

cared much for *BattleTech*. "I first ran across it around '85 or '86," says Nystul, who considers himself a minor league science fiction fan at best. "I didn't like it." But within six months, he was hooked. "The concept of giant robots blowing each other up pulled me in. But what kept me coming back was the depth of the fictional universe. There are a lot of interesting stories about a lot of interesting people."

Though Garfield's more of a sci-fi aficionado than Nystul—he cites authors Isaac Asimov and Theodore Sturgeon as among his favorites—he never got around to exploring the *BattleTech* universe. "I was interested in it," Garfield says. "But I didn't really have the opportunity to really read it through." He's since made up for lost time, getting a particular kick out of Michael Stackpole's "Blood of Kerensky" novels.

And good news for *BattleTech* vets: Stackpole is writing some of the flavor text for the CCG. "We're bending over backwards to make sure the card game is tied to specific parts of the *BattleTech* universe," says Nystul. They've taken pains, for instance, to include the major characters. "We've got Natasha Kerensky, the Black Widow. We've got all the major leaders of the great houses. We've got the major mercenary leaders like Grayson Death Carlyle. And they all have these great color portraits. I'm guessing that people who are big *BattleTech* fans are probably going to want to collect the cards, if only for the artwork."

Now, with his work complete and the release date looming, Garfield gives the game a thumb's up. "I'm very pleased."

Ditto for Nystul. "I think the game's chance of success is pretty

good. There are several science fiction card games out there, but I haven't been thrilled with any of them. I think there's a good opportunity for a strong s-f game."

So the future looks good for the *BattleTech* CCG. But how about the future itself? Do these guys think the world of tomorrow will be anything

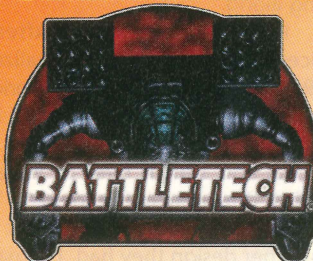
like *BattleTech*?

"Not hardly," says Nystul. "I seriously doubt that giant robots are going to be tromping around."

Garfield just laughs.

Rick Swan, InQuest letter answerer and spittoon cleaner, is also the inventor of the BattleTech hamburger: the Big Mech.

GARFIELD'S TOP 'TECHS



If it's indeed a subterfuge, he really gets hosed. But if you were cheating and it wasn't a subterfuge, then you get hosed yourself.

Kai Allard-Liao

In the *BattleTech* universe, he's simply the best mech pilot. In the *BattleTech* card game, coincidentally, he's also the best.

Daishi

This is a common mech that I like to use in my deck. It's huge. I mean, it's really, really big. There are a lot of players who like to use the little mech swarm-the-opponent strategy, but I'm much more partial to the huge mech strategy, where you get one hit in and make the other person discard 20 cards from his deck.

"Just like in other Richard Garfield games, there are a lot of really, really good cards," says *BattleTech* developer Charlie Catino. "Things that'll throw a monkey wrench into all of your plans." Asked to pick a few of his favorite monkey wrenches, Garfield came up with the following ("from my beta master," meaning they're subject to last-minute changes), described in his own words:

Soft Underbelly

This is a fun one, a card you play in battle. It rips apart a mech that's under construction. It's kind of narrow in application, because you don't always get a chance to attack a mech under construction. But if you do, and your attack isn't blocked, you can play Soft Underbelly, and the thing is shredded.

Caught in Hangar

This card lets you attack the other person's mech directly. The idea, of course, is that the mech is caught as it's being fixed in its hangar. And I kind of like that image.

Mislabeled Drop Box

Here's one of the goofiest cards. In the *BattleTech* universe, forces are deployed on a planet by these boxes that are dropped from orbit. You open them up and inside are mechs, with some assembly required perhaps. You play Mislabeled Drop Boxes on your opponent and a mech which is under construction is replaced by the next mech in the deck.

[name withheld for security purposes]

If you're willing not to name it, I'll tell you about another one I like. It's a card featuring an intelligence agent. His power allows you to go through your deck and take a subterfuge card. But you don't have to show it to your opponent, which means you can actually take whatever card you like. If your opponent challenges you, you show it to him.

