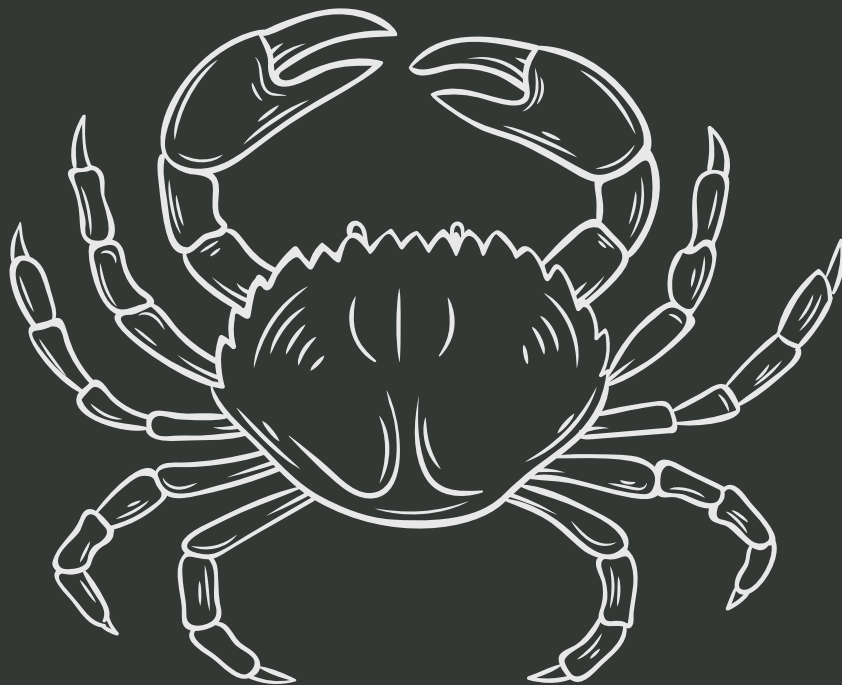


**A FOOL'S
ERRAND**



A BATTLETECH REPORT



CONFLICT BACKGROUND

Humanity, as a species, is well known for its tendency to conflict with one another. Whether it is from believing in causes such as truth or justice (usually with both sides having their own brand of it), a personal issue with someone or being paid to inflict violence on someone, the history of mankind is full of warfare.

The problem is, of course, that if you're ready to use force to reach your goals, you will most likely be met with force in turn. And in an age where the Battlemech reigns supreme in the battlefield, the desire to use such awesome power to achieve your goals is always on the mind of many leaders.

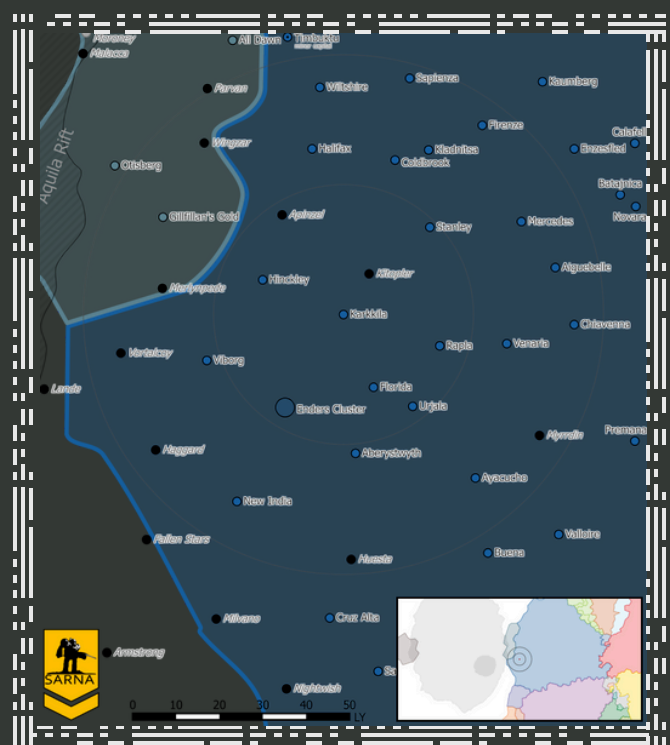
The Succession Wars were a fine example of this mutually assured destruction and the foolishness of it. However, even that conflict did not lead to an end to war. From bar room brawls over real or imagined slights to interstellar conflicts, humans take up arms to advance their causes across the Inner Sphere and beyond.

One such example is the case between a group of Mercenaries and a raiding ducal force in the system of Karkkila. Home to two habitable planets, Karkkila Prime and Högfors II. Despite having been members of the Lyran Commonwealth (and later, the Federated Commonwealth) for close to 300 years in 3060, the "ex-periphery" moniker just did not seem to go away.

With the two planets having a somewhat unfriendly rivalry between each other, it was never too much to cause much concern, and any raids that reached out from Karkkila were always put down to pirates, disgruntled ex-soldiers or outlaw mercenaries, never truly implicating the leadership of either planet.

With plenty of water on both planets (a rarity in the Inner Sphere) and thriving fishing industries, it seemed that the low-intensity conflict was kept up as a more of a tradition rather than necessity, though both planetary dukes seemed to covet the riches from their counterpart, thinking the grass was greener on the other side.

Of course, for the Mercenaries of the Carmine Company, this should have meant an easy payday...



KARKKILA SYSTEM, FEDERATED COMMONWEALTH, 3060

The lord of Högfors II, Duke Hannes Ostermeier, figured that a strong deterrent would serve him well. It would stop raids of opportunity but additionally let him flaunt his wealth as he was certain that word of the hired guns would reach Duke Joakim Ahonen on the court of Karkkila Prime.

Sending out feelers to the hiring world of Galatea in late 3059, his envoys were quick to secure the services of the Carmine Company, which had returned from their previous contract within the Free Rasalhague Republic. A defense contract, involving showy parades, plenty of patrols and public shows of the mercenaries abilities was signed and to take the better part of 3060.

While a good plan in theory, it came with it's own problems. Dissidents considered this kind of spend on mercenaries problematic as the money could have spent elsewhere. Most important, however, was the reaction of Duke Ahonen.

Upon hearing of the mercenaries arrival and hearing of the showy parades, the Duke of Karkkila Prime was at first annoyed, but thought to bide his time, perhaps hire his own mercenaries once the Carmine Company's contract was over. Though it did cross his mind that the mercenaries might be used to raid his domain, he dismissed the possibility.

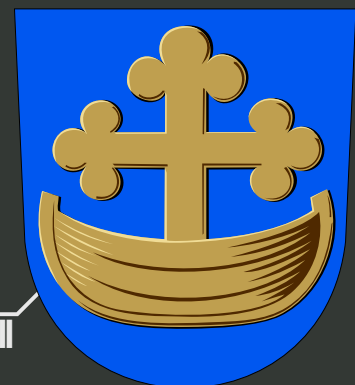
However, as more data came in, one particular piece of information solidified a need for action. The mercenaries had obtained a Flashman. Not one of the poorly-performing machines of the Succession Wars, but a refurbished Star League-era model. A self-proclaimed connoisseur of Star League-era 'mechs, he realized a way to strike both at his long-time rival and benefit financially from it.

Thus, with the help of Captain Mikael Hauki of his elite unit, the Karkkila Kommandos, a raid was planned.

And so a routine patrol for the Carmine Company turned out to be anything but.



DUKE JOAKIM AHONEN, KARKKILA PRIME



DUKE HANNES OSTERMEIER, HÖGFORS II

The coat of arms for both Dukes have been taken directly from ancient terra. For Karkkila Prime, the Dukes symbol represents the industry that has let his people live a tough, but fair, life. For Högfors II, the coat of arms represents the populations close connection to the rivers and seas of their planet, their fishing industry and the "blessings of the sea" that have given them the quality of the life they enjoy today.

CARMINE LANCE

The unofficial Command Lance of Carmine Company, the Carmine Lance, alongside lances Crimson and Cherry, make up the Carmine Company. Well on their way to extending beyond Company in size, the clan invasion has been good for business.

After the events on Ueda (See 'Through the Jaws of Defeat'), Hauptmann Haas was more than happy to sign the company up for what should have been routine patrols, showboating and flexing some myomer muscles in an effort to deter raids, both by pirates and the Duke of Karkkila Prime.

GRIFFIN GRF-3M

HAUPTMANN KATARINA HAAS (4/4)

A former LCAF leutnant, Katarina Haas found the constant ineptitude of her superiors to be stifling and left to start her own mercenary command as soon as her tour of duty on the Steiner-Marik border was over in 3027, abusing her position to write off salvageable 'mechs as destroyed with which she formed the core of her new unit. The Griffin she pilots is still the same machine at it's core than when she was in the LCAF. Steiner-made, just like she is.

FLASHMAN FLS-8K

[ERROR: NAME NOT FOUND] (3/4)

A friendly and outgoing individual, [Error: Name not found] or just "404" to her friends, is a new addition to the company. For whatever reason, though, any database or file her details end up are soon missing her information, despite checks and double-checks. While this makes her a nightmare for administration, her skills as a mechwarrior make up for it. no 'mechs she pilots exhibit any glitches, however, making her well-liked by the 'techs of the Company.

SPIDER SDK-8M

FIRST LEUTNANT JAE MERCER (3/4)

Leutnant Mercer has been with the company since it's inception. Usually in charge of the company's Recon lance, he is often pulled in to take the fastest 'mech in other lances to fill that role whenever a dedicated recon lance would be considered overkill.

A man of mystery, Jae is rarely seen outside of his 'mech, and when he is, he's rarely without his helmet. His short, direct way of talking is perfect for a recon operative but hasn't made him many friends off the field. A born introvert, he doesn't seem to mind.



MARAUDER MAD-5M

FIRST LEUTNANT VASILI ANTONOVA (3/4)

Vasili's fearsome skills at marksmanship are further improved by the accuracy inherent in pulse lasers and his excellent use of the "mech-scale shotgun", the LB-X autocannon. However, he tends to overestimate the firepower at his disposal, leading him to brawls for which his Marauder's armor is not meant for. A former spider pilot, he's going to have to step up or risk losing his second-in-command status.

BULLDOG MEDIUM TANK

LOCAL PDF CREW (4/6)

Partially a publicity stunt, partially a learning experience for the locals, most Carmine Company patrols on Hogförs II have included some local Planetary Defense Force troops as part of their operations. While relatively poorly trained, their enthusiasm has been welcomed by the mercenaries.

FENRIR BATTLE ARMOR

LEUTNANT SAANA SINGH (4/5)

Another publicity stunt, though this one with proper application, are the new Lyran-made Battle armor suits in the Crimson Company. Having seen what Battle Armor can do on the Battlefield, Hauptmann Haas made it a priority to obtain herself some once Inner Sphere designs were in mass production. With her Lyran connections, she has secured a small, if steady, supply of Fenrir's for her force.

Despite their fierce punch, Singh of the newly-formed Carmine Company's BA force dearly wishes the suits had something with a longer range, as the suits sorely lack in armor protection.

"Crab season?" Vasili asked over the comms, the steady plod of his Marauder's metal feet steady under him.

"Tha's right, sah!" the local's cheerfulness was contagious. "A few hundred meters down that'a way's my favourite-" the voice was cut out, the rest of the tanker's crew hushing him down. No telling the best spots to outsiders!

"I'm sure we can arrange for a fishing trip for R'n'R. A team-building exercise. The press'll love it, too." Hauptmann Haas cut in, mixing pleasure with business. Always a merchant's daughter, she was.

The pleasant discussion was cut short as Leutnant Mercer's voice cut in. "Contact."

Looking at the shared feed from Mercer's spider, a lone Saladin hovercraft was approaching, still a klick away. No recognized IFF signature.

"Unidentified hovercraft! State your-" Haas began on an open channel, only to be interrupted by a shocked voice.

"Perkele! Captain, we've been rumbled!" the voice, clearly the pilot of the Saladin, called out. The Hovercraft immediately veered to the side, disappearing momentarily behind a steep cliff.

'Captain', Katarina thought. Seems like they had stumbled upon a raid.

"Mercer, on the hill, get eyes on them, get me a number. 404, take point. Looks like we're just in time to stop a pirate raid. And I don't think they're after the crabs..."



CARMINE LANCE, WITH ASSISTANCE FROM BATTLE ARMOR PLATOON AND THE LOCAL PDF

KARKKILA KOMMANDOS

The elite raiding force of the Duke of Karkkila, led by captain Mikael 'Pike' Hauki, the Karkkila Kommandos are the best of the best... By local standards, in any case. Mixing highly-skilled warriors, Star-league era technology and the strategic planning abilities of a overweight 'mech-obsessed Duke, the Kommandos can be a force to be reckoned with. If they remember to turn on decryption for their communications...

MANTICORE (3055 UPGRADE) MASTER SERGEANT TUULI SAARI (3/4)

When Duke Ahonen cannot get fully functional Star League 'mechs, he tends to try and improve his other forces. Thus, once he learned of the lostech upgrade of the venerable Manticore heavy tank, he made refitting his conventional armor forces with rediscovered 'tech a priority, even if he begrudgingly comments that the newly-made versions of SL-era technology just 'isn't the same'.

SALADIN (ARMOR VERSION) SERGEANT MATIAS MÖKKILÄ (3/4)

A favourite of the Kommandos for it's high speed and the fact that it's AC/20 tends to turn anything it hits into something resembling a salad.

The Saladin was chosen for the raid to act as bait, a task it performed admirably, getting the Carmine to Company to engage with it while the rest of the ambushers joined up with it once the Mercenary force had committed.



KING CRAB CRB-010 **CAPTAIN MIKAEL 'PIKE' HAUKI (3/4)**

A thrill-seeker and a realist, Captain Hauki is glad for his position as the leader of the Kommandos. The low-intensity conflict between Hogförs II, the occasional actual pirate raid and his employers tendency to go above and beyond for Star League-era toys for his 'crack troops' to play around with ensures lots of activity without the risks of, say, trying to fight off the Clan Invasion.

"What? Report, Matias! What happened?" Captain Hauki asked over the comms, watching the strategic map on his 'mech's console. The blips indicating enemy forces dimmed to represent their last known locations as the Saladin lost sight of them.

"Mechs! A tank! And those fancy running suits! we don't have the armor to rush into THAT, Captain!" the voice cried out. Not very useful as a situational report.

"Alright, flank around. Wait for a good moment, then come out blasting. Just don't hit the Flashman. Remember, they can't hit you if you keep moving. Speed is life." Hauki told the his nervous underling, seeing the flames of a jumpjet in the distance as the enemy 'mechs spread out across the rivers. Without jumpjets, his forces had a distinct disadvantage. Feeling the rush of adrenaline, he gripped the controls tight and set his 'mech to a run. Going against Battle-hardened mercs would be a thrill. Hopefully not his last one.

CRAB CRB-27 **LIEUTENANT HANS GUTENBERG (3/4)**

The second-in-command for the mission, Lieutenant Gutenberg has got to where he is more by the shared passion he has with the Duke over lostech rather than any ability as a leader. Still, his immense technical knowledge lets him get the best out of the 'mechs he pilots, even if most of his practice comes from simulators and studying rather than actual combat.

CRAB CRB-20 **SERGEANT RASMUS SCHNEIDER (3/4)**

Sergeant Schneider's more fond of modern 'mech designs than those of the Star League-era, preferring their rugged reliability and simplistic equipment over what he considers to be finicky and bothersome machines. While often butting heads with 'mech aficionados (and the Duke himself, once, if rumors are believed) due to this, it also means there's little competition for him choosing which 'mech he prefers on missions.

A FLASH IN THE PAN

BY PIKE GROVE

It was around midday at a military command center in the outskirts of the City of Karkkila, the capital of the planet with the same name. Captain Mikael "Pike" Hauki had had a most regular day up until that point, barring the slight uptick in readiness levels. The cause for this was a recent hire of mercenaries, an outfit called The Carmine Company, by the system's other habited planet, Högfors II. Currently though, that was mostly out of the purview of the Commander of the Karkkila's Kommandos as, in his view, any offensive action was unlikely at the moment. After all, why attack your enemies when they seem to have attained the apex of their strength for the time being?

No, the current matters off-world were more suited for less militant reconnaissance work than what he offered and all he had to do at the moment was to see that his troops kept the prepared positions on planet stocked and ready in case the Duke of Högfors II, Hannes Osteemeier, felt strong enough in his position for a raid on Karkkila Prime. Really, he was anticipating the start of the crab season. He had brought his crayfish traps with him and was looking forward to lowering them to a nearby bay after leaving work today, but for now they waited in a corner of his office while he was sitting in worn fatigues at his desk focusing on paperwork, drinking coffee, and occasionally stroking his red stubble of a beard.

To the detriment of Mikael's routine however, the "less militant reconnaissance

work" had turned up with data which spurred the Duke of Karkkila, Joakim Ahonen, to motion. For Hauki, the first manifestation of this was a knock on the door of his office which startled his focus from his paperwork he was filling. He took a drink from his coffee and set the mug back to the table. He yelled at the door, "Come in!"

A tall and slender soldier with a blocky face entered the well-lit room with a brown sealed dossier in his hands and stood in attention in front of Mikael's dark wooden desk. His uniform was similar to the one Hauki was wearing, fatigues with blue camouflage pattern, only the ones on the soldier who just entered the room were immaculate and brandished the Corporal's insignia instead of Captain's. The man was clearly sent from the Dukes personal guard as a courier. This observation made the Captain's greenish gray eyes narrow, and his naturally reddish face gained a slightly more serious expression than his normal grin.

"At ease, soldier. Now, what do you have for me?"

"Your orders from Duke Ahonen, sir!"

"My orders?" Hauki sighed and leaned forwards to receive the foreboding dossier which carried the ducal seal of Karkkila, two crossed brass hammers on a red background, the man had been transporting to him. "Does the Duke wish for me to prepare more defensive positions on the planet?"

"I do not know, sir", the Corporal replied "but the Duke seemed to be rather

excited when handing this dossier”.

Mild shock passed through Mikael’s narrow face after hearing this, but he kept his cool and quickly returned his expression to normal. There weren’t many military matters that got Duke Ahonen excited. Sure, the chubby and mustached head of the planet enjoyed sending Mikael and his Kommandos after pirates, brigands, and on a raid to his neighbor in the system when the opportunity presented itself, but what got him giddy was promises of rare tech and mechs, especially ones of Star League make. If the Duke had gotten animated, it meant these new mercenaries had likely brought something of interest with them.

“Thank you” Hauki replied. After a brief moment of silence, he added “you may leave now”.

The Corporal saluted, turned, and left the room, seeming to march rather than walk out of the room. ‘An occupational hazard of belonging to the Duke’s bodyguard’ Hauki thought and moved his attention to the dossier. The Captain shifted excitedly in his brown leather chair. The promise of thrilling action making anticipation swell within him. He carefully broke the ducal seal and started to examine the contents of the dossier and immediately found his mission. The first document, the one on top, which he took out of the folder was a photo of a ‘mech surrounded with a red circle drawn on a red marker pen. Below it, written with the same pen, a note was written in the Duke’s handwriting. It read “FLS-8K GET IT!”.

A Star League era Flashman, if the intel was to be believed, a configuration not built in approximately 260 years since its production lines were destroyed. Beauty with a bite of three large lasers and double heatsinks to fire all of them on the move while running cold. Of course,

the flamer and five medium lasers it had as a backup were enough to overwhelm the heatsinks if used in conjunction with the large lasers, but with 375 rated XL engine propelling the Flashman to 86 km/h there weren’t many fights where it couldn’t just run away if it was undergunned. Sure this move would suck for its slower compatriots, but it was a possibility for the Flashman nonetheless. Mikael eagerly studied the data of the mech provided in the dossier, roughing his short red hair while grinning like a madman. Sure, it’s the Duke who’s collecting this stuff but it was mechwarriors of Karkkila’s Defense Force who got to pilot these machines, and really special tech like this was usually filtered to the Kommandos specifically.

An example of this Mikael’s own command ‘Mech was a King Crab - 010, famed mech of the Star League on its own right and in an extinct configuration used by Star League Defense Force, left in Karkkila as a wreck deemed beyond repair by SLDF during the Amaris Civil war. The Captain had the mech painted as a blue deep sea crab from ancient Terra and given it the name Myrsky, meaning storm in the Captain’s native Finnish, as its two PPCs struck lightning while the two LB 10-X autocannons rained pellets and two SRM-6 launchers brought the thunder.

Still smiling he started to go through the rest of the papers in the folder, finding more intel of the Carmine Company gathered by Karkkila’s intelligence network. As Duke Ostermeier of Högfors II had decided to parade his newest acquisition around for all people to see, the job of gathering intelligence on the mercenary forces hadn’t been very difficult for Karkkila’s intelligence operatives, far from it. In fact, the dossier seemed to contain newspaper clippings with pictures of just about every mech the

mercenaries had brought with them to the planet, though shifting through the pictures revealed this to likely have been a strategic show of force, as the Carmine Company had brought with them a company's worth of 'Mechs and personnel, including three Assault 'Mechs. This did manage to dampen Mikael's mood somewhat, as most people would think twice before engaging with a force carrying that amount of tonnage, but then again most people weren't in charge of Karkkila's Kommandos. And besides, he had orders.

And so, the initial excitement for action over, he focused harder and more seriously on the intelligence provided to find a way to isolate his prey, paying particular attention to their deployment locations and in what sort of groups they seemed to deploy. After carefully inspecting the intel for the duration of three cups of coffee he, to his delight, discovered two notable things. First of these things was that the Lance which seemed to contain the prize, consisting of a Spider, a Marauder, a Griffin, and the Flashman itself. This amount of firepower surrounding the target would make for a tough fight, but not for an impossible one. Secondly, the Carmine Company seemed to deploy all of its Assaults as part of a single Lance, more geared as a dedicated assault lance mostly deployed as a breakthrough force, so if he could ambush the Flashman far enough away from their HQ, it's lance wouldn't likely be able to get reinforced in time. And from experience with Högfors the intel already gathered he knew approximately the patrolling routes. Mikael's forehead gained some wrinkles as he furrowed his brow while studying the routes until he found something promising.

One of the patrol routes would take the mechs from one industrial zone to

another through the wilderness across Högfors' rapids where they would be far away from any backup and the difficult terrain of cliffs and waterfalls would make a great place for an ambush. Though he couldn't bring too much stuff with him. To keep at least some secrecy intact he would need to transport everything in one relatively small dropship and pay attention to his tonnage. And while he planned to command this King Crab trusting it's firepower to ease with the tough fight ahead, he'd need to hide it's reactor signature for as long as possible.

Still pondering in his office, a plan started to form in Mikael's head. He would take with him a few tanks, at least one with hover capabilities so likely a Saladin, and few tough medium mechs, disguise them as random periphery pirates. As the Karkkila system was so close to the periphery border, some pirate action wouldn't be anything too out of the ordinary. First he'd need to find a suitable ambush position and lay there in wait with all mechs powered down to suppress their reactor signatures as much as possible while the hovertank would threaten either the industry or the patrol and draw them closer. Second the lighter assets would power their systems on, being detected almost certainly but with the firepower the Carmine Company's lance was packing they still would have the upper hand in men and tonnage. Only when they would be close enough would Mikael power his mech on and his forces regroup.

The Captain now had a plan. Only he still had to decide on what his tough mediums would be. He started to focus on the question and his eyes started to wander, until they came to a stop looking at the crayfish trap he'd brought with him and a smile shot across his face. "But of course!" he exclaimed to nobody but himself, "it is crab season."

BATTLE REPORT

SCENARIO RULES

As per the rules from the fanmade 'Instant Action' supplement by Victory Point Productions, available on <https://victorypointproductions.neocities.org/>. Both sides made a force between 3-6 units worth 8000 BV with no pilot/gunnery restrictions.

TACTICAL OPERATIONS

The following rules from Tactical Operations: Advanced Rules were used:

- Floating criticals
- Careful stand

MISSION SELECTION

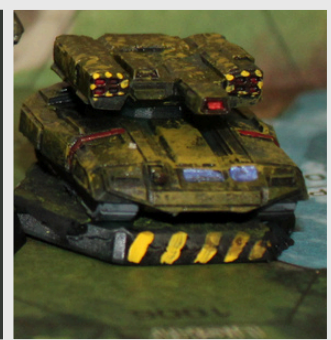
CARMINE LANCE

AGENDA: CONFRONT

KARKKILA KOMMANDOS

AGENDA: SALVAGE

MISSION: TAKE INTACT



MAPSHEET: KOZICE VALLEY (CDS), BATTLE OF TUKAYYID

KARKKILA KOMMANDO DEPLOYMENT



CRIMSON COMPANY DEPLOYMENT

The map chosen represents one of the many river-filled valleys of Hogförs II, prime crayfishing locations and weekend retreats for the local population.

TAKE INTACT

[CONFRONT VS SALVAGE]

“Will you look at the specs on that bad boy. Everyone see them? That armor, those lasers...you know, I’ve been feeling the urge for a new ride. Not a scratch on it, everyone. Kill the rest, but we’re taking this one home.”

MISSION BRIEF

The Confront player must protect their most valuable unit from the Salvage player, who wants to take it home.

The Confront player sets up the battlefield. The Salvage player chooses one map edge to be their home edge. The Confront player’s home edge is the opposite map edge.

The Confront player chooses one of their units to be The Prize. Make this decision based on lore – the Prize should be the most technologically advanced or best equipped of the Confront player’s units, the one piloted by the commander, or a similar reason for the enemy to want to capture it specifically. The Salvage player is trying to capture the Prize intact, and they may not make attacks that target the Prize directly, though it can be damaged for other reasons.

VICTORY

The scenario ends at the end of Turn Eight. If all the Confront units except for the Prize have suffered crippling damage, the Salvage player wins. Otherwise, the Confront player wins.



The Hogförs crab, which has also been introduced into the rivers of Karkkila Prime, is considered a local delicacy. While people from both planets agree that it’s meat is succulent, there are constant arguments whether or not the crab should be served steamed or fried.

However it’s prepared, the correct way of eating the ‘Hog’ as the locals call it, involves a large quantity of butter, two small forks, a ball-peen hammer and copious amounts of local alcohol. Hogförsians drink white wine, while Karkkilan’s prefer beer.

ENEMY CONTACT

The Carmine Company split their 'mech lance and supporting elements up, trying to find out the best locations to cross the rivers. First blood of the game was self-caused as the Flashman rolled snake-eyes for a piloting roll for walking into water, damaging his right arm. This prompted the Griffin and Marauder to jump over, instead.

On the other side of the Battlefield, Captain Hauki's king Crab made glacial progress towards a vantage point on one of the hills, the rest of the Karkkilan forces advancing together, as a group. On the first two turns, no further damage was caused.

It was determined that the cause of the fall was a combination of a large force of Hogförs crabs on the river floor, the 'mechs massive bulk slipping on their backs. Combined with the freely-flowing water, this took poor 404 by surprise and claimed first blood for the crabs. With this, the game was well underway.



The Carmine Company sets forward, quickly realizing that they're not dealing with just a couple of pirate vehicles as 'mechs loom in the distance...



Karkkilan forces huddle close together, harassed by Mercer's Spider, who trusts in his mobility to keep him safe from the King Crab's attack.

HOLY CRAB!

As the Carmine Company got closer, it became evident that this was a force to be reckoned with. The Bulldog took a position within a forest, and a lucky shot from the approaching Manticore ensured it would stay there, reducing its mobility to half with a motive hit. The Spider got into a perfect harassing position, distracting fire away from the rest of the lance as all three Crabs tried to take it down. Only the King Crab managed to hit, though, tearing through the center rear armor of the Spider, scoring two engine critical hits and leaving only three points of structure remaining, forcing it to pull back on turn four. Save for some potshots focused on Crab-20, no other noticeable damage was dealt this early.

The Crab-20 took point for Karkkilan forces, advancing to the middle of the map on turn four, which led to it being surrounded by the Marauder and Spider, while the Griffin, Fenrir's and Bulldog traded fire with the Crab-27, still hanging back in a forest. The Flashman diverted its attention to the north from which the Saladin was making its play. One kick later, the Saladin was no more, but not before it blew the right leg from the Spider clean off. The Marauder fared poorly as well, inflicting grievous damage on the Crab, but losing control as it kicked back, ending up on the ground.

With the Flashman scoring the first kill and Crab-20 heavily damaged, it was starting to look like the Mercenaries would be routing the Kommandos in short order.



Sergeant Schneider overcommits himself, but manages to survive punishment from the Marauder and kick it down, while Sergeant Mökkilä's Saladin loses its right half entirely to a devastating kick by the Flashman.

The Bulldog jarred to a halt as a laser blast melted most of its left tread. Kersantti Mikko Räsänen quickly asked if they can still move.

"Well we can, but it's gonna be slow. We can't risk snapping the track completely," the driver replied while the secondary gunner returned fire towards the Manticore that had almost crippled them, shouting with glee as several SRMs struck home.

Räsänen considered his options. Retreating at half-speed, possibly lower than that, through open territory, would go poorly, especially with those two massive Crabs plodding along. Sure, the mercenary machines had looked imposing during one of those parades the Duke had held, but seeing an actual 'mech clash up close was something else. If he wasn't participating in it, he might even have enjoyed it.

"...Was s'posed to go fishin'..." he cursed, staring out the viewport as the massive form of the King Crab climbed atop a hill, some 150 meters from their position. That was a big one, he thought. Listening to the mercenary communications, they had seen it too, but weren't about to pull back.

"Right! Let's show 'em Karkkila's sum'o'dat Hogförs hospitality, boys! Keep sum'o'dem trees between us and the big 'un, and let's help those 'mercs bag themselves sum crabs! It's fishin' time!" he said, taking aim with the Bulldog's laser...

THE STORM ARRIVES

On turn five, Captain Hauki finally got his King Crab into a good firing position. Hauptmann Haas made the mistake of standing still to fire at the Crab still remaining back in the forest to support the Manticore. Lining up devastating salvo, the King Crab took the Griffin's head off with a perfectly-placed shot from it's LB-X/10's, but not before she snapped an LRM salvo off at the Crab-27 hiding in the woods.

In the middle of the field, the Crab-20 maneuvered behind the Marauder, dealing fairly little damage. The Marauder, which had gotten up to try and destroy the Manticore, alongside the Bulldog, the Fenrir squad and Flashman. The tank had suffered a crew stunned hit, rendering it rather impotent and perfect prey for the mercenaries. After the smoke cleared and the last of the trees around it fell down, the manticore was destroyed, it's right side torn apart by the mercenaries concentrated laser fire.

Mercer's Spider took itself out of the fight by trying to stand up, landing right onto it's back followed by losing his remaining three points of structure in it's CT.



Vasili's gambit paid off, trusting in the rear armor of his 'mech to last through one round of concentrated fire from the alpha striking Crab, allowing for him to get back into the game and bring his heavy firepower to bear. Hauptmann Haas was not so lucky, though, the headshot taking her nearly-undamaged 'mech out of the action.

Katarina let her 'mech come down to a halt, lining up a shot with her ERPPC and listening to the tell-tale 'beep' of an acquired missile lock. One good shot and she'd tear the remaining armor off that 'mech. She pulled the trigger, hearing the fzzt-crackle of the PPC as it fired, but saw the shot go wide. Very wide, in fact. Blinking, she realized that the enemy 'mech seemed to be growing distant and a sudden weightlessness settled upon her. What was going on?

She was brought back to reality as the head of her Griffin hit the dirt, digging deep into the soft ground of the riverbank. She bit her tongue hard, cursing as she was rocked around the restraints of her command couch. Miraculously, though, she remained conscious for the moment. Before her, her Griffin's neck was showering sparks and coolant fluid like blood. It stood erect for a moment, as if in defiance of the forces of gravity. It could not last, however, and the 'mech soon fell on it's back with a heavy crash. Still, it was a clean hit. A new head assembly would be easy enough to get, she thought. The Griffin was still mostly undamaged.

It was only when she tried to unrestrain herself from her couch that she realized her sudden lack of a lower body. The pain flooded her body as her mind could no longer shield itself from the grievous injury so obviously staring back at her from the mess that had been her legs. It was a mercifully short moment before she blacked out.

Seeing the commander's mech lose it's head shocked Vasili, who realized that at least for now, he was in command. He was good at melting enemy 'mechs to slag, but had never thought to actually need to lead the troops. Barely hearing Mercer's "I'm out." as his Spider failed to get up for the last time, he had to do something.

"Hauptmann? Come in? Hauptmann!" There was no response, but it was impossible to tell whether or not the commander had survived

Let's, uh, we..." he began, watching the local's Bulldog penetrate through the opposing Manticore's side, destroying the vehicle. "...We can't let the locals get the best of us! The commander's down, let's drive these bastards off the planet!"

There were some prideful comments from the Bulldog's crew at being compared to so favorably whilst the Fenrir 'jocks and 404 signed off on that sentiment. There were only three crabs left, and no lucky headshot was going to change the outcome of the battle. He'd finish off the fancy 'mech he was dueling with and then mop up the rest.

Moments later, his 'mech lurched to the side, the polite voice of the Marauders onboard computer informing him that the King Crab's shot had torn the leg off from under him. The suggestion to brace for impact came after he hit his head hard against the control panel in front of him.

Okay, maybe one lucky shot wouldn't be enough, but two might turn the tide...

THE HISTORY OF A MECHWARRIOR (INTERMISSION)

Katarina Haas, born 3004 in the Alarion Province of the Lyran Commonwealth, was fascinated with Battlemechs from a young age, whether it be in animated holovids or in war propaganda. In her youth, she lived in relative relative luxury in an safe and untouched region of the Commonwealth as the only daughter to wealthy parents. Due to this, she was free to pursue her dreams of becoming a Mechwarrior.

Upon attending preparatory school on the route to becoming a mechwarrior, the reality of the Lyran commonwealth had started to sink into her young, impressionable mind. Wealth bought privilege, but even more so did nobility, the lack of which she found herself constantly reminded of by some of her peers. Her reaction to this harassment did not lead to her winning many friends over at the school, which would come haunt her later in life.

It seemed to be fate that the War College of Buena was founded when she was 16 and of age to study to become a mechwarrior there. Finding the academy to be free of prestige and nobility due to it's new founding, she thoroughly enjoyed her time there, going so far as to study to be an officer, graduating as a Leutnant of the LCAF in 3023.

On her first (and only) Tour of Duty against Mark forces, however, the reality of the situation reared it's ugly head once more. Incompetent, blue-blooded superiors proved time and time again to be more harmful to the LCAF than the forces of the Free Worlds League. Through her own abilities, she was promoted to command of her own lance as a First Leutnant during the campaign, her goal so far being to rise through the ranks without the aid of connections or status. The fact that her being a 'mechwarrior in the first place was only possible due to her wealthy parents was a fact that irritated her, despite being grateful for the opportunity.

Near the end of her tour she had found that staying in the LCAF would only be a frustrating, rocky and most likely fruitless path, as it has been made clear to her that progressing further in the ranks would be problematic, for someone with no noble connections such as her. This solidified her plans for the future and led to establishing of the Carmine Company.

Having built rapport among others under her command and with the rank-and-file staff, she began her risky plan. Damaged 'mechs were written off as destroyed, to be repaired later with the help of 'techs who would later be joining the Company. It was only due to the incompetence of her superiors that her plan worked, which she found oddly satisfying. Thus by the time her tour of duty was over, she could establish her own lance-sized force as a free mercenary and head to Galatea.



KATARINA HAAS

3004-3060

"Der Feind ist gefährlich, aber ein unfähiger General ist tödlich."

TENSE STANDOFF

The Flashman rushed forward towards the Crab-27, still taking cover within the forest, the Fenrir's joining in to bring their pulse lasers to bear. Despite having won initiative in most of the previous rounds, Carmine Company was on the back foot for the final turns. Turn five saw the the crab knocked down, Lieutenant Gutenberg losing consciousness. Turn 6 saw the mercs tearing heavily into it to exact punishment for their commander. The mechwarrior regained consciousness on turn 7, only to have his 'mech almost completely destroyed by the Flashman.

In the middle of the battlefield, the Bulldog and Marauder were fighting the Crab-20. The ruggedness of the -20 model shone through as, despite armour breaches left and right, no critical damage was inflicted on it's components as it traded fire with the heavier Marauder.

Help came from above as, having got where he wanted to be, Captain Hauki sighted at the Marauder on turn 6. Another precision strike hit the right leg of the Marauder, piercing through it's damaged armor for a devastating critical hit which sheared the leg right off, allowing for Sergeant Schneider to kick the Marauder's side torso in, shutting down it's XL engine.

With only the Fenrir squad in an uncrippled condition, the Crab moved closer, only for the Bulldog's crew continuing to rain fire on it, it's two SRM salvoes penetrating through the center torso, savaging both it's gyro and engine to send it twitching down as it's engine violently shut itself.

On the final two turns, the Fenrir's were trying their best to avoid punishment from the King Crab. Avoiding fire, they managed to avoid being crippled on turn 7, but turn 8 saw the King Crab alpha striking the unit, destroying every single suit remaining.

Despite taking a pounding from every direction, the King crab suffered only armor damage. a Lucky critical hit bounced into the head location, destroying Captain Hauki's life support, damaging him in his rapidly overheating 'mech.

However, With the Bulldog's front armor gone, there was nobody left in fighting condition to stop the Kommando captain from winning the mission, and stealing the Flashman for his Duke.



END RESULTS

BEGIN TALLY

CARMINE LANCE

GRIFFIN GRF-3M - SALVAGEABLE

Head destroyed
Pilot killed in action
Approx. 75% of armor remaining

MARAUDER MAD-5M - SALVAGEABLE

Right leg destroyed
Left torso destroyed
Left torso damaged
XL engine damaged
Pilot lightly injured
Approx. 25% of armor remaining

SPIDER SDR-8M - DESTROYED

Right arm destroyed
Right leg destroyed
Right torso damaged
Center torso destroyed
Pilot lightly injured
Approx. 40% of armor remaining

FLASHMAN FLS-8K - COMBAT READY

No internal damage
Approx. 95% of armor remaining

BULLDOG MEDIUM TANK - CRIPPLED

Front heavily damaged
Approx. 35% of armor remaining

FENRIR SQUAD - DESTROYED

Two pilots survived
All Battle Armors destroyed

"Attention, Flashman pilot. Surrender now, or I'll pound your 'mech and your friends to dust." Captain Hauki said through grit teeth, trying to overcome the pain as to not let it show. It would be nice if he'd play along.

Both the Flashman and King Crab were overheating, weapons aimed at one another, but neither were firing.

"My job..." the captain continued "...Is to take that 'mech. But don't think I won't destroy you... Or your companions... if you don't punch out." to make his point, one massive autocannon turned towards the prone Spider up on a hill. Despite being slow, the King Crab would still be faster than a 'mechwarrior on foot.

A new voice cut in on the 'comms, belonging to the eager Bulldog commander. "...And we's got your friends in our sights." they added, the cheerfulness from before the fighting gone. "So's we've got here a stand-off."

Hauki had to take a moment. The tank crews of the Kommandos were dead, or close to it. Both 'mechwarriors had punched out safely, despite grievous damage to their 'mechs.

"The way I see it, my contract with the Hauptmann just expired." came 404's reply. "So, way I see it, my 'mech is my severance package and I'm a free agent. Lead the way to the dropship, 'boss'?"

KARKKILA KOMMANDOS

KING CRAB KGC-010 - COMBAT READY

Life support destroyed
Pilot lightly injured
Approx. 70% armor remaining

CRAB CRB-27 - DESTROYED

Right arm destroyed
Right torso destroyed
Right leg destroyed
Center torso destroyed
Left torso destroyed
Fusion engine heavily damaged
Gyro heavily damaged
Heat sink destroyed
Pilot lightly injured
Approx. 15% of armor remaining

MANTICORE (3055) - DESTROYED

Left side destroyed
Crew killed in action
Approx. 70% of armor remaining

CRAB CRB-20 - SALVAGEABLE (BARLY ...)

Left arm destroyed
Left torso destroyed
Center torso heavily damaged
Right torso damaged
Right leg destroyed
Gyro destroyed
Engine heavily damaged
Two heat sinks destroyed
Pilot lightly injured
Approx. 10% of armor remaining

SALADIN (ARMOR) - DESTROYED

Right side destroyed
Front damaged
Crew killed in action
Approx. 15% of armor remaining

END TALLY

Vasili could do nothing but impotently watch from the dead cockpit of his 'mech as the Flashman began to plod away in front of the King Crab. Any tricks, and the 'mech would be blasted to bits, so clearly, the captain didn't fully trust the mercenary to keep her word.

He kicked open the jammed exit hatch and climbed out of the cockpit into the fresh air outside, the pristine crab fishing location ruined by the metal hulks around it. On the hill, Mercer was slowly making his way down. The Bulldog crew were celebrating their survival and their kill of the enemy Crab. Let them enjoy their victory, the shakes would probably come later once they realized how close they had come to getting killed.

Speaking of which, the Griffin's detached head still lay where it had fallen. He'd have to go check up on the Commander. Get on the Bulldog's comms to get Crimson lance to sweep the area and ensure the OpFor was driven off-planet, if they weren't already leaving. Climbing down and starting to walk towards the Griffin's head, he shook his own. This hadn't gone well for the Company at all.

MINOR KARKKILA VICTORY

AFTERMATH

The sudden death of their commander left the Carmine Company momentarily stunned. Thankfully, with Lyran mercantile efficiency, Hauptmann Haas' organization was designed to withstand a blow such as that. The contracts, after all, were written for the Company and not for Haas directly. Another veteran from the company's inception, Julia Braun of Crimson lance, quickly took command. There was some chafing and several resignations (effective after their current contract), but the Company would survive the loss of their leader.

The loss of an expensive lostech 'mech and the new Spider hurt the Company's bottom line, but not cripplingly so.

The rest of their contract was mostly uneventful, with the largest incident being that of First Leutnant Vasili almost losing a finger during a crab fishing accident with the locals.

For Duke Ostermeier, the mercenaries defeat would prove to be a propaganda victory. Rather than telling the true objective of the raid, it was spun to be a tale of the brave mercenaries fighting against a cowardly Karkkilan raid and forcing them to disengage. It was claimed that the Flashman, despite fighting heroically, succumbed and was destroyed by the foul invader's King Crab, sinking to the bottom of the river, never to be found again. For the mercenaries, this was fine. It made them more popular with the locals, rather than reveal that the only reason they had been attacked was their presence.

Duke Ahonen of Karkkila got exactly what he wanted out of the invasion. The minor damage on the armor of the otherwise-pristine 'mech was to be expected, and the 'mech would soon be painted into the colors of the Duke. The loss of seven lives, two combat vehicles and two crabs, one an antique SLDF design stung, but as far as he was concerned, there were plenty of Crabs to go around.

Captain Hauki got the thrills he had been seeking, and the favor of the Duke for having pulled off the raid successfully. He'd have plenty of time to play around with the new 'mech, as well.

404 got along surprisingly well with the Karkkila Kommandos, considering that she had killed several of them during the raid, agreeing that it was the cost of doing business. Her skills as a Mechwarrior were a boon to the Karkkilans, even if she was an administrative nightmare there as well.

