

for a more realistic look than the fanciful, surreal approach taken by *Magic*. "It's a little more gritty, a little darker. One of the references I've been using for a visual style is the Judge Dredd comic book."

Coad hopes the art will evoke the feeling of a grim, militaristic future. "I'd describe it as post-apocalyptic. The art's a lot more literal than in *Magic*, as we're representing mechanical vehicles and people. We've got a lot of really great scenes of these 30-foot robots engaged in all sorts of combat, as well as images of the generals and the infantry. So we've got quite a mixture, ranging from the socio-political elements to the battle-grounds to, of course, the mechs themselves."

In addition to the cards, Coad is also supervising the production of tokens that will be included in each pack. "They're going to be pressed plastic, basically a solid color," says Coad. "Courtney designed them. They work as counters, which you use when you're building your mechs."

Despite tight deadlines, Coad's team has stayed on track. "The pieces have been turning around in about three and a half weeks," he says. "I'm very pleased with what we've received." As the pieces come in, they're sent to FASA for approval. "FASA's been very helpful. They're making sure that everything stays consistent with their universe. And I think everything's been going quite well."

## Growing Pains

At FASA headquarters in Chicago, *BattleTech* line developer Bryan Nystul keeps a watchful eye over the entire project. "Wizards of the Coast is designing the game," says the 26-year-old Nystul, a former employee of Mayfair Games who came to FASA about two and a half years ago. "We're making sure that everything works for the *BattleTech* universe."

Which isn't easy. "*BattleTech* has a pretty large continuity, almost comparable to something like 'Star Trek.' It's got millions of words in print. It's huge. And Wizards doesn't really have a *BattleTech* expert. They're relying on us to keep the boat on course, so to speak. That wouldn't

be a problem if we were doing it ourselves."

So why didn't FASA handle the whole thing? "There are a lot of reasons," says Nystul. "Probably the main one is that Wizards has a certain degree of marketing presence and expertise that we don't have in regard to card games. Plus, we're a very small company. We have maybe 25 or 30 people here total, and the burden of producing a card game would be pretty staggering." But so far, so good. "I'd have to say things are moving along."

It's been quite a trip. After the licensing agreement was finalized in '93—and before Garfield got seriously involved—Nystul and a cadre of FASA staffers put together a design proposal and sent it over to Wizards. "First, they were going to use it. Then they were going to combine it with another design they had. Ultimately, the whole thing sort of fizzled out. That's when they more or less said, let's get Richard to come up with something." After a series of stops and starts, Garfield settled down last spring and came up with a version he liked. "Then he came out here," recalls Nystul, "and we sat down and talked about it."

Nystul's impression? "Obviously, it hadn't gone through a whole bunch of cycles of playtesting. But it was definitely a playable design." Nystul made a few suggestions, such as having mech missiles inflict a variable number of damage points instead of a fixed amount ("to make it a little bit more like the *BattleTech* board game"). Then the game went back to Wizards, where Garfield subjected it to three months of tinkering, including up to 25 hours a week of in-house playtesting. Throughout, Nystul kept tabs on the proceedings via phone, fax and e-mail, passing judgment on every sketch and sentence, making sure every pilot's name was spelled correctly and every mech had the right number of gun barrels.

The process has taken a toll on Nystul. "We've been trying to get our own stuff done in addition to helping with the card game that Wizards is doing. It's kind of doubled our workload. But I'm still excited about being involved. I'm really looking forward to cracking open those boosters. I'm confident the game's going to be pretty cool."

## Last Words

Ironically, in their younger days, neither Nystul nor Garfield

