

CITYTECH

LIFE IN THE BIG CITY

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Mercenary MechWarriors take their relaxation as seriously as their fighting. Scattered throughout space are many worlds almost exclusively reserved for MechWarrior R&R. Mercs in the employ of one house stick together (swearing to a different house cuts you off from former friends), but almost all mercenaries recognize rest worlds as non-combat zones. If his appearance was an honest mistake, a mercenary from the wrong house would usually be given the chance to leave with his life

Maloof's Tavern, on Rahway II, is the favored hangout for 'Mech pilots on that Davion planet. It is large, uninterestingly decorated, and usually noisy and crowded. On any given night, one can find MechWarriors drinking, singing barracks songs, and swapping war stories.

The 'Warriors from Burrow's Crashing Thunder Regiment dominated the revelry that night, celebrating their crushing victory over Kurita troops at Weehawken, on Travis V. Other troops were pleased to hear about the triumph, and turned their own thoughts to the dubious delights of city fighting.

Generally, only MechWarriors are welcome in Maloof's. Technicians or infantry or support personnel spend their time elsewhere, so when a 'Warrior invites one to drink at Maloofs it is a mark of high respect.

Frank Krieger and Abby Farber stood out in their repair clothes, but otherwise blended easily with the crowd at Burrow's table. Unlike most top Techs they had no desire to become MechWarriors. They simply enjoyed tinkering and honing their skills, and were known as possibly the best technicians around. They got along well with the 'Warriors, holding them in no awe.

Oddly, one of the 'Warriors from their company was leaning against the bar. Glaring at the two mechanics, Lt. Razowski jammed his chair into the crowd and indicated the man at the bar.

"Keep an eye on Williams. Don't let him near Krieger or Farber,"

"What's the deal?"

"He's still sore over what Krieger and Farber did on Torwind. You hear about it? Over near New Lodi, our lance ran into a few 'Mechs from Homer's Battalion. We finally knocked them out, but still had the pants knocked off us. Kilmer, Williams, and I didn't have enough intact armor among us to cover a bed, and no way did we have enough usable spare to go around.

"You know a city is an ideal place for finding at least a variety of goods for makeshift spare parts, if nothing else. A good Tech can find a wealth of wires, small motors, and building materials that'll hold a 'Mech together long enough to move it out. Anything is better than standing around with your actuators hanging out in the breeze. Yeah, anything...no matter what Williams says.

Now, Krieger and Farber are two of the best Techs in the sphere, and two of the best scroungers. They got some facing off a wrecked building to cover us. That stuff works, but it needs outer covering, so it was like Christmas to go into a factory and find some truck trailers. It must have been a meat packing plant, because the trucks were all painted with product logos. Now, I agree with Williams that there must have been enough plain metal to go around, but it the kids wanted to have some fun, who am I to argue? Hot mechanics are a rare gift, so cut them some slack.

"We left them alone because there weren't enough tools for everyone. And besides, Williams is totally inept at repairs. But don't quote me. When we got back, Krieger was gone. Farber was there, laughing, and asked how we liked the new design.

"Down my *Wolverine's* arms, it read 'SpamSpamSpam SpamSpamSpamSpam'. Kilmer's *Warhammer* looked OK until you walked around it, and the whole rear torso, in big yellow letters screamed 'LARD.'

"Well, we both laughing, but Williams took one look, grabbed Farber's wrench and chased her until we grabbed him. Up and down both his 'Mech's legs and on its right torso, like a badge it read 'Processed Chicken'."

The merriment was drawing tired stares from a handful of exhausted, sorry-looking members of Kushnir's Battalion of the 42nd Armored Lightning Regiment, sitting dispiritedly at a dark side table. Word was out that they had taken heavy losses on Pike IV. His large frame slumped in as chair, MechWartior Russell stared into a glass and talked to an inattentive cohort

"It's a sad comment on urban living when you see a *BattleMaster* mug a *Phoenix Hawk* in a blind alley.

"John Judd was just a country boy, and I don't think he ever fought in a city before. It's hard to realize there are so many places you shouldn't go.

"We were being pretty stomped at Paramus. Pasquesi's Battalion was everywhere, chasing us all over the map, and tearing us up real bad. We were having no luck breaking through the main street, and so Chen moved our lance down what seemed a quiet side street, hoping to go around Pasquesi. Unfortunately, some of Pasquesi's men had the same idea, and at the next corner, we met up with three ominous looking guys. In the first wave, I almost had my front melted off me. Chen took a nasty shot in the hip that froze him up, and Crane had his arm blown off. Judd, who was a little behind us, turned and ran,

"I don't know if he forgot his jump jets were out, if he thought he was going down a street, or if he thought he could break through, but he ran down an alley that ended in a huge building, with big buildings on both sides, Judd was trapped like a skunk in a basket.

"The *BattleMaster* was after him like a shot, or as much like a shot as a *BattleMaster* can move. He grabbed Crane's arm, and we all know what was coming next, but couldn't do anything about it.

"I moved down the street toward the alley, and got there in time to watch the *BattleMaster* raise the severed arm and bring it crashing down right an the head of Judd's 'Mech. There was a huge cloud of debris, and then the sight of a headless *Phoenix Hawk*. I was trying to shoot at the *BattleMaster*, but it was more like throwing pebbles. After a few seconds I realized that there was no sign of John, and that the *BattleMaster* was going to push me aside if I didn't move. Just then, I got the order to retreat. I hate to say it, but I was glad to be getting out of there, win or lose.

"Chen lost his 'Mech but he got out of there himself to fight another day. Crane, of course, lost the arm off his 'Mech, and mine sustained some nasty engine damage. There were a lot of losses in our entire battalion, but I just keep thinking of John in his *Phoenix Hawk*, just before the blow fell."

He raised his glass "To John Judd—a damn fine MechWarrior—and just a country boy."

Two men at one end of the bar were trying to balance full glasses on their heads, and laughing every time they spilled. At Burrow's table a young-looking 'Warrior watched them. The veteran next to him snorted, "Plague."

"What?"

“Locusts—you know, plague of *Locusts*. *Locust* pilots are the weirdest. Ask any MechWarrior—even a *Locust* pilot. They’re proud of their reputation.

“A lot of it is probably because they’re not taken seriously. The first time you see one of those gooney-bird things in battle, you’re not exactly over-awed. But they move like crazy, and they’re still ‘Mechs. If you’re not in a ‘Mech yourself, a *Locust* is plenty scary,

“There’s this *Locust* in Fink’s Lance. The pilot’s Kim Howard, tall, gawky guy, who looks kind of like a *Locust*. He loves nothing more than ‘stomping rats’, you know, infantry. For a *Locust* pilot, it’s probably the best chance to feel big.

“I saw Howard do it the hard way in New Mendham, though. He was scooting that little ostrich all over the streets like it was nothing, just asking for trouble. Sure enough, the road makes a turn, he doesn’t quite make it, and goes skidding, just as an Infantry unit is coming out of this house to take a swipe at him. So the *Locust* goes barreling through this infantry unit and sends them rolling around like oranges, then the ‘Mech smashes feet first into a house, and the whole thing caves in on it.

“Now, I don’t know if Howard hit his head, or panicked, or was just trying to be funny. But his ‘Mach is lying on the ground, for crying out loud, and what does he do but eject out the top. He goes flying back through what was left of the infantry and I don’t think anyone who saw it will ever get over it. One of the infantry guys swears Howard was yelling ‘Whoopwhoopwhoop’ as he went by, but it was probably just the wind.

“So Howard didn’t die a hero’s death.”

“The sonofabitch didn’t die. He must’ve landed on his head. He’s getting a new arm and leg, and if anyone wants to pull his ‘Mech out of the rubble, we can have a crazy, bionic *Locust* pilot to contend with.”

“No, thanks. And the moral of the story is: Don’t run in the City.”

“No, the moral of the story is *Locust* pilots are the weirdest.”

Neil Armstrong Edlemann was known as the old-timer’s old timer. He had worked his way to battalion commander, and everyone expected that some day he would take command of D’Anna’s Regiment. Edlemann never got that final promotion, though. Some said his attitude was all wrong for command, because he didn’t really like fighting. Others said that was the best attitude for a commander,

Edlemann felt he was getting too old for the fight, and was turning his *Thunderbolt* over to his niece Kate. They sat together in Maloof's and he spun war story after story, cautionary tales.

"Nothing worse than some stupid kid, just got his first chance in a 'Mech wanting to show everyone how much he knows.

"I don't know what we did to deserve Scott Markwell in our unit, but it takes someone high ranking to do something like that, and I wish I knew whose butt I'd burned,

"All I know is that when Murray bought it, the kid appeared as a replacement. He was somebody's cousin, or nephew, or some damn thing, and I was supposed to be his nursemaid through his first battles.

"I have to admit the kid was pretty good. 'Showed a lot of potential', is what you would probably write on his report. But attitude! 'I can't wait to crunch a big guy,' that kind of thing. Gung-ho is better than asleep, but it's still dangerous.

"There wasn't a lot of time to get acquainted before we were leaving for Parsippany, and I figured it would be easier to deal with the kid after he'd eaten some laser and was a little less impressed with the whole idea of battle. I just wanted him to quiet down a little—I didn't want him silenced.

"No one really wanted to go to Parsippany, except maybe Markwell. It's just a jerkwater, or jerkwaterless burg on a pointless planet, but Halpern's regiment was using the area near it as a base, and so we had to take it out. It's like that sometimes.

"It looked to be a nasty fight. Our company was to draw Halpern's troops into the city to reduce their advantage, and the rest of our people would follow up behind. Markwell understood we were in a bad position, but just felt it was a chance for more glory in victory. He was right, but he forgot about the chance for stupidity in defeat.

"They jumped on us right away when we landed, and it was all I could do to take care of myself and keep a general idea of where everyone was. It's hard to keep track of men in a city. So I couldn't keep any special eye on Markwell. I just kept getting flashes every now and then of a *Rifleman* running around shooting off anything he could. It's obvious you can't fire more than one large laser at a time, but this kid was going crazy. He did do some real damage to the other side, but he was asking to go out in a blaze of glory.

I got on the commline, and said, 'Take it easy ace. Aren't you overheating?' He said everything was goosey-gassey, but I was having serious doubts.

"Sure enough, I couldn't raise him on the comline after that, Through the smoke, I finally caught a glimpse of the *Rifleman* just in time to see its torso blow in an ammo explosion. Markwell should have been knocked out or dead by that point, but it turned out that he ran out the leg when he shut down, gasping for air. The idiot was lucky enough to make it into a building that wasn't wrecked in the shooting, and somehow managed to hook up with a friendly infantry unit. He got back with us, but it was almost not worth coming back. His 'Mech had been taken for what parts were left, and whoever had sent him in the first place could not be happy to have him back 'Mechless.

"I don't know what happened to Markwell. He could have been a good 'Warrior after learning that lesson, but sometimes it's too late. So, take an old man's advice. Don't wait till you're on the Field to learn to hold back."

"I'd like to propose another toast—to the city rat, the only fighter worth a damn in a city—the infantrymen."

"Infantry!" slurred a voice from another table. "What's that against a 'Mech?"

"Infantry can clean a 'Mech's chronometer, a tale not to be wished on any MechWarrior, although it might be appropriate for some smug slugs. I know a guy, Tony Barnes, kind of a hot shot jerk. You know the type—'Nothing on two metal legs can stop me'. He may have been right, because what stopped him was something on 56 flesh and bone legs - Finnegan's infantry.

"The way I heard it, from Jones, the Medium Lance Commander, Barnes walked his *Rifleman* into the upper part of a four-storey residential building at the battle of Graiset. Little did he know the infantry had been there for a while, had seen him coming, and were just waiting for him in the back of the building. So he was trying to chew his way through the building when out of all these rooms came a bunch of Laser Infantry, swarming all around him like gnats. He started flailing around, shooting wildly. It knocked some of them out, but there were a lot left. Enough to eventually wear him out.

"As he knocked away at the building, the remaining forces were able to keep moving back into the small space left, and keep firing,

He was banged up really badly and was not going to last much longer anyway, when he took a hit in the sensors

“At that point, he ejected and managed to get through the hole in the roof. What was left of his ‘Mech went to spare parts for the opposing gang.

“No one knows for sure where Barnes is now. He is among the most disgraced of the Dispossessed—a man who lost his ‘Mech to foot soldiers. There is a nasty rumor that he’s had to join an infantry unit himself.”