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PROTOCOLTURE ADDICTS™ PRESENTS

PROJECT A-KO™ THE ROLEPLAYING GAME



DREAM POD 9

WRITTEN BY JIMMY MAH

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AMERICA'S MECHA

by Marc-Alexandre Vézina

The announcement of the **Battletech** animation a while ago caused quite a stir among anime and mecha enthusiasts. Some hoped for an American version of Japanese mecha shows, others dismissed it entirely as hype, others still condemned it outright as shameless merchandizing. Most just shrugged and waited.

Now Battletech has been on our television screen for more than a few months. In fact, by the time you read this, the first season of thirteen episodes will have run its course and the production staff will be awaiting the decision: cancellation or second season. The show has caused many reactions among Battletech fans, several of them extremely negative.

The first and most often heard comment concerns the quality of the animation itself. It would seem that many expected anime-like drawings with fluid battle scenes. Unfortunately, such animation is very costly to produce. We often forget that Japanese anime is most often made nowadays by large studios funded by wealthy corporations (Bandai, for example). These companies are assured of recouping their investment through merchandizing sales to a mecha-crazy public. In North America, mecha are still only thought of as "That's a Transformer, right?", unfortunately — no offense intended to **Transformers** fans out there, of course.

The second most often heard critique is about the exaltitude of the animation's background. While it is true that many liberties were taken with the history of the Battletech universe, none of these changes radically modify the game play itself. Does it matter if the Draconis Coalition's *Mauler* prototype is now the assault 'mech of choice in the Successor States? Is it so important to know whether General Kerenski or his son Nicholas formed the Clans? At worst, it makes the integration of the animated series and the game somewhat difficult, but at least new players brought over by the TV show can easily correct their misconceptions by talking with long-time players or referring to the game books. "Take two Technical Readouts with milk and call me back in the morning!"

While the dialog and scripts are sometimes poor or just average, this is one of the first attempts at a truly North American mecha show (along with competitor and excellent TV series **Exo-Squad**). It has the huge task of making giant 12-meter battle robots as believable to the general public as they are to us mechaheads. Not an easy task to be sure. If shows like **Battletech** and **Exo-Squad** can prove that war stories with giant robots can be interesting (hell, fascinating!), then maybe we'll see original North American shows with Japanese quality in the near future.

Let's not give up already — voice your opinion!

Marc-Alexandre Vézina

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All other illustrations comes from promotional artwork, cover art or directly from the animation (video grab).

BATTLETECH: A SHORT HISTORY

By Marc A Vezina

In 1984, designers at FASA Corporation came up with a new game which featured giant robots trying to pound the snot out of each other in a feudal society spiraling toward barbarism. The very first edition of the game was then called **Battledroid**, which was soon changed to **Battletech** to avoid confusion with Lucasfilm's "Droid" trademark. This new **Battletech** board game was introduced in 1985. Unknown to the designers, it was the start of an adventure of epic proportions.

Battletech is a fictional universe set in the early 31st century. Centuries after the fall of the powerful Star League, a bitter civil war is still being waged by a number of great ruling families called the Houses, which each preside over one realm. Each House seeks to control the others in the hope of reforming a new Star League under its guidance. The situation is further complicated by the return of the exiled Star League Armed Forces in the form of conquering warrior Clans.

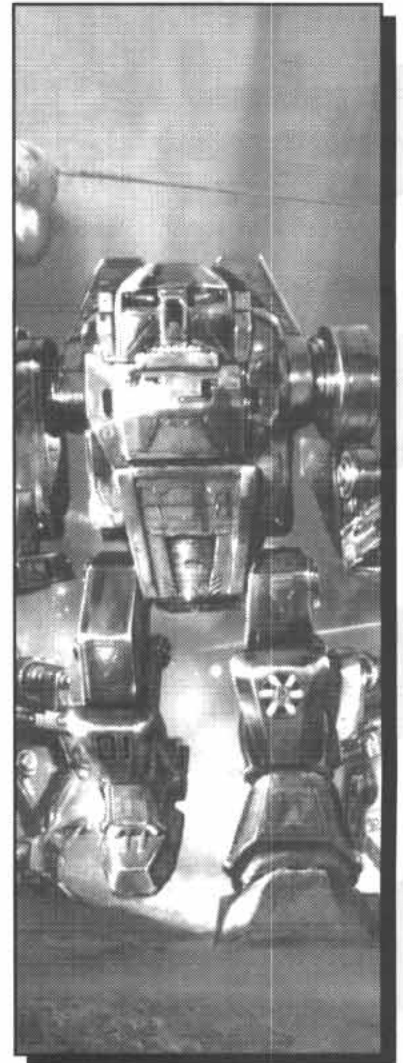
The first boardgame was so successful that it spawned a number of subsequent related products, such as **Citytech** (1985), **Mechwarrior: the Battletech RPG** and **Aerotech** (1986), **Battleforce** and **Succession Wars** (1987) and **Battletroops** (1989). In addition, numerous supplements giving further detail on the background also appeared during this time (nearly 75 books total at last count). Novels and software were also created and marketed.

The overwhelming success of the original **Battletech** games led to the development, in 1987, of a new company specialized in simulating **Battletech** adventures through computer technology. The company was Virtual World Entertainment (VWE). Over the next three years, VWE perfected a real-time simulator system that allowed people to see what it was like to pilot a Battlemech. The enterprise was wildly successful, and VWE centers are now opening across the country.

Faced with such unprecedented success, FASA started making plans for a possible televised series and supporting toy line as early as late 1989. Little progress was made until 1993, however. After unsuccessful negotiations with Playmate, FASA finally gave the toy license to Tyco, while the televised series was to be produced by Saban Entertainment (well-known for its X-Men and other animated series). Design and pre-production took the rest of 1993 and most of 1994 (for more detail on this, turn to page 8). The series was first aired in syndication on September 7th, 1994, the culmination of several years of preparation. The toys reached the shelves just in time for Christmas 1994, even though the series had not been seen everywhere in the United States yet.

The show ran into some unexpected difficulties when one of the nine studios hired to animate the footage failed to provide its sections on time, causing massive production delays and a scrambled airing schedule. In the space of a single weekend, producer Kurt Weldon and his team whipped up a composite episode made up of bits and parts of the five previous ones. The famous Episode 5-A, "No Guts, No Galaxy", was thus born. Not part of the original run of 13 episodes, it was a stop-gap measure that will not be seen again.

Now that the first season of 13 episodes has run its course, the designers at FASA Corporation are already throwing ideas around for the second season. In addition, the long-awaited **Battletech: the Movie** is now in the pre-production stage and is expected to reach theatres somewhere in 1996. It seems the **Battletech** universe will be around for quite sometime...



PALLADIUM BOOKS

ROBOTECH: NEW WORLD ORDER

The RDF finds itself facing RDF traitors and must fight their own Destroids to stop a madman's bid to conquer the African Sector. Other conflicts involve fighting Zentraedi terrorists and bandits. Both Veritech Fighters and Destroids are featured in this action-packed adventure-sourcebook. Estimated release date March 20, 1995.



Robotech: New World Order, written by Kevin Hassall, 112 pages, cover by K. Long, art by W. Breaux and E. Geier, published by Palladium Books.

UPCOMING PROJECTS

Watch for the following books in the coming months:

March	Robotech: New World Order
April	Rifts Undersea
June	Robotech Strike Force
August	Rifts Hardbound Edition Rifts South America

(from Palladium Books Press Release)

BANDAI'S MICRO GUNDAM

Bandai Corporation is releasing a new line of small scale models for Gundam. The Micro Gundams, as the line is called, stand about 80 millimeters tall (3.125") and come pre-assembled in individual boxes. They are molded in color and require only minimal assembly. Ball-joints give them exceptional mobility, making the Micro Gundams perfect for use as gaming miniatures.

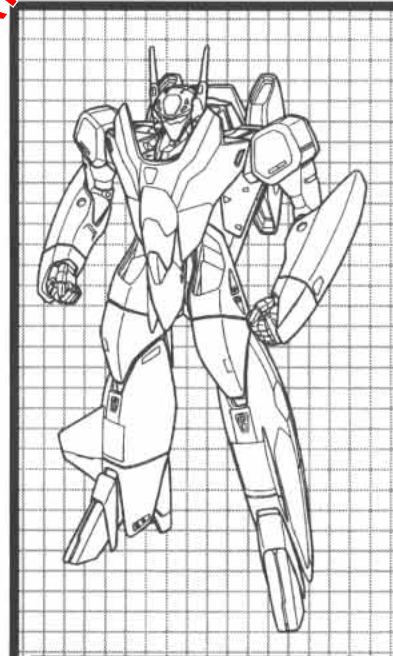
The first release include the RX-78 Gundam, Victory Gundam, FA-78 Gundam, and many more. A full line of Zakus and Zakus variants is also available. Planned future releases include RX-77 Guncannon, MS-07 Gouf, GP-01 and GP-03 Gundam and flatbed transport trucks.



VERY HEAVY METAL

Global Games is releasing a tabletop version of their **Legion of Steel** boardgame this summer. And to make sure the rulebook won't be alone on the shelves they are releasing a whole bunch of new miniatures to go along with it.

Probably most impressive among the new releases are the Colossus, extra-large walker vehicles bristling with weaponry. Each miniature weights an amazing **1 kilogram** (that's 2.2 pounds) and is made up of sixteen (16) pieces. Available in lead (Canada) or pewter (USA) versions, the Colossus will retail for projected \$35 US/Can! The prototype Colossus miniature in the picture below is the UNE Superfortress.



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