

Star control communication throughout the Inner Sphere. By spreading information through their network of hyperpulse generators, they keep up on tactical situations throughout known space. For more on these guys, check out the article by Shawn Caron on page 64.

ComStar cards will give you an edge in manipulating your deck and managing your resources better. One of the strongest cards in the set is Anastasius Racht, the Precursor Martial of ComStar. His diplomatic skills are so well-developed that once you get him in play, he can either tap a Clan Mech and untap an Inner Sphere Mech or tap an Inner Sphere Mech and untap a Clan Mech. As you can guess, that can really turn a battle around fast. Other notable ComStar cards include Hyperpulse Generator, which allows you to move around your opponent's construction counters; ComStar News Bureau, which gives extra resources to decks with Support Politics; and the Grim Reaper, a classic ComStar Mech.

Anastasius is tough to beat, but the universe has no shortage of powerful personalities to go up against him. While the background for *Counterstrike* covered events from 3050 to 3052, *Mercenaries* includes Mechs and personalities that appear up to 3055. Cards like Sun-Tzu Liao (the new Chancellor of the Capellan Confederation), Omi Kurita (keeper of the family honor), Aletha Khabrinski of Clan Ghost Bear, and Vandervain Chien, of Clan Jade Falcon help round out your decks and bring them up to date.

## Fire It Up!

In a lot of current decks, people seem to rely pretty heavily on cards like Mech Hangar and Secured Drop Site to get extra deployments. After all, why should you only deploy two cards when you can bring out three or four? Here's my chance to tip you off on a particularly useful card in *Mercenaries*: Rapid Deployment. With this Command card, you can tap as many Resource cards as you want until the end of the turn and get an extra deployment each time. Weenie Mech decks are going to be masquerading as tank decks.

That's just the beginning. A lot of players like to brag about the really big Mechs, but you may have noticed the growing legion of small Mechs. Take the Dart DRT-85 from the upcoming set, a fast little guy that doesn't inflict damage (but can still block) and deploys for a cost of 0. Now team it up with a card like Rapid Deployment. In no time at all, you'll be throwing out more Darts than a 10th-level AD&D character.

Of course, some players love monster Mechs. Here's a news flash: Watch out for the new unique Mechs. If you like Natasha Kerensky's attitude, you're going to love the Widowmaker card. It costs quite a bit to bring out Natasha's personal Dash, but once it's out, it's nasty. Using Overheat, it can lash out for an amazing 19 damage. If you know the backstory up to 3055, you also know about Yen-Lo-Wang, the Mech that Justin Xiang Allard passed down to his son Kai. Now this King of the Nine Hells has its own card. My favorite card, however, has to be Rhonda's Highlander, the personal Mech of the leader of Snord's Irregulars.

These three Mechs have something else in common. Their reputations are so fierce that if one of them shows up on the battlefield, any Mech that opposes it gets -1 attack. It gets better, though—one of the funkiest cards in the expansion lets you add this ability to any Mech. You're going to have to check out Intimidating Paint Job. Customize a heavy Mech with wicked detailing and the Mechs it opposes also get -1 attack. Get a paint job for a whole lance and suddenly that huge Mech your opponent planned to crush you with is going to be indestructible!

## Take It All!

Personally, I like the freakish Mechs best. Every set seems to have a few, and this one is no exception. The runner-up for weirdest Mech has to be the Salamander, which is so jam-packed with missiles that it actually bulges. I'm certainly not going to complain about the Missile 4 option, though. The oddest Mech in *Mercenaries*, though, is definitely the Behemoth, a four-legged lum-

bering "Stone Rhino" with lasers mounted in its snout. Funk-a-licious!

You may also notice some Mechs in this expansion that are just being introduced to the BattleTech universe. Glenn Elliott, one of the designers, has told me that they're called "second-line" Mechs, and they reflect the evolution of Mech design. Take the Mandrill, for instance. It's a Mech that led to the development of the Baboon HOWLER. Then there's the Corvis, the predecessor of the Ryoken STORMCROW. Even the Mechs have their own history. Now that's a backstory.

If you're a fan of the BattleTech universe, then you should also know about a special battle in the history of the Inner Sphere. Not only does this event have its own card in *Mercenaries*, but you can watch the battle unfold on the Web. (See Mike Selinker's sidebar on Harover, page 61.) The characters in this promo from Wizards of the Coast are also featured throughout the flavor text for the expansion. Isis Polaris is a deadly targeting ace. Okada Nikei embodies the honor of House Kurita, and "E-Train" McNeill...well, you've got to visit the website to witness his horrible death. While you're at it, check out the rest of Wizards' BattleTech Web pages and read through the card lists for *Counterstrike* and *Mercenaries*.

## Keep It Smooth!

Simply put, this expansion makes the game better than ever. If you like to play with Universe rules, you're going to see a lot more options for all of the Houses and Clans. And if you're a card game junkie—like I am—I think you'll wind up with a stack of cards that won't just get buried at the bottom of a massive pyramid in your basement. If you can afford to hire these Mechs and mercs, *Mercenaries* is worth the investment. I think I'm going to have to take a break from miniatures and play some more cards....

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