty' weapons on 10+).

- Also **a word on fire**: you can boost the 'static defence'-bonus from a wood by igniting it. However, you generate 5 more heat (and can thus possibly fire less weapons) while in a burning wood. A Catapult e.g. is at home in burning woods. It can just stay there, fire both LRM launchers and never get hot. This is however not true e.g. for our Crusader...

- By the way: of course **your opponent will also use woods for cover**. Do not ignite them (thereby improving his defence), clear them for lowering his defence!

- **Minimise the threat posed by your designated target**, by moving to a distance that is better suited for your weapons than for his. Move out of his firing arc(s) to minimise the number of weapons he can bring to bear on you; this is usually particularly the case if you move into his rear (beware of twist able/flip able arm-mounted AC-20s and such, however!). Of course, you only can do this if your target has already moved...

- **Minimise the threat from other Mechs than your target** by blocking or at least hindering LOS by intervening terrain (woods, smoke, hills). Make sure you are at a distance that is sub-optimal for the weapons of the Mechs in question. And – as above – stay out of his firing arcs. Again, this can most easily be achieved, if the opposing Mechs in question have already moved.

- Move such that you can kick the opponents Mech, but not vice versa.

- ...

NOTE: how can I check LOS? Use eyesight; if it is too difficult to tell, use a length of string.

NOTE: how can I check LOS in MM? Easy: hold down CTRL, click on one hex. Hold down CTRL again, and click on a second hex. A dialogue pops up, telling you the distance between the two hexes involved as well as any intervening terrain. This not only works on the big map, it also works on the Mini-Map.

When do you move which Mech, then?

ENERGY MAY BE LIKENED TO THE BENDING OF A CROSSBOW; DECISION, TO THE RELEASING OF A TRIGGER. THE QUALITY OF DECISION IS LIKE THE WELL-TIMED SWOOP OF A FALCON WHICH ENABLES IT TO STRIKE AND DESTROY ITS VICTIM.

If you carefully read the two paragraphs above, you will already have some ideas about that.

However, what I presented above is an ideal move, which first of all requires that you have (at least local) initiative. Also, you will almost never be able to make an ideal move with every single Mech you have. So, you will have to be content with trying to make the best move under the current conditions, staying as close to the ideal case as possible.

All I want to give here therefore is a rough guideline (not a strict rule!) in which order you should move your Mechs;

1. Immobile Mechs. They can do nothing else than stay where they are.
2. Slow, prone Mechs (possibly with missing leg); they won't get far.

3. Unimportant Mechs (initiative-sinks), that cannot pose serious threats to the opponent, e.g. Mechs like WSP, or Mechs that will not contribute (or be threatened) at all, no matter where they go, either because of their current position or their condition.
4. Mechs in a situation where they are the last according to local initiative, i.e. all other relevant, nearby Mechs, possible targets/threats have already moved.
5. Mechs that are and will always only be threatened by Mechs that already moved.
6. Mechs that already have (or will almost certainly) get passable targets while not getting seriously threatened.
7. If you lost initiative, you can move your backstabbers now (or even earlier), if it is clear that there won't be any backs to stab this turn.
8. Mechs that still have a solid chance to pose a serious threat.
9. Mechs that are severely threatened by yet unmoved, dangerous Mechs. Move them as late as possible to reduce the number of Mechs ganging up on it.

How should you move a Mech?

There are basically three modes of movement: walking, running, jumping. This is not the whole truth however, as there is a 4th mode of movement: stay where you are and don't move at all. Lets have a look at all of these:

Standing still:

- When you are in a good position, e.g. wood, and have targets, and only limited threats in return, why not stay there? This way you possibly get cover from the terrain you are in, without getting BTH-penalties due to movement.

Walking:

- You want to get somewhere, but still want to have reasonable BTH-modifiers? Try to walk. Makes your weapon fire worse by adding only +1 to BTH.
- Recommended especially when running gives you no real advantages (i.e. worse BTH-modifiers for opponent, medium range instead of long range for you, better position, etc.)
- *Walking speed is indicated by light-blue-bordered hexes in MM.*

Running:

- Basically like walking, except you get farther, and shoot worse, adding +2 to BTH.
- Only do this when you get an advantage over walking (see above).
- *Running speed is indicated by yellow-bordered hexes in MM.*

Jumping:

- Lets you ignore most terrain features (hills, woods, etc.), so it is good for getting somewhere fast. Besides generating lots of heat (1 per hex jumped, 3 minimum), it adds +3 to BTH, not funny.
- However, jumping does give you an additional +1 'defence bonus' to your moved-distance modifier and makes it harder to hit you.
- Only jump when it does not matter (because you won't shoot much anyway), you cannot get to that – preferably good - position (and facing) by walking or running, or you desperately need that additional +1 defence bonus.

Movement ‘tricks’

If you walk/run/jump, always try to get a movement BTH-modifier as high as possible, i.e. move as many hexes as possible, making it harder for your opponent to hit you.

If you just go from hex A to hex B, by clicking on hex B, MM takes you there by **the shortest** route. This **is not always the best solution**, as you can imagine.

An example: Suppose you have a Mech with 5/8/0 move and want to get to hex B. Using the shortest route, you use up - say - 6 MP to get there, so you have to run, but you move only 4 hexes, giving you a +1 modifier. But we still have 2 MP left, right? So you could (and should) try to find a path that is longer, which takes you to the same position. After having moved 5 hexes for example, you already get a +2 instead of the +1.

This can be done in MM using ‘way-points’. Instead of clicking on the target hex, we choose a different route going via other hexes. You select a hex as way-point by holding down SHIFT while clicking on the hex in question.

NOTE: If you are unsatisfied with your move in MM, but have not yet pressed 'done', you can undo it by hitting ESC. This also works, if you messed up your fire-declaration. The only exception to this is when you give an 'alpha-strike', i.e. fire all weapons. In this case the last 'fire' command also triggers 'done'.

Another example: say your Locust is in a hex where he would like to stay (i.e. in the rear of a already moved Mech), but he needs some ‘dynamic cover’, making him a more difficult target. Solution: run in any given direction, make a full turn and return to where you came from. This should give you something like a +3 modifier...

The ‘moonwalker’ or ‘ballet’ step:

Suppose you want your Mech to move exactly 2 hexes forward to get a target in optimum range, while staying out of its optimum range. If you just walk there directly, you get a +0 modifier for having moved only 0-2 hexes. ‘Moonwalker’ helps you to get there also walking, but with a +1 (you have to be faster than 3/5/0 to do this):

- Back up 1 hex, switch to walk (*with the appropriate buttons*), go forward three hexes; et voila: +1 modifier for having moved 3 hexes!
- You can also do it in reverse: forward 1 hex, switch to ‘back up’, back up 3 hexes.

8. The weapon attack phase/heat issues

First of all, have you picked the right targets?

- Always choose extremely fragile Mechs first, and especially Mechs that can deal out a lot of damage, but can't take it themselves, like our Warhammer. Take those down quickly, so you get rid of threats and get an initiative advantage.

MILITARY TACTICS ARE LIKE UNTO WATER; FOR WATER IN ITS NATURAL COURSE RUNS AWAY FROM HIGH PLACES AND HASTENS DOWNWARDS. SO IN WAR, THE WAY IS TO AVOID WHAT IS STRONG AND TO STRIKE AT WHAT IS WEAK.

If you can get something annoying like a Spider on – say – an 8+ or better, kill it!
(almost) No matter what else you can shoot at...

- Shoot at badly damaged Mechs! Stay on target, even if it is/becomes slightly more difficult to hit.
- Keep Mechs like the Awesome that just won't die till later, when you have finished with his friends.
- When in doubt, pick the target which you can hit most easily (lowest BTH).

CONCENTRATE your fire! Shoot one opposing Mech with as many machines as you can (provided they do not have far better targets). Remember your opponent has to make a +1 piloting skill roll (PSR) after getting 20+ damage.

IF OUR TROOPS ARE NO MORE IN NUMBER THAN THE ENEMY, THAT IS AMPLY SUFFICIENT; IT ONLY MEANS THAT NO DIRECT ATTACK CAN BE MADE. WHAT WE CAN DO IS SIMPLY TO CONCENTRATE ALL OUR AVAILABLE STRENGTH, KEEP A CLOSE WATCH ON THE ENEMY, AND OBTAIN REINFORCEMENTS.

Needless to say, you can only do this if you have done your homework during the movement phase. If you did that right, you will also have lower – or at least not higher - BTH than your opponent.

So, what else?

- Some Mechs are low on ammunition (e.g. Enforcer), so don't waste those few precious shots on BTH 11+ or so...
- If you have the choice of hitting a Mech in a wood on something like 11+, shoot at the wood instead (clear). That is easier by far, as you get -4 modifier from the wood being an immobile target. This weakens the opposing Mechs' position, while your shot on 11+ would have missed – at least more likely than not...
- Be careful which weapons you shoot, and beware of overheat! This is very important! Try to stay below 5 heat (5 means you get -1MP, making e.g. a 4/6/0 Mech 3/5/0), whenever possible. At 8 you receive +1 BTH, and above that things only get worse.

Try to avoid significant (5+) overheating, except under the following conditions:

- a) your Mech is almost certainly going to die this turn.
- b) your Mech is a fast (jumper?) Backstabber, and you want to inflict maximum damage this turn, and you are already planning to retreat and cool off next turn.
- c) your fire will most likely cripple or kill the other Mech.

And most important:

- d) you also have a realistic BTH- number, so you don't get heat for not causing any damage because of shooting on 11+ or so...

- Always shoot big guns like PPCs or big ACs first, then the smaller ones (LL, ML, etc.), and finally LRMs, then SRMs. The big guns take away huge chunks of armour, while the small guns/missiles can give you more chances to do critical damage, destroying components of the Mech. This always applies, no matter if the weapons are located on one Mech or on different Mechs shooting the same target.

I think what I said above about 'heat' should suffice for now, so I'll skip the heat phase here. Just a few more remarks:

- Be aware of the heat effects!
- Calculate your heat before fire declaration (*MM does this for you, as soon as you produce overheating it is indicated by a * behind the heat produced this turn*).
- Always consider and keep in mind what you will probably want to do next turn (movement and firing). Ask yourself how those plans can be affected by heat.
- Weigh your to-hit/kill chances against unwanted heat-consequences
- ...

9. Physical attacks

Physical attacks are an important part of Battletech. I'll go through them one by one now. Note that damaged (or missing) actuators usually affect BTH.

Charge: Can do a lot of damage, but has high BTH. Also, you cannot shoot and charge in the same turn. For most Mechs and situations, I find it better to just shoot and do some other physical attack. (exceptions to this are Mechs like a 4/1-pilot Ostscout). You can charge opposing Mechs from the field, if they are directly adjacent to the map-edge, and you come from the 'right' direction.

Death from Above (DFA): Almost the same as Charge, except only performable by jumpers, less damage – but the damage goes on the punch table (Head!). I regard it usually as a desperate last resort. (exceptions to this are again Mechs like a 4/1-pilot Ostscout).

Kick: Low BTH. If successful, forces a Piloting Skill Roll (PSR) from target (if unsuccessful, forces a PSR from you, so don't kick on – say – 11+). Damages 'only' the legs. However, severely damaging (e.g. actuator hit(s)) or even destroying a Mech's legs is practically his death sentence... So try to kick your opponent, and avoid getting kicked. Also, if you are 1 level higher than the opponent, you do not kick his legs, but hit him on the punch table instead (again: Head!)

Punch: While having a slightly higher BTH than the kick, you hit him on the punch table (guess where the name comes from...). No PSRs involved; this can be an advantage or disadvantage, depending on situation (i.e. BTH, condition of Mechs involved). Especially good if your opponent already suffered damage to his Head!!!

Some Mechs come equipped with hatchets. If your Mech has two hands, he can uproot a tree while in a wood (instead of firing). Club/hatchet attacks do twice the damage of a punch, but hit full-body locations.

Push: Forces the opposing Mech into the hex behind him, especially good for pushing him off the map. Note that – different from punches – missing hand and arm actuators do not modify the push!! You only need functioning shoulders. This makes e.g. the Catapult a horrible puncher, but an excellent pusher. Often enough, opponents are not aware of this.

Just pick the type of physical attack that can harm your opponent most, i.e. usually try to kick him, but also consider punching him, especially if he has low armour on his Head. Think carefully before you charge/DFA .

10. How to make it all work

THE ART OF WAR, THEN, IS GOVERNED BY FIVE CONSTANT FACTORS, TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN ONE'S DELIBERATIONS, WHEN SEEKING TO DETERMINE THE CONDITIONS OBTAINING IN THE FIELD. THESE ARE: (1) THE MORAL LAW; (2) HEAVEN; (3) EARTH; (4) THE COMMANDER; (5) METHOD AND DISCIPLINE.

THE MORAL LAW CAUSES THE PEOPLE TO BE IN COMPLETE ACCORD WITH THEIR RULER, SO THAT THEY WILL FOLLOW HIM REGARDLESS OF THEIR LIVES, UNDISMAYED BY ANY DANGER.

HEAVEN SIGNIFIES NIGHT AND DAY, COLD AND HEAT, TIMES AND SEASONS.

EARTH COMPRISES DISTANCES, GREAT AND SMALL; DANGER AND SECURITY; OPEN GROUND AND NARROW PASSES; THE CHANCES OF LIFE AND DEATH.

THE COMMANDER STANDS FOR THE VIRTUES OF WISDOM, SINCERELY, BENEVOLENCE, COURAGE AND STRICTNESS.

BY METHOD AND DISCIPLINE ARE TO BE UNDERSTOOD THE MARSHALLING OF THE ARMY IN ITS PROPER SUBDIVISIONS, THE GRADUATIONS OF RANK AMONG THE OFFICERS, THE MAINTENANCE OF ROADS BY WHICH SUPPLIES MAY REACH THE ARMY, AND THE CONTROL OF MILITARY EXPENDITURE.

THESE FIVE HEADS SHOULD BE FAMILIAR TO EVERY GENERAL: HE WHO KNOWS THEM WILL BE VICTORIOUS; HE WHO KNOWS THEM NOT WILL FAIL. SO, THE STUDENT OF WAR WHO IS UNVERSESED IN THE ART OF WAR OF VARYING HIS PLANS, EVEN THOUGH HE BE ACQUAINTED WITH THE FIVE ADVANTAGES, WILL FAIL TO MAKE THE BEST USE OF HIS MEN.

IN RESPECT OF MILITARY METHOD, WE HAVE, FIRSTLY, MEASUREMENT; SECONDLY, ESTIMATION OF QUANTITY; THIRDLY, CALCULATION; FOURTHLY, BALANCING OF CHANCES; FIFTHLY, VICTORY.

MEASUREMENT OWES ITS EXISTENCE TO EARTH; ESTIMATION OF QUANTITY TO MEASUREMENT; CALCULATION TO ESTIMATION OF QUANTITY; BALANCING OF CHANCES TO CALCULATION; AND VICTORY TO BALANCING OF CHANCES.

NOW THE GENERAL WHO WINS A BATTLE MAKES MANY CALCULATIONS IN HIS TEMPLE ERE THE BATTLE IS FOUGHT. THE GENERAL WHO LOSES A BATTLE MAKES BUT FEW CALCULATIONS BEFOREHAND. THUS DO MANY CALCULATIONS LEAD TO VICTORY, AND FEW CALCULATIONS TO DEFEAT: HOW MUCH MORE NO CALCULATION AT ALL! IT IS BY ATTENTION TO THIS POINT THAT I CAN FORESEE WHO IS LIKELY TO WIN OR LOSE.

Read this article before a fight. During the fight, try to stick to the following list (it is actually more or less a summary of the above said):

In general:

- 1.Be patient (but don't bore your opponent to death!).
- 2.Wait for the opportunity and seize it when it arises. Be decisive then.
- 3.Be flexible. Adjust your strategy and tactics according to the flow of the game.
- 4.Be calm. DON'T PANIC, even if things go amiss (e.g. due to bloody dice/RNG rolls).
- 5.Don't forget to seriously kick ass:).

Start of Battle

- 1.Patience.
- 2.Compare the forces: who is better at long-range? Who is better at short-range? Who is more manoeuvrable? Etc. Consider possible general strategies (for both sides).
- 3.Patience.
- 4.Take an overview of the terrain: which regions and positions benefit you or your opponent (also pay attention to partial cover positions and LOS).
Think. Narrow down the number of strategies.
- 5.Patience.
- 6.Decide for a preliminary strategy, choose sides and deploy accordingly, lightest and fastest Mechs first, slowest and most powerful last.

During movement phase

An ideal move should maximise the threat your Mech poses to opposing Mechs, while minimising the threats to himself.

Patience. Think, then move.

PONDER AND DELIBERATE BEFORE YOU MAKE A MOVE.

- 1.Check ranges/LOS to all possible targets and/or threats, both from your current position and the desired (new, but can also well be the current) position(s).

2. Check your own BTH-numbers, and the BTH of enemy Mechs targeting you both from your current position and the desired (new, can also well be the current) position(s).
3. Check where all relevant opposing Mechs can move in order to pose a threat to you, and check their BTH numbers as well.
4. It is not a disaster, if a Mech can only shoot bad (or not at all). It is a disaster, if it makes itself a prime target just because it wants to get a few shots off. It is also a disaster, if it moves such that other Mechs of you unnecessarily become prime targets.
5. Patience.
6. Timing is of utmost importance! Is it wise to move 'this' Mech 'there' now? Or should you move another Mech first, in order to maximise benefits from your own initiative or minimise the opponents benefits from his initiative?
7. Patience.

Weapons fire

1. Check LOS.
2. Calculate BTH
3. Check current heat of Mech, be careful if you consider to pick up any overheats. Preferably stay below 5 heat, except under extraordinary circumstances.
4. CONCENTRATE fire, preferably on the weakest/most badly damaged Mech(s) of the opponent. Shoot big guns first, then smaller guns, then missiles.
5. Record new Heat status and ammunition consumption.

HE WHO KNOWS THESE THINGS, AND IN FIGHTING PUTS HIS KNOWLEDGE INTO PRACTICE, WILL WIN HIS BATTLES. HE WHO KNOWS THEM NOT, NOR PRACTICES THEM, WILL SURELY BE DEFEATED.

After the game

... is before the next game, right?

So, if you have lost, it is time now to ask yourself, and answer honestly:

- Did I lose because my opponent 'lucked me away'? If so, that's life. A tip: buying new dice usually does NOT work. Believe me, I tried it...

- Did I lose because my forces were inferior to his (in general or due to terrain)? If so, check the section on lance/army composition again...

- Did I lose because my opponent was plainly better than me? In that case: improve your skills. Figure out which moves of you were really bad and which moves of your opponent were really good. Read especially the initiative/movement/weapons attack sections again and try to do better next time. Like with so many other things in life, nothing can substitute for experience and practice in playing Battletech.

But – and this is often forgotten – if you did win, also ask yourself basically the same questions, only exchanging the roles of 'I' and 'my opponent'.

These questions above are the most important ones in this article. Lie to others, if you really have to. But if you lie to yourself here, I and my scribbling here will be of no use for you at all. You might as well stop reading now, erase the file and/or burn the printout...

Be honest to yourself and do a thorough self-evaluation of your Battletech skills. If you are not satisfied with what you find, improve it. But for Christ's sake, don't take the easy way out and blame it all on the dice! Everybody complains about bad dice rolls. Take me, for example: it is a rare day when I hit with a complete alpha-strike on a BTH of '6' or even '5' or '4' – just ask the fellas I usually play with. So do I complain about my dice? You bet! But I am also well aware of any strategic and tactical mistakes I made...

For some reason (Murphy's Law?) new players often have incredible luck with the dice in Battletech. But sooner or later, statistics creeps in and rears its ugly head, giving you average or even below-average dice rolls. This is when it is time for you to decide and to show your true quality:

- Either: You become a self-obsessed moron, absolutely convinced of your 'abilities' and blaming each and every failure on your opponent's 'luck'. Incompetence meets ignorance and arrogance. What a nice combo...

- Or: Sit down and learn how to swing the probabilities of this game in your favour, and earn the respect of good players – and in due time become one yourself.

Your choice.

But, as always, there is yet a third path: you may be aware of – and accept – the fact that you are a mediocre – or even bad – player, but you are happy with that, and enjoy playing Battletech nonetheless. That's perfectly fine with my; in fact, I do appreciate your stoic attitude, then ☺.

However, should you take (or stick to) the first path, please keep your delusions of grandeur to yourself... Don't tell everybody your 'great feats' 20 times over. Once is funny, twice is okay, but after that it just gets first boring and then quickly annoying.

But talking of respect, here is another message that I almost forgot:

Never underestimate an opponent.

This applies especially to opponents you have not played against before.

In MegaMek, when I was a small Solie without XP, people kept attacking me, taking me for easy prey. Much to their dismay, I had to disappoint them...

So, what I do think of myself as a Battletech player?

- Do I think I am any good? You can count on that! Feel free to challenge me at the table or on MegaMek and find out for yourself. However, different to my trusted 'Krusty Burger', I am only just 'good', not 'good enough'. You never stop to learn.

Talking of learning, you can learn something from every human being. In the worst case you learn how something should not be done. Again, this also applies in general, also for your life outside of Battletech (if you don't have any, seriously consider getting one ☺)

- So, do I think I am the 'best Battletech player', then? Well, first of all, I do not know if there is such an individual, and if so, it is quite probable that this is somebody else than me. But apart from that: there are quite a few opponents who are in no way easy prey for me and who give me a hard run for my money – and vice versa...

Actually, we come here – by accident as it is – to my real reasons for writing this stuff up:

In the beginning, it was only intended as an internal guide for new players of our Battletech Chapter 'The Griffins'. But what would have been the benefits? We would trash our opponents more badly than we did before; where is the fun in that? So I decided to make it publicly available, so that all Battletech players might benefit from it and possibly become better players (and more challenging opponents). Besides, I like writing stuff up and explaining all sorts of crap to others ☺.

11. Vehicles and infantry

I am not much of a tank/infantry player myself and prefer to stumble around in Mechs. However, I might as well give some comments on those here, for the sake of completeness.

First, lets have a look at those tanks:

Tanks in general are usually heavily armoured and have lots of fire-power, especially if you look at their ridiculously low BV. Tanks can roughly carry twice the armour and fire-power of a Mech of the same BV. Tanks never produce overheat. So you think: GREAT!

What's the disadvantage then? Well, actually, there are several:

- Tanks can easily be slowed down/immobilized/otherwise impaired. A single hit to the right location can already immobilize it.
- Tanks can 'easily' be destroyed by TACs (through-armour-criticals, rolls of '2' and '12' on the hit location table). A TAC on a tank has a 50% chance to destroy him, no matter how many hundred armour plates he has left.
- Tanks suffer severe movement limitations (e.g. for changing elevation levels) or even restrictions (see below). Tanks can't jump (yeah, I know, please don't bother to mention the 'Kanga'...).

This all makes tanks too inflexible and unreliable for my taste...

Having said all this, do NOT underestimate tanks. Deal with them, or they deal with you.

An example? Two LRM-carriers have as many LRM 20s as three Archers, and they can fire them all without overheating. However, they are tanks, and unusually badly armoured ones at that. So either send something to take them out fast or let yourself be shot to pieces by them.

Your choice.

Tank-types:

There are three general types of Tanks (I won't go as far as covering other, more exotic, vehicles like VTOL and stuff like that here):

- Tracked: the 'conventional' Tank, as we know him. Most tanks fall under this category. Usually quite slow. Can not enter water or Heavy Woods.
- Wheeled. Usually a bit faster than tracked. Can not enter water, Rough, Rubble, Light Woods or Heavy Woods.
- Hovercraft: light (max. 50 tons), usually exceptionally fast, actually the fastest ground-units in the game. This makes them difficult to hit and therefore very annoying, as they can often get behind anybody's back. Can not enter Light Woods or Heavy Woods.

Enough said. Maybe I can get our Chapter's 'tank-driver' to write something up on how to use them; I am mainly concerned – as you might have noticed – with putting them to an early demise.

NOTE: SRM-Mechs such as the Javelin are particularly good at taking out Tanks.

On the other hand, if you want to use tanks, just prevent the opponent from doing this by clever movement and good support for your tanks.

So what about Infantry then?

I'll just list some of their attributes/abilities:

- Infantry is dirt cheap. For the BV of one solid Mech, you can field enough Infantry to fill half a Map, if you place one in each hex.
- Infantry is usually very slow (exception: jump infantry can jump 2-3 hexes, depending on armament).
- Infantry do not get a BTH-penalty for moving. Very annoying in conjunction with jump infantry. They jump, and hit your standing Mech on a 4 or so, and still get a good 'dynamic cover' BTH-modifier for shots directed against them...
- Infantry has very limited range for their weapons, the maximum being something like 6 (?) for SRM infantry. However, they can shoot at you while they are in the same hex like your Mech, while you cannot return fire; all you can do is kick, or 'stomp', them...
- Note: infantry can do seriously annoying damage at short ranges
- Deal with infantry separately and early on. When they are in the midst of a tough in-fight, you will often find that you can not 'waste' or spare shots on them, because you have to take care of more pressing threats.
- Infantry takes double damage in open terrain, so try to catch them there.
- ...

Blockade tactics

Tanks and infantry can act as roadblocks: You can move into a hex containing them, but not through it. Be careful that non-jumping Mechs of you are not trapped by such tactics!

On the other hand, you can efficiently throw that ball back at them: with their movement limitations/restrictions tanks are more easily trapped as Mechs (and they're often dead meat then).

12. Bigger games

I have concentrated here on lance composition and lance strategies/tactics, for several reasons:

- 'Team' tactics really become important at the lance level
- The lance is, at least for me, where you can really learn – and later show – tactical brilliance. In bigger games, lousy tactics can more easily be compensated for by sheer fire-power and superior forces (e.g. using only Imp, Warhammer-D (we christened it 'The Pussy Waggon' in our Chapter) and crap like that). On the other hand, other factors become more important in games at a bigger scale (this is why I included this chapter here, after all ☺).
- If you know how to build, and more importantly play, a lance well, you will have only minor difficulties in switching to smaller or bigger forces.
- *In MegaMek, fights are usually carried out on the lance level in 98% of the games.*

Before I now turn to 'bigger games', I should clarify what I mean by that. Here I will not only be talking about games with a greater number of units/Mechs, but still with only one player on each side, but I will focus on multi player games at company level and above.

Like I said above, it should be rather straightforward for the first to extend what I said here to this kind of games, with some additions.

The bigger the game gets, some things do change – subtly at first, then drastically:

- The Mech designs have to be re-evaluated. Some Mechs are horrible in one-on-one, but come more and more into their element the bigger the battle gets. Good examples are Rifleman and Jägermech. On the other hand, other Mechs become less dominant in bigger battles. A lone Grasshopper for example is tremendously powerful up to lance level, but he won't be able to take on a whole 'phalanx' of 6+ Heavy Mechs on his own. He is then just one of the many attackers required to get the job done.
- The bigger a game gets, strategy becomes more and more important than tactics. It will matter more in which region of the battlefield Mechs (or even lances) are located, not so much which specific hexes they occupy. Having said this, good tactics will of course maximise the success of your strategy, so do not throw over board what you know about them...
- Most importantly, the effects of massive fire-concentration get more and more devastating the bigger the game gets. Basically the two points above are just some of the consequences of

this fact. Other consequences are more subtle, as they involve the psychology of the participating players, and I will deal with those below.

From now on, I will assume that we are talking about multi player games (especially **Chapterfights**), and I will address the player groups involved separately, namely 'command' and 'crew' (in really excellent gaming groups where all players know what they are doing, this distinction becomes superfluous, as these 'groups' merge together):

The whole bunch:

As soon as there is more than one Mech per side, Battletech is a team game. If you play alone, this team will only consist of 'machines'. If there are more players involved, all sorts of human factors come into play.

However, always keep in mind that you play for the team, not for yourself in the first place...

Command:

THE PRINCIPLE ON WHICH TO MANAGE AN ARMY IS TO SET UP ONE STANDARD OF COURAGE WHICH ALL MUST REACH.
HOW TO MAKE THE BEST OF BOTH STRONG AND WEAK – THAT IS A QUESTION INVOLVING THE PROPER USE OF GROUND.

THUS THE SKILFUL GENERAL CONDUCTS HIS ARMY JUST AS THOUGH HE WERE LEADING A SINGLE MAN, WILLY-NILLY, BY THE HAND. THE HOST THUS FORMING A SINGLE UNITED BODY, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE EITHER FOR THE BRAVE TO ADVANCE ALONE, OR FOR THE COWARDLY TO RETREAT ALONE. THIS IS THE ART OF HANDLING LARGE MASSES OF MEN.

- **Army composition:** You are no longer playing alone. So now your Mechs not only have to make up a good team, they must also be suited for the players who use them. Do you know your team-mates? If not, find out their strengths, weaknesses, play-style and favourite Mechs. Give them machines that suit them and that they are familiar with.

-**Mech assignments:** Every player should have at least two Mechs. This way, he won't make stupid (for the team as a whole) moves, just to keep his single Mech alive and stay in the game.

It is a good idea if at least one of those Mechs has some sort of long-range potential, so that the player is kept busy – and happy – rolling dice, and possibly dealing damage, now and again, and does not lose patience, biding his time...

- **Strategy:** You as command are responsible for developing the general strategy and adjusting it to the changing situations. This includes the selection of target Mechs.

Be aware of the effects of fire-concentration on your plans. If you are going to rush a phalanx of 8 long-range-platforms, you will lose a few Mechs. What did you expect? A welcome committee? So either do it, or don't do it. If you turn tail after the first hundreds of missiles hit your Mechs and the ground around them, you should not have bothered to rush at all. So, turn tail and you're boned. Pull through the attack and you might yet prevail.

- Communication:

SUN TZU SAID: THE CONTROL OF A LARGE FORCE IS THE SAME PRINCIPLE AS THE CONTROL OF A FEW MEN: IT IS MERELY A QUESTION OF DIVIDING UP THEIR NUMBERS. FIGHTING WITH A LARGE ARMY UNDER YOUR COMMAND IS NOWISE DIFFERENT FROM FIGHTING WITH A SMALL ONE: IT IS MERELY A QUESTION OF INSTITUTING SIGNS AND SIGNALS.

- If you know the strategy – good! But do your team-mates know it as well? Communication is necessary for good team-play. Just give your 'crew' general directions now and then – as dictated by the necessities of the situation – like 'Secure the right flank with your Catapult and Vindicator' or: 'Try to get that Phoenix Hawk of yours in a position from where it can get into the rear of that Hunchback in the next couple of turns', etc.

A tip: do not tell a semi-experienced player e.g. to jump his Mech in hex A, facing hex B. It tends to piss him off, as he feels insulted in his quality as a player (Believe me, I found out the hard way...). However, if you have a new player in the team, by all means do that from time to time, but not without explaining why this is a good move right now; otherwise he won't learn anything, and will become and remain dependant on your advice...

In Megamek, use the private channel to coordinate your moves.

- **Movement order:** If no one volunteers, you as command have to decide whose turn to move it is, according to your tactical expertise.

- **Rules questions:** Often enough, situations arise which call for a correct interpretation of the rules. Keep your crew out of the debate and settle it with the opposing command. This minimizes the resulting unrest. In this context, it also is a good idea to agree on certain questions/interpretations that usually come up before the game begins.

- Dangers and how to avoid them:

THERE ARE FIVE DANGEROUS FAULTS WHICH MAY AFFECT A GENERAL: (1) RECKLESSNESS, WHICH LEADS TO DESTRUCTION; (2) COWARDICE, WHICH LEADS TO CAPTURE; (3) A HASTY TEMPER, WHICH CAN BE PROVOKED BY INSULTS; (4) A DELICACY OF HONOUR WHICH IS SENSITIVE TO SHAME; (5) OVER-SOLICITUDE FOR HIS MEN, WHICH EXPOSES HIM TO WORRY AND TROUBLE.

THESE ARE THE FIVE BESETTING SINS OF A GENERAL, RUINOUS TO THE CONDUCT OF WAR. WHEN AN ARMY IS OVERTHROWN AND ITS LEADER SLAIN, THE CAUSE WILL SURELY BE FOUND AMONG THESE FIVE DANGEROUS FAULTS. LET THEM BE A SUBJECT OF MEDITATION.

NOW AN ARMY IS EXPOSED TO SIX SEVERAL CALAMITIES, NOT ARISING FROM NATURAL CAUSES, BUT FROM FAULTS FOR WHICH THE GENERAL IS RESPONSIBLE. THESE ARE: (1) FLIGHT; (2) INSUBORDINATION; (3) COLLAPSE; (4) RUIN; (5) DISORGANIZATION; (6) ROUT.

OTHER CONDITIONS BEING EQUAL, IF ONE FORCE IS HURLED AGAINST ANOTHER TEN TIMES ITS SIZE, THE RESULT WILL BE THE FLIGHT OF THE FORMER.

WHEN THE COMMON SOLDIERS ARE TOO STRONG AND THEIR OFFICERS TOO WEAK, THE RESULT IS INSUBORDINATION.

WHEN THE OFFICERS ARE TOO STRONG AND THE COMMON SOLDIERS TOO WEAK, THE RESULT IS COLLAPSE.

WHEN THE HIGHER OFFICERS ARE ANGRY AND INSUBORDINATE, AND ON MEETING THE ENEMY GIVE BATTLE ON THEIR OWN ACCOUNT FROM A FEELING OF RESENTMENT, BEFORE THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF CAN TELL WHETHER OR NO HE IS IN A POSITION TO FIGHT, THE RESULT IS RUIN.

WHEN THE GENERAL IS WEAK AND WITHOUT AUTHORITY; WHEN HIS ORDERS ARE NOT CLEAR AND DISTINCT; WHEN THERE ARE NO FIXED DUTIES ASSIGNED TO OFFICERS AND MEN, AND THE RANKS ARE FORMED IN A SLOVENLY HAPHAZARD MANNER, THE RESULT IS UTTER DISORGANIZATION.

WHEN A GENERAL, UNABLE TO ESTIMATE THE ENEMY'S STRENGTH, ALLOWS AN INFERIOR FORCE TO ENGAGE A LARGER ONE, OR HURLS A WEAK DETACHMENT AGAINST A POWERFUL ONE, AND NEGLECTS TO PLACE PICKED SOLDIERS IN THE FRONT RANK, THE RESULT MUST BE ROUT.

THESE ARE SIX WAYS OF COURTING DEFEAT, WHICH MUST BE CAREFULLY NOTED BY THE GENERAL WHO HAS ATTAINED A RESPONSIBLE POST.

IF THERE IS DISTURBANCE IN THE CAMP, THE GENERAL'S AUTHORITY IS WEAK. IF THE BANNERS AND FLAGS ARE SHIFTED ABOUT, SEDITION IS AFOOT. IF THE OFFICERS ARE ANGRY, IT MEANS THAT THE MEN ARE WEARY.

THE SIGHT OF MEN WHISPERING TOGETHER IN SMALL KNOTS OR SPEAKING IN SUBDUED TONES POINTS TO DISAFFECTION AMONGST THE RANK AND FILE.

IF SOLDIERS ARE PUNISHED BEFORE THEY HAVE GROWN ATTACHED TO YOU, THEY WILL NOT PROVE SUBMISSIVE; AND, UNLESS SUBMISSIVE, THEN WILL BE PRACTICALLY USELESS. IF, WHEN THE SOLDIERS HAVE BECOME ATTACHED TO YOU, PUNISHMENTS ARE NOT ENFORCED, THEY WILL STILL BE UNLESS.

THEREFORE SOLDIERS MUST BE TREATED IN THE FIRST INSTANCE WITH HUMANITY, BUT KEPT UNDER CONTROL BY MEANS OF IRON DISCIPLINE. THIS IS A CERTAIN ROAD TO VICTORY.

IF IN TRAINING SOLDIERS COMMANDS ARE HABITUALLY ENFORCED, THE ARMY WILL BE WELL-DISCIPLINED; IF NOT, ITS DISCIPLINE WILL BE BAD.

IF A GENERAL SHOWS CONFIDENCE IN HIS MEN BUT ALWAYS INSISTS ON HIS ORDERS BEING OBEYED, THE GAIN WILL BE MUTUAL.

Crew:

- **Your Mechs:** You did not get the Mechs you like to play? Talk to your commanding officer (CO). Often there are some reasons for this, mostly the limited BV available. If it can't be changed, that's it. You have two choices then: either be pissed off and have a miserable time playing the game or make the best out of the 'cards' you have been dealt. In any case, do not just throw your Mech(s) away just because you don't like it/them! Familiarize yourself with your Mechs.

On the other hand, you might be lucky or you might have a nice CO and get your favourite Mechs. Do not cherish them too much.

If your Mechs 'die', but your team wins, all is fine.
If your Mechs 'live', but your team is defeated, all is lost.
That's it. Period.

- **Your Orders:** (Hopefully) you did get some information about the current strategy from your command. If not, ask him. If in doubt whether the strategy is still valid or not, or you do not know how to move to put it into practise, ask.

- **Communication:** If you are in a difficult situation or do not quite know what to do, DON'T PANIC. First think carefully, then ask for advice, if still in doubt.

- **Your time:** Always pay attention to the game, and how the opponents' moves will affect your opportunities for moving. Learn to recognise when it is your time to move your Mech. When in doubt, consult your team-mates. Learn not only when it is your time to move, but also when it is time for your Mech to 'die'. Not by throwing him away needlessly, but by making a sacrifice that makes its 'death' count for your team, by providing it with precious time and/or distraction, etc.

Unfortunately, there are some players who consider it boring to observe the flow of the game, to become part of this flow, and to wait for the opportune moment. They prefer to chat around and enjoy other such entertainments, while they wait to get told that it is their turn to move. Only then do they come to the 'table' and examine the situation, taking lots of time to think up a move which in the end is – more often than not – bad. Why? Because they only see the situation as it is, not how and why it developed. During observing this development, one should always keep in mind several possible moves, and as the turn progresses, eliminate the ones that became unfavourable. Thus it will not only become clear when, but also where to move, minimizing the time required to do the actual move.

Such players should seriously ask themselves whether a Chapterfight is really a good occupation for them and whether they – and their team – would not benefit more if they did something else with their time. Or become better players and reliable team-mates, of course...

- **Your move:** Learn how to make good moves; I hope this article may be of some help for this. However, nothing can substitute experience and practice here. When in doubt, ask team-mates.

- **Courage under fire:** Possibly the most important point here. Not only the 'command' must be aware of the consequences of fire-concentration in bigger games, you as 'crew' must be aware of that as well. Fire-concentration can deal a staggering amount of damage to one Mech in a single turn. SURPRISE! This might be your Mech. How do you react then?

Will you act like a panicked chicken, running away screaming 'don't shoot me, don't shoot me!'?

Or will you act like a Mechwarrior, either performing a well-timed ordered retreat or standing your ground at whatever cost, depending on what the situation calls for?

Umm, I guess, that pretty much sums it up. It is time for some...

13. Final words

... but not final version. This is a beta-version. If you have any constructive criticism, please tell me, and I'll try to make things clearer.

However, I do hope that these mumblings are useful – at least for some of you.

Try to implement the concepts presented here in your future fights. Do not expect to make everything 'right' on the first try. It took me years to figure this stuff out (I could have saved a lot of this time by paying more attention to Sun Tzu) – for all that it is worth... But I am pretty sure you'll get the hang of it, if you just want to.

Oh, and by the way, do not think I never make any mistakes myself. Nobody's perfect. I only happen to make fewer mistakes than many others ☺.

Always keep in mind that it is likely that your opponent will try the same with you. And actually, this exactly is where the fun comes in, right? It is far better to beat an 'opponent' than to mop up a 'victim'. So if you feel like a victim lately, learn how to become an opponent!

Talking of fun: go and get some, and do not forget to bring honour, Mechs and planets to House Liao on your way back home!

But before I 'release' you, I will leave the honour of the last counsels in this article to Sun Tzu:

THE GENERAL THAT HEARKENS TO MY COUNSEL AND ACTS UPON IT, WILL CONQUER: LET SUCH A ONE BE RETAINED IN COMMAND! THE GENERAL THAT HEARKENS NOT TO MY COUNSEL NOR ACTS UPON IT, WILL SUFFER DEFEAT:-LET SUCH A ONE BE DISMISSED!

WHILE HEADING THE PROFIT OF MY COUNSEL, AVAIL YOURSELF ALSO OF ANY HELPFUL CIRCUMSTANCES OVER AND BEYOND THE ORDINARY RULES.

So, did I tell you all my 'secrets' ☺?

ALL MEN CAN SEE THE TACTICS WHEREBY I CONQUER, BUT WHAT NONE CAN SEE IS THE STRATEGY OUT OF WHICH VICTORY IS EVOLVED.

DO NOT REPEAT THE TACTICS WHICH HAVE GAINED YOU ONE VICTORY, BUT LET YOUR METHODS BE REGULATED BY THE INFINITE VARIETY OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

ACCORDING AS CIRCUMSTANCES ARE FAVOURABLE, ONE SHOULD MODIFY ONE'S PLANS.

SUCCESS IN WARFARE IS GAINED BY CAREFULLY ACCOMMODATING OURSELVES TO THE ENEMY'S PURPOSE.

... and, as a last piece of advice:

IF YOU KNOW NEITHER THE ENEMY NOR YOURSELF, YOU WILL SUCCUMB IN EVERY BATTLE.

IF YOU KNOW YOURSELF BUT NOT THE ENEMY, FOR EVERY VICTORY GAINED YOU WILL ALSO SUFFER A DEFEAT.

IF YOU KNOW THE ENEMY AND KNOW YOURSELF, YOU NEED NOT FEAR THE RESULT OF A HUNDRED BATTLES.

IF YOU KNOW THE ENEMY AND KNOW YOURSELF, YOUR VICTORY WILL NOT STAND IN DOUBT; IF YOU KNOW HEAVEN AND KNOW EARTH, YOU MAY MAKE YOUR VICTORY COMPLETE.

Incidentally, this last (rearranged) citation of Sun Tzu was once the first, and so the circle closes...

Greetings,

Iain MacAllan, *aka Ikarus*.