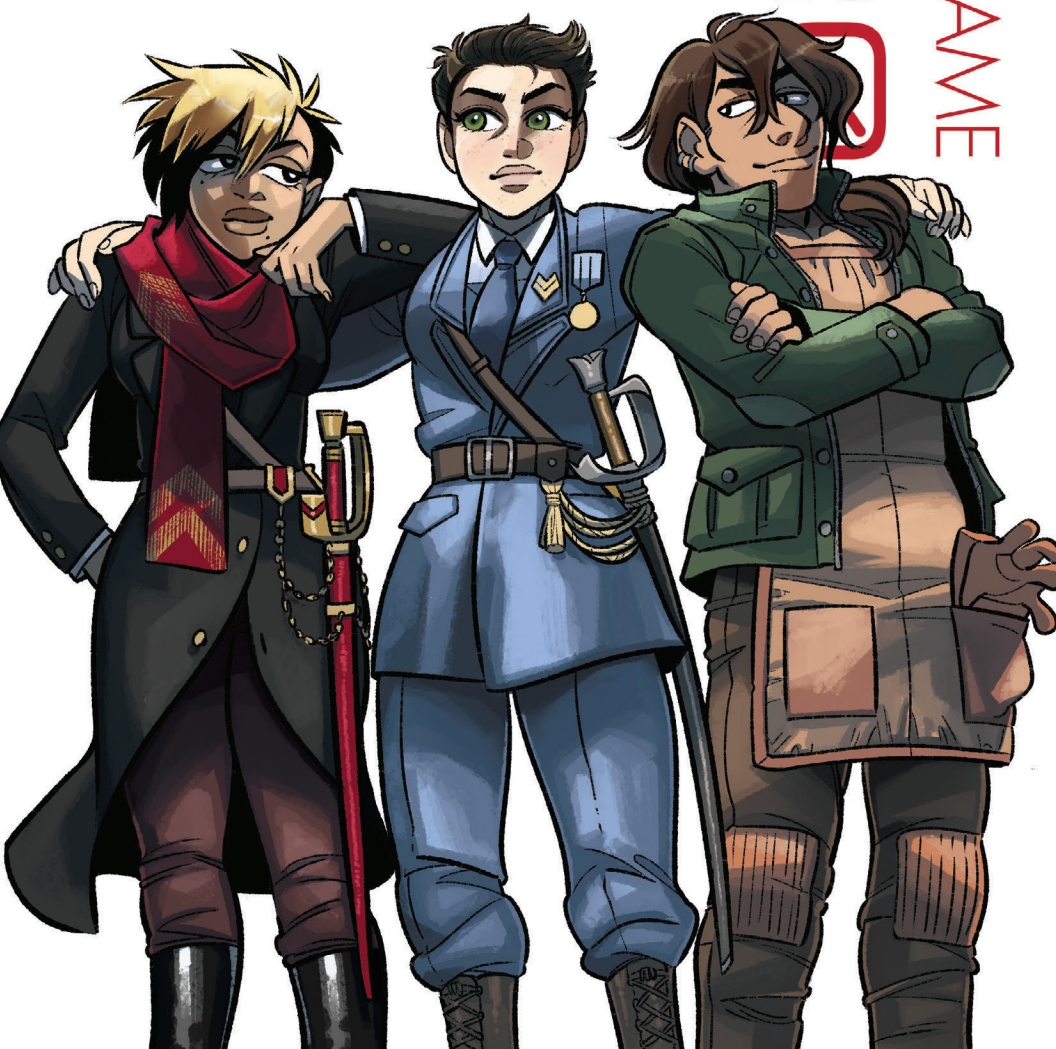


# FIREBRANDS

D. VINCENT BAKER

MEGUEY BAKER

MOBILE FRAME  
ZERRO



# FIREBRANDS

A ROLE-PLAYING GAME  
D. VINCENT BAKER

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## MOBILE FRAME ZERO

The year is SC 0245. Humanity has spread through the Milky Way, using transit gate technology to colonize the galaxy. **Mobile frames** are the hard-working, hard-fighting combat- and labor mecha that they've brought with them.

You are romantic ace mobile frame pilots, caught up in an undeclared war for the future of the **Bantral system**.

*MOBILE FRAME ZERO: FIREBRANDS* is a casual role-playing game by D. Vincent Baker, set in Joshua A.C. Newman's *MOBILE FRAME ZERO* universe. You don't need to be familiar with *MOBILE FRAME ZERO: RAPID ATTACK* or *MOBILE FRAME ZERO: INTERCEPT ORBIT* to play.

To play, you'll need 3-5 players, a copy of this playbook for each, and a handful of coins.

# INTRO

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## THE BANTRAL SYSTEM IS NOT AT WAR.

Bantral was never, until recently, a wealthy colony. The planet had resources enough just to maintain its own small society, but none worth exporting. There was never any need for the corporate sponsors of its initial colonization to interfere with its administration. In the halls of Solar Union commerce, land shares on Bantral traded for nothing, no cost, no gain. You might throw “all of my land shares on Bantral” into your golf wager as a joke, or give them as a prank gift to a friend.

Recently, though, there was a minor development in an obscure biochemical processing technology, and the novel features of Bantral’s ecosystem went from being a scientific curiosity to being an untapped and unknowably deep wellspring of wealth. Land shares on Bantral are no longer an ignored asterisk on anyone’s balance sheet.

The handover of administration and power from the descendants of Bantral’s original Terran colonists to the newly-interested legal rightsholders—the self-proclaimed “Landowners”—has been cheerful, orderly, and mutually profitable. There have been a few isolated spats, of course, but there’s been practically no protracted, bitter, bloody war of resistance between the displaced old Bantraesh aristocracy and the offworld Landowners. When a Landowner uses the threat of violence to force a hereditary great family to give up their land, keeping them on as guides and entertainers, it’s “cheerful.” When they offer them in exchange a negligible sum, it’s “mutually profitable.” When a fiery company of Bantraesh irregulars responds by raiding their holdings and seizing arms and materiel against future battles, and local insurrectionists take advantage of the upset by forcibly occupying a biochem processing facility, and the Landowners respond with ruthless crackdowns and martial law, these are “a few isolated spats.”

To admit otherwise would be to invite the intervention of the Terran Transit Authority’s mediation and peacekeeping forces. Then no one would get rich from Bantral but the TTA.

## SETTING UP

You'll need 3–6 players. Set aside an hour to play, more if you like. Each player needs their own copy of this playbook.

The object of the game is to **create messy entanglements**. Fall in love with your enemies, ally with your rivals, fight with your friends.

To start the game, **introduce your characters**.

During play, take turns around the table. On your turn, **choose another player and choose a game** to play with them. Go around the table at least once, and as many times as you want.

To end the game, resolve the **outstanding questions** you've raised.

## INTRODUCING YOUR CHARACTERS

Take turns introducing your characters.

On your turn, choose a **faction**, three **attractive qualities**, and a **name**. Announce them to the table. You need at least one player for each faction, so when you're choosing, take into account the choices of the players who went before you.

Write your details on a tent card so that everybody can see them and remind themselves who you are.

## PLAYING THE GAMES

To start play, everyone turns to page 8 and plays **Solitaire**.

Thereafter, take turns around the table. Choose any player to go first.

On your turn, choose another player and choose a game. There are nine games:

**Solitaire** on pages 8–11;

**An Animated Disagreement** on pages 12–13;

**A Chase** on pages 14–15;

**A Conversation Over Food** on pages 16–17;

**A Dance** on pages 18–19;

**A Free-for-all** on pages 20–21;

**Meeting Sword to Sword** on pages 22–23;

**Stealing Time Together** on pages 24–25; and

**A Tactical Skirmish** on pages 26–27.

Both of you turn to that game in this booklet. Follow the instructions there. Some of the games are one-on-one, some allow other players to join, and some are for everybody to play at once.

You can choose any game you want. Between turns, you can flip through the games and plan for which one you might want to play next.

You can choose any player you want, but keep in mind which players have gotten to play more games and which have gotten to play fewer.

When it's not your turn and you aren't playing the current game, you can choose either to watch and listen, or to play **Solitaire** by yourself.

## YOUR DUTIES

Play easy, play fair, and always let the other players make their own decisions for themselves.

Try to get your character into messy entanglements with the others.

Whenever anyone asks you a question about your character or the current situation, answer it. If you don't know the answer, make it up.

If you find that you've missed a rule or played a game incorrectly, just try to go along with the other players and do what's most fair. You can work out what should have happened later, when you aren't playing.

## GETTING KILLED

It won't surprise you when it happens, but your character might be **killed** during play. You can create and introduce a new character to play, you can continue play as a supporting character already part of the game, or else you can keep playing without a character, asking and answering questions and participating in the games that call for an audience.

## ENDING PLAY

Go around the table playing games at least once. After once around, anyone can decide to end play at the end of any player's turn.

**To end play**, go around the table one last time. On your turn, bring up any unresolved question you have about the characters' fates. Say what you think the possible outcomes could be. The other players can contribute possible outcomes as well.

Everyone votes to determine which of the possible outcomes is the one that comes true.

If you don't have a question, pass your turn.

# FACTION: THE BANTRAESH

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The **Bantraesh** are the aristocratic families of Bantral. You are a hereditary warrior prince or princess of a noble family, a mobile frame ace pilot, and the offworld "Landowners" have robbed you of your wealth and estates. You've been raised to believe that the wealth of Bantral belongs to the Bantraesh.

Bantraesh of the same family are your **friends**. Bantraesh of different families are your **rivals**. The Landowners and the Revolutionaries are your **enemies**.

Choose three **attractive qualities**. You're: beautiful, cultured, enthusiastic, fiery, passionate, radiant, rich, severe, strong.

Choose a **name** that will be easy to remember. You can use your own real name if you like.

Choose a **family name** too.

Mobile frames are the walking combat- and labor mecha that humanity brought with them to colonize the galaxy. Your **mobile frame** is military model, probably a Chub, custom-built for you personally, armed and armored in grand style, kitted out in heraldic insignia and the colors of your house.

Your **soldiers** are your siblings, your cousins, and your household guard. Think of them as knights, retainers, and loyal warriors.

Write your details on a tent card and put it out on the table.

# FACTION: THE LANDOWNERS

---

The **Landowners** are, according to Solar Union law, the rightsholders to the wealth of Bantral. You are a mobile frame ace pilot employed to defend and secure their rights.

The Landowners, their soldiers, and their officers are all your **friends**. Officially, the Bantraesh are your **rivals**, but when fights break out, they're your **enemies**. The Revolutionaries are your **enemies**.

Choose three **attractive qualities**. You're: confident, conflicted, educated, fashionable, friendly, good-hearted, sophisticated, striking, thoughtful.

Choose a **name** that will be easy to remember. You can use your own real name if you like.

Choose a **company name, unit designation, or squad callsign** too.

Mobile frames are the walking combat- and labor mecha that humanity brought with them to colonize the galaxy. Your **mobile frame** is a high-end military model, probably an Osprey, armed and armored to your exact specifications, bearing the insignia of your company and rank.

Your **soldiers** are like you, professional war fighters employed by the Landowners. Think of them as a military unit under your command.

Write your details on a tent card and put it out on the table.

# FACTION: THE REVOLUTIONARIES

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The undeclared war between the Landowners and the Bantraesh is an opportunity for the people of Bantral to rise up. You are a **revolutionary** captain, a mobile frame ace pilot, fighting for freedom from both hereditary tyranny and offworld rule. It's your opinion that the wealth of Bantral should belong to its people.

While both the Bantraesh and the Landowners are your **enemies** in principle, some of their more sympathetic individuals, families, and squads are your **rivals** and **friends** in practice. And while in principle the revolution is entirely your **friends**, in practice it contains **rivals** and **enemies** as well.

Choose three **attractive qualities**. You're: charming, dashing, devoted, down-to-earth, funny, generous, idealistic, inspiring, kind, resolute.

Choose a **name** that will be easy to remember. You can use your own real name if you like.

Choose **what you do**, the profession or occupation of your daily life. Choose something that brings you into regular contact with the Bantraesh, the Landowners, or both.

Mobile frames are the walking combat- and labor mecha that humanity brought with them to colonize the galaxy. Your **mobile frame** is a repurposed labor model, probably a Hi-Leg or Commissar, much repaired, armed and armored with mismatched and makeshift systems, with no insignia except maybe a symbol of uprising, justice, or liberty.

Your **soldiers** are your fellow revolutionaries, working people committed to fight for their own rights and self-determination. Think of them as your friends and colleagues pushed into a desperate corner.

Write your details on a tent card and put it out on the table.



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## SETUP

Play by yourself, quietly. Use the section for your faction.

## CONDUCTING SOLITAIRE

Choose what you've been doing, and then choose what's happened. Choose freely.

## ENDING SOLITAIRE

Because of these events, there's something about you, some detail of your mood, your actions, your appearance, that **everyone else might notice**. Decide what the detail is. The next game you play, say it.

Because of these events, there might be something, some news, gossip, or intelligence, that **everyone else has heard**. Decide whether there is. If there is, then at the beginning of the next game, whether you're playing or not, say it.

## BANTRAESH

- » You've been entertaining interloping offworlders in your family estate...
  - ...And they've proven gracious and easygoing, and you're warming to them.
  - ...And they've been thoughtlessly presumptuous with your best goods.
  - ...And they've been treating you as a servant.
- » You've been meeting in secret with the noble heads of other local Bantraesh...
  - ...And they proved bickering, shortsighted, stupid and jealous.
  - ...And they agreed to follow your plan, but first you must show results.
  - ...And they demanded that you lay off your violent, dangerous actions.
- » You've been training with your soldiers...
  - ...And your soldiers showed themselves quick, flexible, and well-disciplined.
  - ...And your soldiers were concerned more with fashion and style than with fighting effectiveness.
  - ...And you were very nearly caught out by an enemy.
- » You've been prowling the transit highways for unguarded offworlder shipments...
  - ...And you spotted a fine prize with only a small escort.
  - ...And by chance you discovered that your yourself were being watched.
  - ...And you discovered that the offworlders have doubled their escorts.
- » You've been seeking support from the revolutionaries...
  - ...And they demanded that you denounce your own family first.
  - ...And you found them lax, under-coordinated, and poorly led.
  - ...And they agreed eagerly to fight with you in return for arms and supplies.
- » You've been taking offworlders hunting, fishing, and touring your family's estates...
  - ...And you contrived to abandon them in a mucky lowland place.
  - ...And they proved bright company, cheery, appreciative, and outgoing.
  - ...And they acted fools and boors, spoiling the sport.
- » You've been spending time with your immediate family, trying to get a handle on what's happening...
  - ...And your sibling goaded you to fight more fiercely than you have been.
  - ...And all agreed to bear these insults with patience, to be revenged in future.
  - ...And instead you fought bitterly and split yourselves.

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## LANDOWNER

- » You've been drilling maneuvers with your squad...
  - ...And they showed excellent discipline and team spirit.
  - ...And they stumbled over each other like raw, uncoordinated recruits.
  - ...And they've been overworked; they're tired, sloppy, and impatient.
- » You've been scouting and touring the region with hired Bantraesh guides...
  - ...And they contrived to abandon you in poor and unfamiliar ground.
  - ...And you were struck by Bantral's marvelous vistas and untamed beauty.
  - ...And they treated their servants with shocking high-handed cruelty.
- » You've been patrolling, maintaining an armed presence...
  - ...And a group sporting populist emblems threw bricks and garbage at you.
  - ...And a child ran up to you, screaming at you to go home.
  - ...And a company in a drinking house toasted and cheered you.
- » You've been escorting goods and equipment along the transit highways...
  - ...And you came under fire from afar, but continued unchecked.
  - ...And you found and disabled a terrifyingly large bomb hidden by the roadside.
  - ...And you enjoyed the outing in the high, gorgeous countryside.
- » You've been off duty, drinking and relaxing with your fellow soldiers...
  - ...And you found that you couldn't fully relax and enjoy yourself the way they did.
  - ...And afterward you confronted a band of angry Bantraesh, cursing you and brandishing arms.
  - ...And the next day, revolutionaries firebombed the establishment.
- » You've been off duty, going among the locals in civilian dress...
  - ...And someone tried to murder you with a knife.
  - ...And you were met not with hostility but with a kind of wary friendliness.
  - ...And you saw an old Bantraesh noble beating an underling with a cane.
- » You've been tracking revolutionaries and taking them into custody...
  - ...And one escaped when her friends waylaid you on the road.
  - ...And one begged you to let her free, which you did.
  - ...And some of them were bearing arms stolen from the Bantraesh, or provided by them.

## REVOLUTIONARY

- » You've been quietly building support among the people of the region...
  - ...And you had a close run-in with a Bantraesh counterintelligence agent.
  - ...And you're pleased with the armaments you've collectively amassed.
  - ...And some of your colleagues are getting restless to strike.
- » You've been conducting surveillance of the offworlders' transit shipments and troop movements...
  - ...And you expect a lightly-escorted materiel transport tonight.
  - ...And after several assaults and losses, they're committing double escorts.
  - ...And you saw a friendly meeting between Bantraesh and offworld officers.
- » You've been seeking Bantraesh support against the offworlders...
  - ...And they dismissed you, saying that they did not need the help of rabble.
  - ...And they promised you food, safety, and money, but not arms.
  - ...And they demanded that you commit yourself to their cause instead.
- » You've been seeking support from the offworlders against the Bantraesh...
  - ...And they promised to deliver arms and intelligence in return for future loyalty.
  - ...And they didn't understand the situation, but made vague promises.
  - ...And you came away with a caseful of hard cash.
- » You've been overseeing the retrofit of labor frames for combat...
  - ...And it was slow, filthy, exhausting work.
  - ...And you were pleased and impressed with the cunning work of your technicians and makeshift armorers.
  - ...And you feel certain that the forces you must face will crush and destroy you.
- » You've been raiding Bantraesh plants and warehouses for materiel...
  - ...And you seized the mobile frame of a night guard.
  - ...And you nearly blundered into a deadly ambush, but pure chance revealed it to you in time.
  - ...And there are a dozen crates of munitions in your home, right now, visible to any who happen to look.
- » You've been meeting with your spies in the local Bantraesh households...
  - ...And today one of them was apprehended and missed your meeting.
  - ...And they told you that the noble heads of the family have sold out to the offworlders after all.
  - ...And today you didn't keep your meeting because someone was following you.

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## SETUP

Everyone plays. Decide with your chosen partner what is the matter of your disagreement, where you are holding your discussion, and who else is present.

What do you notice about each other? What have you heard?

You and your partner each state your position. Everyone else takes the part of your audience, real or imaginary.

During the discussion, anyone can ask anyone for details about the setting, occasion, and circumstances.

## CONDUCTING THE DISCUSSION

The audience conducts the discussion.

Audience members, you take turns posing challenges to the position holders. Both position holders must answer each challenge. You decide who goes first, or let one of them volunteer.

Once both have answered, award 1 coin to the one who you think gave the best answer. You have to choose.

If either position holder goes on too long, you can cut them off (hoots and boos optional) and award 1 coin to their counterpart, or else just ask them to kindly wrap up.

They are absolutely not allowed to interrupt or rebut one another. If either position holder interrupts the other or tries to get in a rebuttal when it's not their turn to answer, cut them off at once and award 1 coin to their counterpart.

## ENDING THE DISCUSSION

After three challenges, they compare coins. Whatever proportion of coins they each hold, they can be confident that, if they were forced to commit, the same proportion of the audience, real or imaginary, would side with them.

# AN ANIMATED DISAGREEMENT

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## CHALLENGES

- » Please express your position in the form of a slogan that people can rally behind.
- » Please explain how your position is best for the most people.
- » Please explain how your position carries the weight of tradition, law, and social order.
- » Please explain how your position is the most urgent and expedient.
- » Please explain how your position best serves the neglected interests of the underprivileged.
- » Please express your commitment to your position, even if it's not actually "true" or "right."
- » Please explain how your position is the most just and equitable.
- » Please explain how the other position has merit and is worth real consideration.
- » Please make a personal attack on your counterpart.

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## SETUP

Only you and your chosen partner play. Choose which of you is the hunter and which is the quarry. Ask your partner how the chase came about.

What do you notice about each other? What have you heard?

During the chase, anyone may ask anyone for details about the landscape, what's ahead, what's behind, and what course the hunt might take.

## CONDUCTING THE CHASE

The quarry conducts the chase.

First, say where you're going.

Lead the hunter through a series of four challenges and admissions. Choose freely, except that the third one must be an admission.

During the chase, you and the hunter gain coins, representing the distance you're each able to gain on the other.

## MOBILE FRAMES

Decide with your partner whether you're in your mobile frames, and conduct the chase accordingly.

## ENDING THE CHASE

After a total of four challenges and admissions, compare coins.

If you have more coins than the hunter, you break away and escape.

If the hunter has as many coins as you, or more, choose one:

- » I've somehow turned myself around. I blunder into you.
- » I've come to some temporary security: a warren, a tree to climb, a door I can lock behind me. Here is where I go to ground.
- » You've driven me into a blind way and have cornered me.
- » Your allies have cut me off, and I'm brought to.
- » I'm exhausted and you overtake me.
- » You've proven yourself and I let you catch me.

## CHALLENGES

- » I know this ground well. Follow me if you dare, but throw. On tails, you're plunging heedless into danger, and I need not choose any admissions during the chase after all.
- » I race along a high and perilous ledge. Follow me if you dare, but throw. On tails, you have to slow to pick your way carefully along, and I gain a coin.
- » I press through a thorny briar. Follow me if you want, but throw. On tails, you're tangled and torn and must extract yourself, and I gain a coin.
- » I plunge through stinking, muddy water. Follow me if you want, but you'll need to ignore the stench and filth and ruin your clothing.
- » I scramble up a steep incline. Follow me if you can keep up, but throw. On tails, the way is exhausting, and I gain a coin.
- » I reach clear ground and leap away. Follow me if you can rally yourself, but throw. On tails, you stand gasping, and I gain a coin.
- » I lead a dizzying course through switchback and blind. Follow me if you want, but throw. On tails, you're lost, and won't be able to find your own way back.
- » I leap out over nothing and make a hard, precarious landing. Follow me if you dare, but throw. On heads, you gain 1 coin. On tails, though, you barely catch yourself, you're clinging on with all your strength, and the chase ends now with you at my mercy.

## ADMISSIONS

- » I don't know this ground well, and at a turning I hesitate. Throw. On heads, you rush to overtake me, and so gain 2 coins.
- » I slip on treacherous ground and scramble to keep my footing. Throw. On heads, you slide to overtake me, and so gain 2 coins.
- » I steal a look back at you, and you're nearer than I thought. Throw. On heads, you put on a burst of speed, and so gain 2 coins.
- » I risk leaving the trail and standing quiet while you race past. Throw. On heads, you spot me and don't overshoot, and so gain 2 coins.
- » I've led myself into a dead end, and have to dash past you to win free. Throw. On heads, you head me off, and so gain 2 coins.
- » I come to a dangerous climb or leap and I hesitate, steeling myself. Throw. On heads, you race up behind me, and so gain 2 coins.
- » There are other enemies ahead of me, and I must suddenly change my course. Throw. On heads, you can gain on me, and so gain 2 coins.



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## SETUP

Ask your chosen partner how you two came to be eating together.

Other players can join freely, if it makes sense for their characters to also be present at the meal.

What do you notice about each other? What have you heard?

During the meal, anyone can ask anyone for details about the setting, occasion, and circumstances.

## CONDUCTING THE CONVERSATION

Take turns. The person with the lowest social standing takes the first turn. If this isn't clear, have another player choose who takes the first turn at whim.

On your turn, choose one or more of your conversational partners and choose an action:

- » Ask a topical question;
- » Engage in actual improvised conversation;
- » Pass, saying instead something about the food;
- » Leave the conversation.

## ENDING THE CONVERSATION

End the conversation either when everyone has passed in a row, or when everyone has left the conversation but one.

# A CONVERSATION OVER FOOD

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## TOPICAL QUESTIONS

- » I make an ignorant social or diplomatic blunder. Do you let me recover gracefully or do you hold it against me?
- » I'm feeling expansive. What do you want to know about me?
- » I'm feeling generous. What favor do you ask me?
- » I hope you don't bring \_ up. Do you?
- » I need you to come clean about \_. Do you?
- » I accidentally spill the secret that \_. I cover it gracefully, but do you pick up on it anyway?
- » Something gives you away to me. What?
- » I'm trying to keep you occupied while \_. Do you go for it?
- » I hope to find common ground with you about \_. Is there any?
- » I need you to reassure me about \_. Can you?
- » I hope to convince you that \_. Can I?
- » I hope to get you to commit to \_. Can I?

## LIKELY TOPICS

Feel free to bring any of these topics into the conversation:

- » An airdropped crate of Landowner munitions that has gone missing.
- » Someone's family's involvement in lawless violence and sabotage.
- » The murder of the noble head of one of the local Bantraesh families.
- » Someone's cousin who has gone missing, maybe taken, maybe in hiding, maybe fled.
- » A particular Landowner's poor record of compliance with the laws and customs of Bantral.
- » The unknown identity of a notorious revolutionary captain.
- » The unknown identity of a notorious highway robber.
- » The revolutionary fervor of the local citizens.
- » The longstanding exploitation of the local people by the Bantraesh.

Feel free to bring topics of your own into the conversation too.

---

## SETUP

Ask your chosen partner how you two came to be dancing together.

Other players can join freely, if it makes sense for their characters to also be present at the dance.

What do you notice about each other? What have you heard?

During the dance, anyone can ask anyone for details about the setting, occasion, and circumstances.

## CONDUCTING THE DANCE

Take turns asking each other questions. Each of you gets to ask the other two questions, taking turns, and then the dance ends.

If other players have joined the dance, you each get to ask two questions in total, choosing which dancing partner for each question. Take turns around the circle as the figures of the dance bring you from partner to partner.

The worst dancer asks the first question, or else have another player choose who asks the first question at whim.

## ENDING THE DANCE

Once every dancer has asked two questions of each of your dancing partners, the dance ends.

## QUESTIONS

- » My hair has fallen in front of my ear. Do you touch my face?
- » Your mouth is close to my ear. What do you say?
- » The dance's figures separate us. When they bring us back together again, do you blush?
- » I lose my place in the dance. Do you let me stumble, or do you draw me back into place?
- » Something about me catches your eye and your look lingers. What is it?
- » You have the opportunity to draw me close and hold me for a moment. Do you take it?
- » My face is close to yours. Do you turn subtly toward me, or subtly away?
- » You may, at this moment in the dance, place your hand upon my elbow, my shoulder, my waist, or my hip. Which do you choose?
- » When the dance ends, will you stand with me or rush away?
- » At this moment in the dance, you laugh. At what?
- » The dance's figures bring you to dance with someone else. Whom? When the dance brings you back to me again, are you pleased or disappointed?
- » This moment in the dance allows me to step close to you and linger very near. Am I welcome?

---

## SETUP

Everyone plays. Everyone's characters meet, in your mobile frames, to do battle. Ask your chosen partner where the free-for-all takes place.

What do you notice about each other? What have you heard?

During the free-for-all, anyone may ask anyone for details about the location, landscape, and circumstances.

## CONDUCTING THE FREE-FOR-ALL

Go around the table. Each of you gets two turns. You go first.

On your turn, choose an enemy player's character and give them a challenge. They answer it freely.

## ENDING THE FREE-FOR-ALL

When everyone's had two turns to make challenges, and it's comes back around to you for your third turn, choose an end to the battle. Choose the one that best fits the action up to that point.

After the free-for-all, remind everybody that if the battle has left them with unfinished business, a grudge, or a real tactical objective, they should bring it into their next game.

## ENDS

- » We fight briefly but it's obvious that none of us will be able to seize the upper hand. We reach an unspoken agreement to meet again under less equal circumstances and go our separate ways.
- » We fight fiercely, but it threatens to spill over into civilian areas. Rather than put innocents in danger, we leave the fight unresolved.
- » The fighting is intense, but soon [name one or more allied characters] dominate the field. Everyone else limps home for repairs and recovery.
- » The fight's explosive. We do an enormous amount of damage to the landscape and to [name whatever is nearby]. When the fight ends, [name one or more allied characters] are still standing, and everyone else is lucky to have survived at all.

# A FREE-FOR-ALL

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## CHALLENGES

- » I open fire on you, pounding you with everything I've got. Can your frame take it? How?
- » I rush you. I'm faster than you'd believe. Can you react in time and get away? How?
- » I hold back, lighting you up with sensors and comms, zeroing you for my allies. Are you able to evade? How?
- » I button up and march on you, shrugging off everything you throw at me. Can you stand me off? How?
- » I'm on your back and I outmaneuver you at every turn. Can you shake me? How?
- » Far across the landscape I raise my rifle. I can put a shot into your reactor core, slice off your comms antenna, unhinge your knee, put out your eye. Do you avoid my shot? How?
- » I fall out of the sky like a hunting bird. Do you survive my attack? How?
- » I heave you bodily off the ground, lift you up to smash you down again. Are you able to get out of my grip? How?
- » I keep to cover, circling with tactical precision. I'm almost impossible to spot. Do you see me coming? How?
- » I get the drop on you and hit you with a roaring jet of flame, steel-meltingly hot. Can your frame take it? How?
- » I rain a barrage of rockets down on you out of nowhere. Can you escape them? How?
- » I do \_\_. Can you survive it / dodge it / hold me off? How?

## ENDS (CONT.)

- » We fight to a bitter, bloody stalemate. At the end of the day no one has prevailed, and we all have to retreat to lick our wounds.
- » Pretty soon we all realize that we're showing off more than we're fighting. By the end, we're cheering each other on, and [name a character] wins the battle on pure acclaim.
- » It's serious fighting, but rules of engagement hold. By the end, [name one or more allied characters] hold the field, but everyone's given and taken their share of fair hits and no one's crossed any lines.

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## SETUP

Only you and your chosen partner play. Decide together how the two of you came to be standing alone sword to sword.

What do you notice about each other? What have you heard?

During the duel, anyone can ask anyone for details about the location and circumstances.

## MOBILE FRAMES

Decide with your chosen partner whether you're in your mobile frames with your plasma cutters, or unframed with simple steel. Conduct the duel accordingly.

If you're in your mobile frames, being "killed" can mean that your mobile frame is destroyed but you've survived, or that you've indeed been killed. Decide with your partner.

## CONDUCTING THE DUEL

To open the duel, ask a leading question. The better with the sword begins. If you don't know which of you that is, throw a coin.

Take turns asking leading questions, back and forth.

At any time after the third leading question, either of you can choose to ask one of the closing questions instead.

## ENDING THE DUEL

Keep asking questions back and forth until an answer ends the duel.

Note that some of the leading questions might end the duel, and some of the closing questions might allow the duel to continue, depending on the answer.

# MEETING SWORD TO SWORD

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## LEADING QUESTIONS

- » You touch me, cutting me along the rib or across the arm. Do you press your attack or give me a moment?
- » I have my sword's point to your clavicle. Do you submit, or do you twist away to rejoin the fight?
- » We lock swords and your mouth is near my ear. What do you say?
- » I touch you, cutting you along the rib or across the arm. Do you withdraw and run, or do you rejoin the fight?
- » I pretend to falter and dip my blade. Do I draw you out, or do you recognize the ploy and hold steady?
- » I launch a sustained attack with my weight behind it. Do you give ground readily or grudgingly?
- » I overreach slightly and you have an opportunity to slip in a dirty little cut. Do you take it?
- » We circle, swords' tips touching. What do you say to me?
- » You thrust perilously close to my face. Do you cut me? Where?
- » I catch your wrist in my hand and draw you close to me. Do you let your sword drop, or do you shove me away and fight on?
- » I thrust and you barely turn it; a fraction slower and you'd been cut through. Does it exhilarate you or chill you?

## CLOSING QUESTIONS

- » You get your sword's point well between us, inside my guard. If you drive it home, you kill me. Do you drive it home, or do you allow me to step back and recover myself?
- » I get my sword's point high up under your chin. Do you submit or flee?
- » You knock my sword rattling out of my hand. Do you allow me to recover it, or must I submit?
- » I pierce your side, but in so doing leave myself open to a return stroke. Do you deliver it?
- » I seize momentum and initiative and drive you backward. If you stand, throw. On heads, you hold me back; on tails, I cut you through, killing you. Do you stand, or do you allow yourself to be driven?



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## SETUP

Only you and your chosen partner play. Ask them how you two came to be stealing time together.

What do you notice about each other? What have you heard?

During the liaison, anyone can ask anyone for details about the location and circumstances.

## CONDUCTING THE LIAISON

Converse as you like, naturally. During the conversation, either of you may, whenever you like, begin an exchange by making an advance. The other then makes an answer to conclude the exchange. Return to conversation or advance into the next exchange as you like.

## ENDING THE LIAISON

At any time after the third exchange, any player may interrupt you by having someone else enter the scene. Otherwise, continue your conversation and exchanges until you part or draw a curtain upon what follows.

## UNDER ANOTHER'S NOSE

If there's a risk that you'll be caught together, then any player may, after any answer, have you throw. On tails, you're discovered or exposed.

# STEALING TIME TOGETHER

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## ADVANCES

- » I open your mobile frame's canopy. May I?
- » I touch your hand. May I?
- » I touch your fingertips. May I?
- » I touch your wrist. May I?
- » I touch your cheek. May I?
- » I touch your hair. May I?
- » I touch your ear. May I?
- » I touch your lips. May I?
- » I touch your thigh. May I?
- » I touch your \_\_. May I?
- » I loosen your armor. May I?
- » I loosen your clothing. May I?
- » I loosen my own armor or clothing. May I?
- » I do not only touch, but kiss you, as above. May I?

## ANSWERS

- » You may.
- » You may, but first I want you to do \_\_. Will you?
- » You may, but first I want to do \_\_. Do you mind?
- » You may, but only for a moment.
- » You may, but only for a moment, and then I withdraw to a less charged distance.
- » You may, but only for a moment, and then I break off and depart.
- » You may, but at this moment we're interrupted.
- » You may, and let's draw a curtain upon what follows.
- » You may not, but instead I [make an advance]. May I?
- » You may not, and I withdraw to a more comfortable distance.
- » You may not, and I break off and depart.

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## SETUP

Only you and your chosen partner play. Decide with your chosen partner which of you is the attacker and which the attacked. Ask your chosen partner how the battle came about.

What do you notice about each other? What have you heard?

Both of you say how many soldiers you lead. It should be a number from 3 to 8. Be prepared to identify each one by name, rank, code name, relationship to you, or position in your force.

Both of you name your objective(s) in the skirmish.

During the skirmish, anyone may ask anyone for details about the landscape and the circumstances of the battle.

## CONDUCTING THE SKIRMISH

Take turns making demands of each other. The attacker makes the first demand.

When you make a demand, you choose whether to demand submission or withdrawal. In your demand, you must name yourself, one of your own soldiers, or one of your enemy's declared objectives.

## ENDING THE SKIRMISH

The Skirmish ends either when one of you accedes to a demand, submitting or withdrawing, one of you loses the last soldier from your force, in which case you must immediately submit or withdraw, or one of you is killed or captured.

## 2-ON-1 AND MORE

If you and your partner agree, either or both of you can invite other players to join your side. No one can join uninvited.

To conduct the skirmish, go around the table. On your turn, choose an enemy and make a demand. If they don't submit or withdraw, they immediately make a demand of you in return. After you've given your answer, play passes to the next player.

The skirmish ends when only one side is left in the fight.

# A TACTICAL SKIRMISH

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## DEMANDS

- » Submit / withdraw now, or my force spreads itself too thin and you pick off \_\_, who was straggling.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or \_\_, one of my advance units, blunders into your position and you tear them open.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or you zero \_\_, on my flank, and blow the hell out of them.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or you pin my force down and take out \_\_ while we're struggling free.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or you ambush and capture \_\_, my scout.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or an opportune shot cripples \_\_, my lieutenant.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or your artillery fire takes out \_\_ and scatters the rest of my force.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or one of your units engages \_\_ at close quarters and carves their guts out.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or you catch \_\_ out in the open and strike them down.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or you catch \_\_ at an inattentive moment and cut them to pieces.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or you're able to concentrate fire on \_\_ and gun them down.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or \_\_, my least-experienced soldier, surrenders to your mercy.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or you get the drop on \_\_ and take them prisoner.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or you're able to draw \_\_ out of position and cut them down.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or you catch us on the move and kill \_\_.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or you take out \_\_'s comms systems and, blind, they expose themselves to deadly fire.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or \_\_ crosses into your kill zone and you put them down.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or you catch \_\_ in a sharp crossfire and tear them apart.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or you bog us down in bad ground and take out \_\_.
- » Submit / withdraw now, or we abandon \_\_ to you and retreat to a fallback position.

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## OVERVIEW

Bantraphyll is a complex biomolecule. It's very rare in the galaxy but common—almost ubiquitous—in the plant life on the planet Bantral. It's a crucial component of the process by which these plants shed certain harmful factors present in Bantral's biosphere. This process is what gives the plants of Bantral their distinctive pearlescent shimmer. Raw bantraphyll has no other particular value.

A large number of interstellar industries use cryostabilization in their shipping systems, naturally. Many different cryostabilization processes exist, each with its own set of technical and economic advantages and disadvantages, depending upon the matter to be stabilized, the exact stability required, the scale of the implementation, and so on. One cryostabilization process uses crystalline bantraphyll. It's an excellent process otherwise - reliable, precise and relatively scalable - but crystalline bantraphyll is so difficult and expensive to catalyze that no industry makes use of it.

Until recently, that is. Recently, someone working in an unrelated field developed a process that catalyzes crystalline bantraphyll from raw bantraphyll extremely inexpensively. Now, by adopting crystalline bantraphyll cryostabilization, several interstellar industries stand to increase the efficiency of their shipping systems by as much as 1 or 2%, reducing overhead and realizing substantial profit. It's become possible for Bantral to gainfully catalyze raw bantraphyll into crystalline form and export it to an interstellar market.

## POINTS OF DEBATE

- » There is almost no debate about whether Bantral should exploit its newfound resource and export crystalline bantraphyll. It's already begun and it's obvious to almost everyone that it'll continue. Bantral is undeniably becoming a wealthy planet. In conversation, practically never: "should Bantral develop bantraphyll, or should it not?" Instead: "what should Bantral do with its new wealth?"
- » Raw bantraphyll is, in principle, an unlimited and renewable resource. However, there's debate about which plants to best cultivate for crystallization and how best to cultivate them. Research into this topic is ongoing, and has identified several good candidates, but new findings could overthrow any of them at any time. Each candidate has its advocates, motivated both by profit and by environmental concerns. In conversation: "Panspecial

# CRYSTALLINE BANTRAPHYLL

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clearcutting and natural regrowth? Fields of quick-growing broadgrasses? Vertical plantations of Ambeke's Ivy? Managed stands of Shivering Fir? Or what?"

- » The crystallization process can be made sustainable, but there's debate about the upper limits of its sustainability. Technical projections disagree by as much as 15%, and various policy proposals exaggerate the differences. In conversation: "Periodic binges and lulls? Surge ahead but hold fallbacks? Slow growth toward an optimum? Or what?"
- » The crystallization process is broadly scalable. There's no technical debate about this, but there's fierce policy debate about how best to industrialize it on Bantral. In conversation: "One industry, to maximize bargaining power? A network of collectives, to maximize the spread of profits? Competing corporations, to maximize efficiency? Policy set globally, regionally, locally, or by each producer independently?"
- » And, of course, the most urgent debate, the one that threatens the peace of Bantral, is about who owns the raw bantraphyll and who should profit from its development. In conversation: "Do the offworld investors own Bantral? Do the hereditary landholding families? Or do the people?"

## TRAJECTORY

If the situation continues in the direction it's going, the offworld "Landowners" will continue to have their way:

- » Until they develop a clearly superior intensive system, they'll take the "panspecial clearcutting and natural regrowth" approach to cultivation.
- » They'll take the "surge ahead and fall back only when it becomes untenable" approach to sustainable production.
- » They'll support a single industry to maximize their own bargaining power. Note that the interstellar industries who stand to benefit from adopting crystalline bantraphyll cryostabilization would prefer competing corporations, to minimize their own costs.
- » And, of course, they will own the wealth and resources of Bantral, on the strength of their past investment, until recently worthless.

# FOR MoFØS

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## MoFØS

MoFØs are fans and players of MOBILE FRAME ZERO: RAPID ATTACK and MOBILE FRAME ZERO: INTERCEPT ORBIT. If you want to, you can integrate FIREBRANDS with the other games:

- » Build a selection of cool and suitable mobile frames and bring them to the game with you. Have everyone choose one as part of introducing your characters. You can bring a selection of minifig parts too, if you have them.
- » Alternate playing FIREBRANDS, RAPID ATTACK, and INTERCEPT ORBIT, set on Bantral and in the Bantral system. When one game finishes, build on its events to set up the next game.
- » Use the Ace Pilot rules in INTERCEPT ORBIT to bring your FIREBRANDS character into your RAPID ATTACK or INTERCEPT ORBIT games.

The object of RAPID ATTACK and INTERCEPT ORBIT is to play hard, hold discipline, and defeat your enemies. The object of FIREBRANDS is to play easy, make a mess, and fall in love with your enemies. When you switch between them, watch out. Don't play hard to defeat your enemies in FIREBRANDS! Don't fall in love with your enemies in RAPID ATTACK or INTERCEPT ORBIT! It'll just cost you the game.

## THE IJAD

In SC 0245, the Ijad themselves haven't yet come to Bantral. Some certainly know of the situation developing there, however. These Ijad would consider the struggle for self-determination of the people of Bantral to be a righteous one, and would recognize many of the revolutionary factions as their fellow Ijad.

This means that some revolutionary factions could have direct Ijad support, so you're allowed to bring Ijad mobile frames and weaponry into FIREBRANDS.

# CREDITS

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MOBILE FRAME ZERO: FIREBRANDS ©2016 by D. Vincent Baker.

This is the PAX East 2016 Early Adopters' playbook.

Character illustrations ©2016 by Emilee Denich.

Mobile frame illustrations ©2016 by Richmond Gan.

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A hilarious and wrong party version of **Stealing Time Together** appears in Vincent Baker's game SPIN THE BEETLE. An even more charged version appears in Asbjørn Olsen's scenario FAYE.

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# FIREBRANDS

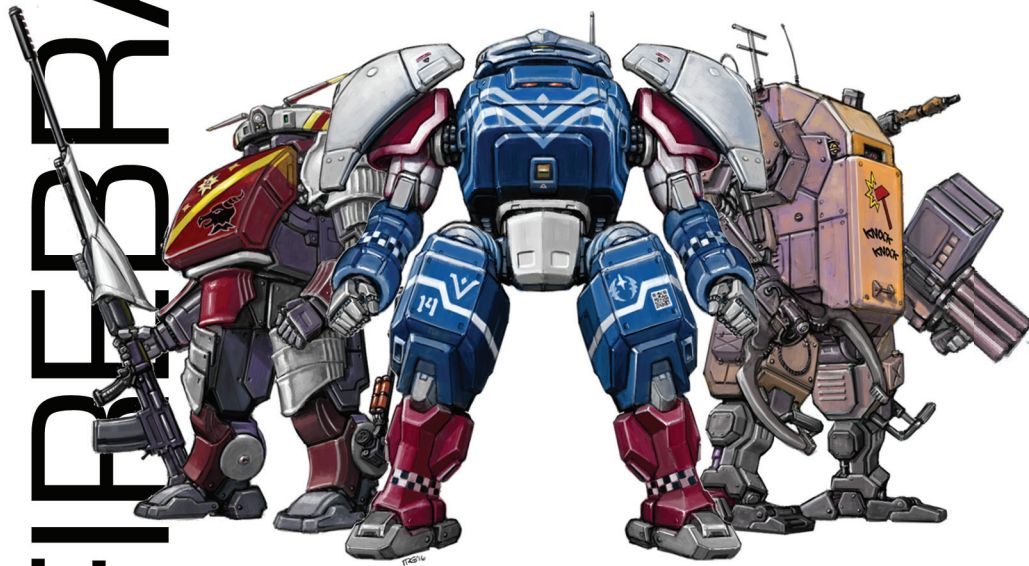
MOBILE FRAME  
ZERO

## The year is SC 0245.

Humanity has spread through the Milky way, using interstellar transit gate technology to colonize the galaxy. **Mobile frames** are the hard-working, hard-fighting combat- and labor mecha they've brought with them.

You are romantic ace mobile frame pilots, caught up in an undeclared war for the future of the **Bantral system**.

Fight with your friends. Ally with your rivals. Fall in love with your enemies.



*MOBILE FRAME ZERO: FIREBRANDS is a casual role-playing game by D. Vincent Baker, set in Joshua A.C. Newman's MOBILE FRAME ZERO universe. You don't need to be familiar with MOBILE FRAME ZERO: RAPID ATTACK or MOBILE FRAME ZERO: INTERCEPT ORBIT to play.*

To play, you'll need 3–5 players, a copy of this playbook for each, and a handful of coins.

3–5 players



1–3 hours ages



15+