



# **DEATH FROM ABOVE**

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# **W A R G A M I N G**



**DFA OPTIONAL & HOUSE RULES**  
**CLASSIC BATTLETECH**



# DEATH FROM ABOVE WARGAMING

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# DEATH FROM ABOVE WARGAMING

## CLASSIC BATTLETECH

### INTRODUCTION

If you've watched our battle reports, you might have noticed we play with a unique set of rules which include optional rules published in the BattleMech Manual, Total Warfare, or advanced rules from supplements like Tactical and Strategic Operations. This manual is intended to itemize all the optional rules that we commonly use and show you where to find the rules as written (RAW) within the various source books (written as *[source books]*) for quick reference. In addition, we will present, in detail, all the custom house rules we've designed, implemented, and battle-tested at DFA Wargaming so you can experience our unique playstyle.

When it comes to choosing optional rules, or creating house rules, our top priorities are balance, game length, and fun. We are, however, also mindful to preserve the raw spirit and feel of Classic BattleTech as much as possible, even as we add new aspects that might be more familiar to MechWarrior or other games of the BattleTech universe.

For the sake of organization, this manual will group the presentation of rules we use into five sections:

- **Miniature Rules**
- **Default Rules**
- **Optional Rules**
- **Modified Optional Rules**
- **House Rules**

First, a message from our affiliates...

# COMSTAR



## WARNING

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# DEATH FROM ABOVE WARGAMING

## CLASSIC BATTLETECH

### MINIATURE RULES

The first thing you see on our tabletop is the 3D terrain vs. paper maps. 3D terrain exponentially adds to the hobby and immersion value of the game, so it was a clear choice for us. Regardless of preference, our rules adapt to paper maps as well.

*Strategic Operations*, pg. 386, provides rules for 3D terrain play, but we suggest visiting: [bg.battletech.com](http://bg.battletech.com), and in the Downloads section, get the free digital supplement: *BattleTech Miniature Rules*.

### Units

We do not restrict miniatures to only using the officially licensed models. We embrace the freelance hobbyists, and independently printed or cast miniatures that are allowed in tournament play, as long as they reasonably match the scale, visual identification, and hex basing of the intended unit. This means a printed 'Mech in the "vido game" style, a sculpt in a new pose, or an alternate variant of the same unit is generally good for our tabletop.

### 3D Terrain – Forest Edge

We often use trees without shared bases and consider the boundaries of a forest as the perimeter trees in a group, i.e., the trunks represent vertices on an imaginary polygon drawn by your ruler edge. As long as 50% of a miniature's base intersects an edge and the player spends the movement cost to get in, they are considered "in the forest."

### 3D Terrain – Levels

For any terrain surfaces or scenery pieces that rise at least 1/2" above the surrounding ground, we always round up in inches (from the ground beneath) to calculate the cumulative elevation level of the surface, scenery, or area being traversed.

### 3D Terrain – Rough Terrain

An exception to our determination of terrain levels exists for any scenery piece that rises less than 1/2" from the surrounding ground and does not serve as a stable surface (i.e., scatter terrain, rocks, small structures). We consider these pieces as rough terrain to pass through and on the same level as their surrounding ground.

### Scale

This is more of a house rule, but worth mentioning early, that we use a universal conversion of scale and distance as: 1 inch = 1 hex, instead of 2 inches. This seems like a significant change in scale, but it results in a more intuitive system, since the raw numbers in rules or stats never change.

**Reason:** While the playable area is often larger in 3D, we find that keeping a 1:1 scale makes for a more tactical game, as units have more room for maneuvers outside their shooting ranges. In addition, less doubling and less rounding.

### DEFAULT RULES

The standard rules include some "default" guidelines that we have recalibrated for our playstyle. These are as follows:

### Default Skill Ratings

Our default MechWarrior has a gunnery skill of 3 and a piloting skill of 4. BV is still calculated in the normal fashion, per the TechManual (plus errata).

**Reason:** After many matches and some statistics, 3/4 moves the game along and results in more hitting and less inaction. This also aligns with the newer Chaos Campaign recommendations.



# DEATH FROM ABOVE WARGAMING

## CLASSIC BATTLETECH

### Default Forest Height

Our forests are level 3 in height.

**Reason:** In BattleTech, each level is about 6 meters in height. The rules recommend treating forests as level 2 terrain (12 meters), but Earth's average height in forest canopies are shown to be between 20–25 meters. We decided that level 3 (18 meters) was a fair compromise for average conditions, requiring at least a level 2 hill or building for a 'Mech to be able to see over a forest on level 0.

### OPTIONAL RULES

These are the optional rules (and sources) that we have included as RAW in our gameplay:

#### Backwards Level Change

*[BattleMech Manual, pg. 15]*

#### Careful Stand

*[BattleMech Manual, pg. 19]*

#### Expanded Arm Flipping

*[BattleMech Manual, pg. 25]*

#### One-Armed Prone Fire

*[BattleMech Manual, pg. 30]*

#### Floating Criticals

*[BattleMech Manual, pg. 45]*

#### Wreckage

*[BattleMech Manual, pg. 49]*

#### Expanded Damage Modifiers

*[BattleMech Manual, pg. 55]*

#### Enhanced Flamers

*[BattleMech Manual, pg. 99]*

#### Machine Gun Rapid Fire Mode

*[BattleMech Manual pg. 101]*

### MODIFIED OPTIONAL RULES

These are the official optional rules that we have included and modified for our games:

#### Expanded Reckless Movement

*[BattleMech Manual, pg. 20]*

**Modification:** Includes deep snow, ice, fog, swamp, and night - as well as downhill. Still does NOT include rubble, forest, uphill, or water.

**Clarification:** Moving into water usually requires one pilot skill roll (PSR). Since there is also a level change, a pilot can opt to move recklessly downhill, thus requiring a total of two PSRs. Normally, moving into depth 1 water would require an additional 2 MP, but in the scenario where the pilot moves recklessly downhill, it would only require an additional 1 MP, as per the rules.

**Reason:** If a pilot wants to push full throttle through ice, snow, fog, and darkness - why not barrel down a hill at full speed with the risk of potentially falling? Note: always wear a seatbelt.

#### Forced Withdrawal

*[BattleMech Manual, pg. 81]*

**Modification:** We never play with the condition in which forced withdrawal is triggered when any three sections have suffered internal damage. In almost all scenarios, 'Mechs that are no longer capable of moving and are forced into withdrawal are considered destroyed (the pilot ejects).

**Reason:** Cowardice will not be tolerated! Seriously though, as it relates to three sections damaged internally, a few wounds to the arms and legs wouldn't chase off our brave pilots.



# DEATH FROM ABOVE WARGAMING

## CLASSIC BATTLETECH

### Extreme Range

*[Tactical Operations, pg. 85]*

**Modification:** We use it, but we ignore all the provided rules and modifications, except the calculation of the range bracket and the attack modifier (which is further amended in the House Rules section). Besides the new range bracket and attack modification, it functions just like the other range brackets.

**Reason:** Extreme range was just what we needed to stretch out a 3D map under the simplified scale (1 inch = 1 hex). This allows for a couple turns of tactical maneuvering on a 4'x4' map before the bullets start flying. The host of conditional damage modifications felt tedious and inconsistent, so we have opted to leave them out entirely. Overall, the difficulty to hit at extreme range is generally high, so the significance of these changes has never felt out of place.

### Partial Cover

*[Miniature Rules, pg. 11]*

*also: [Strategic Operations, pg. 393]*

**Modification:** There is no modifier to the Target Number (TN) for a target being in cover. Instead, if a location (e.g., right arm) is more than 50% hidden and that location is rolled on the location hit chart, the shot misses (hitting the cover instead).

**Reason:** The stacking penalty for shooting targets in cover feels harsh (first: the flat +1 penalty, and second: unable to hit a covered location). Using RAW, assume that the target's right arm is in cover and you have a TN of 7+ (58.3% base chance to hit). The +1 penalty reduces the chance to hit by 16.7%. If you hit, there is an additional 13.9% chance to hit the right arm and deal no damage. This reduces your total chance of hitting and dealing damage to 35.9%.

Overall, the shot is about 22% less likely to hit the target just because one arm was in partial cover! With the house-ruled revision, the chance to hit and deal damage is 50.2%, reducing the to hit by 8.1%.

You may have noticed, we also amended the conditions of cover to require that more than 50% of the location must be hidden, instead of any arbitrary amount. With 3D terrain, a trivial amount of foot or hand can easily find its way behind cover, and that just does not feel satisfying. Detail-oriented players will need to agree on how to delineate some torso sections from one another (e.g., shoulder guards, weapon mounts, etc.), or just divide the 'Mech's torso into thirds.

## HOUSE RULES

Now we dive into our very own custom rules, and some modified standard rules.

### Distance - Always Round Up

We adhere to a universal "round up" rule when it comes to measuring distances in inches. When playing without a hex grid, ranges can be in between, but some of the RAW round up (shooting range), and other times round down (minimum range).

**Clarification:** Physical attacks on 3D terrain are considered to have a range within 1 inch (i.e., any part of the target can be within 1 inch). Charges and Death from Above attacks must end with bases overlapping (i.e., same hex), per their rules.

### Mechs Provide Cover

'Mechs, friend or foe, can block LOS and provide cover, just like hard cover or buildings. In RAW, this is not the case.

**Reason:** Immersion. We like that a unit can shield their allies from incoming fire, and a crowded urban fight will create LOS havoc, just like you would expect.



# DEATH FROM ABOVE WARGAMING

## CLASSIC BATTLETECH

### Boosting

'Mechs equipped with usable jump jets can "boost" while running to clear difficult terrain or obstacles that are no wider than 1 hex or 1 inch, and no higher than level 1. Boosting cannot be used in consecutive hexes/inches (i.e., they need to touch down after clearing an obstacle), and they cannot change facing while boosting over a hex. 'Mechs may boost a total number of times equal to their available jump MP, but the combined total movement (including the boosted distance) may not exceed their available run MP.

'Mechs generate 2 heat for running, plus 1 additional heat point for each jump MP spent during the move.

The 'Mech suffers a +3 attack modifier (as if they jumped); however, their target modifier does **not** get a +1 bonus for jumping and is based on distance moved (as if the unit ran).

**Reason:** Immersion. Many of us have used jump jets during a run to give us a little boost uphill or over an obstacle in MechWarrior, so why not on the tabletop? In RAW, especially on wide 3D terrain, jump jets feel lackluster. The counterbalance we have added is the fact that you can still build up significant heat and take the shooting penalty but gain no bonus against incoming fire. Just remember the limits - you cannot boost over forests (too high) or consecutive hexes of rough terrain; for more sprawling difficult areas, pilots will need to fully engage their jump jets.

**Example:** See the diagram at the top right. A CPLT-C1 *Catapult* is running. Ahead lies one hex of rubble, and a level 1 hill. The *Catapult* can boost over these obstacles: running forward 1 hex, boosting over the rubble, running forward one hex, boost uphill into the next hex, change facing, and run forward again into the final hex. Under the normal rules, the *Catapult* would be forced to either slog through or around the rubble and expend extra MP to move up hill.



**BOOSTING DIAGRAM**

The red circles indicate where the *Catapult* boosted. In total, it would spend 6 MP, moving 5 hexes with a facing change, build up 4 heat, and have a +3 attacker modifier and a +2 target modifier. Even though the *Catapult* has jump MP remaining, it cannot move any further as it spent 6 MP, which is the available run MP for the unit.

### Revised Range Modifiers

We have revised the range modifiers when attacking as follows: Short: +0 / Medium: +1 / Long: +2 / Extreme: +3.

**Reason:** Speed of play, tactical flexibility, and action! We have been playing this game a long time, and if you are trying to shoot a running 'Mech at long range, and you have also run... good luck. Even a legendary gunner, at skill rating 0 only has a 42% chance to hit. If you have a gunnery of 3 and are running, you are missing over 80% of the time. Why is this a problem? Because it suffocates the action to the point where everyone needs to be at short range (or all standing still) to be effective. Even missile boats are inclined to hold their fire until they can waddle up to short range. Our revised range modifiers still have a meaningful impact on the game, as that 0-gunnery pilot in our scenario now has a 72% chance to hit. Reasonable odds for a legendary pilot.



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## CLASSIC BATTLETECH

### Cluster Rolls

Instead of using the Cluster Hits Table to determine the number of cluster munitions that strike a target, we use the following rules:

First, determine the number of munitions per cluster from the damage stats. This is equal to the grouping size (the C#) divided by the damage per munition. However, you will soon find that its rather straightforward:

- LRMs are 5 missiles/cluster.
- SRMs are 1 missile/cluster.
- LB-Xs are 1 round/cluster.

Then, divide the weapon size by its munitions per cluster, to get the total number of clusters it fires (e.g., LRM-20 / 5 = 4 clusters, SRM-6 / 1 = 6 clusters).

When a weapon with cluster munitions hits, roll a single die for each cluster. Each roll of 3+ will result in a full cluster hit, a roll of 1 or 2 means the entire cluster misses. If all clusters for a single weapon miss (the attack itself hit), the weapon always does a minimum of 2 damage.

If a missile launcher is equipped with an Artemis Fire Control System the same rules apply, with the exception that the player may reroll any 1s (one per cluster). Resulting rolls of 3+ will hit. If all clusters miss on an Artemis-equipped launcher, the same minimum 2 damage applies.

If a target has AMS, they must declare the AMS' activation per normal. All cluster confirmations must be rerolled. All rerolls are confirmed on a 3+ and there is **no** minimum damage if all clusters miss.

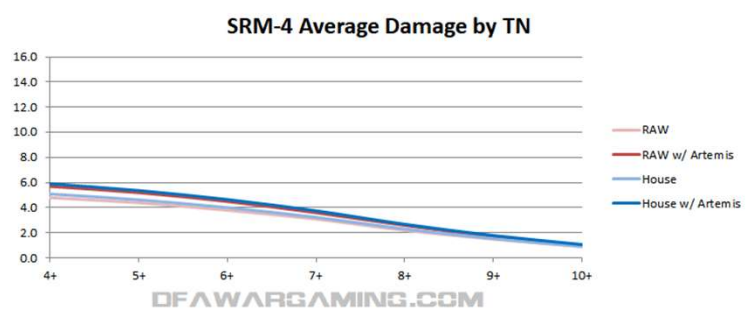
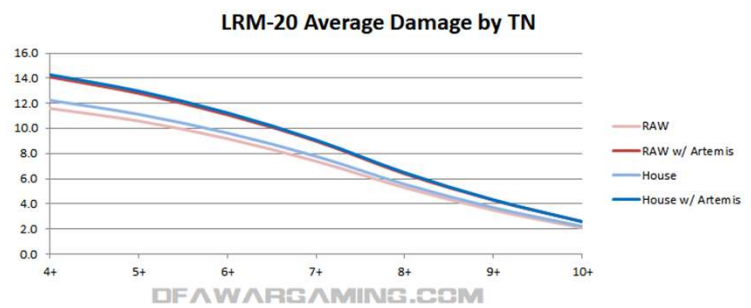
If Artemis/NARC are involved against a target with AMS, then all cluster confirmations must be rerolled *except* 6's; they are guaranteed to hit. All rerolls are confirmed on a 3+ and the minimum damage rule of 2 applies.

**Example:** A player declares that their CPLT-C1 *Catapult* hits with both LRM-15s. The LRM-15 fires 3 clusters (15/5). The player rolls three dice for the first LRM-15 and gets: 3, 5, and 1. Two clusters hit from the first launcher. The player then rolls another three dice for the second LRM-15, and gets: 1, 2, and 1. No clusters hit from the second launcher, but it will still deal a 2-point damage cluster due to our minimum damage rule. As a result, a total of two 5-point clusters and one 2-point cluster hit the target and require hit locations to be rolled for each cluster.

Note: the player would not want to roll all six dice at once, since the minimum damage rule applies *per weapon*. The player needs to distinguish clusters from one LRM launcher vs. the other.

**Reason:** Speed of play. It is an amazing thing, and almost hard to believe, that the statistics regarding average damage turn out almost identically to the Cluster Hits Table. In that regard, there is negligible impact to weapon effectiveness, but a great gain in speed of play.

### CLUSTER HITS AVERAGE DMG (EXAMPLES)







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### Group Fire

When rolling to hit, players roll a d6 that represents their "pilot" die, and another d6 for each weapon being fired. The pilot die is then added to each of the individual weapon dice to determine a hit or a miss. Various size and color dice can be used to represent different types of weapons (we have a chart for that), allowing you to roll everything simultaneously.

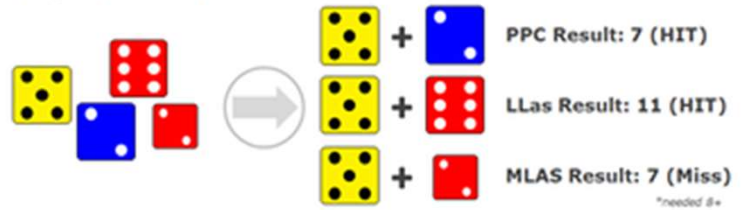
When rolling for location, players follow the same pattern rolling a d6 to represent their "pilot" die, and another d6 for each weapon that hit the target. The pilot die is added to each individual weapon die to determine locations.

**Example:** A ZEU-6T *Zeus* (Gunnery: 2) is firing its PPC, Large Laser (LLas), and a Medium Laser (MLas) at a target. Assume the target is "12" away in the open, has a +2 target modifier, and the *Zeus* walked. The PPC is at medium range, the LLas is at long range and the MLas is at extreme range. The target numbers would end up being 6+ for the PPC, 7+ for the LLas, and 8+ for the MLas (using revised range penalties).

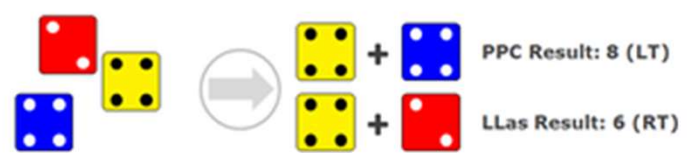
The *Zeus* player picks up one yellow die to represent his pilot die. He also picks up one large blue die for the PPC, one large red die for the LLas, and one medium red die for the MLas, and rolls them all at once. The player rolls 5 on the pilot die, and a 2, 6, 2 for the PPC, LLas, and MLas, respectively. Adding the pilot die to each of the weapon dice, the player gets totals of 7 for the PPC, 11 for the LLas, and 7 for the MLas. The PPC and LLas hit, but the MLas misses.

Next, the player rolls to determine hit locations. The player rolls one yellow die for his pilot die, one blue die for the PPC, and one red die for the LLas. The player gets a 4 on the pilot die, 4 on the PPC and 2 on the LLas. Adding the pilot die to each of the weapon dice, the player gets totals of 8 for the PPC (LT hit) and 6 for LLas (RT hit).

#### Step 1: Roll to Hit



#### Step 2: Roll Location



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### GROUP FIRE (EXAMPLE)

**Clarification:** Pilots can opt to fire in chain mode (following RAW), rolling 2d6 separately for each weapon. All location rolls must also be separate 2d6 rolls when chain firing. You cannot combine group and chain fire in the same turn.

Additionally, any time the pilot chooses to group fire at more than one target (per the secondary target rules), they must make a separate gunnery roll for each attack. Said differently, they would roll a pilot die plus weapon dice for the first target, then roll a pilot die plus weapon dice for the second target. We are also aware of the group fire rules that exist in Strategic Operations; however, this is an alternate approach.

**Reason:** Speed of play and immersion. This method dramatically speeds up the combat phases. More so, the pilot die adds a visceral feeling of simulation for the pilot's targeting reticle and the 'Mech's target interlock circuits, whereby the pilot's momentary aim and timing are reflected in the "pilot" die and it sways the entire trigger pull.



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Aside from mechanics, group-fired weapons have a negligible increase in probability to hit the same location multiple times. Overall, the probability to hit a given location in chain or group fire does not change more than 1.3%, showing that group fire is closely inline with RAW probabilities. In terms of floating criticals and headshots, the probability of rolling multiple 1s or 6s in a group of three weapons is less than one tenth of one percent (<0.1%).

The most compelling result is that, despite the very different ways the probabilities are modeled across the two methods, the average number of hits and misses (regardless of the number of weapons fired) is exactly the same for both chain fire (RAW) and group fire (house). In summary, our analysis helped prove that this house method, while certainly a change in the mechanics, is balanced and fair, delivering the same average damage as RAW to the same probabilistic spread of locations. However, the boom-or-bust nature of group fire can preclude observation of the averages.

### Dice Identification

Since group fire allows players to roll all their weapons at once (i.e., a fist-full of dice), it is important to distinguish one weapon from another. At DFA, we use different size and color dice to accomplish this. The sizes we use are 19mm, 16mm, 12mm, and 8mm. Red dice represent lasers, white dice for ballistics, black dice for missiles, and blue dice for PPCs. The larger the die, the more powerful the weapon - for example, an AC/2 would be an 8mm white die, whereas an AC/20 would be the massive 19mm white die. You can choose to use any colors or sizes that make sense to you, and more importantly, that you have available. With the introduction of 3050+ tech, you can use translucent dice or additional colors to represent things like extended range or pulse weapons, or even special modifiers like damaged arm actuators.

The diagram below illustrates how we assign dice to the introductory tech.

