Behemoth Mecha Design Notes

A mecha RPG presents an interesting problem: how do you accurately capture the feeling of being a [insert your preferred size of mecha here] tall robot using only your player’s imagination?

Video games have it easy. You can rely handedly on UI and UX to convey the awesome feeling of being taller than buildings and crushing humans with your bare metal hands. But in an RPG how do we do that?

For starters, we can look to video games for inspiration. The dichotomy between pilot and robot is super important! If the pilot and robot feel the same then we have failed as a mecha game. Another thing that’s super lame is if the robot feels like the pilot but bigger. That shit infuriates me. Crank gameplay up to 11. Giant robots are faster, stronger, and better than humans at everything but fitting into normal sized doors and understanding social cues.

So for step one we got: Robots don’t have social skills, that’s on the pilot. Giant robots are a tool to be used by the players, not the be all end all. This leads directly into point two which is:

Robots shouldn’t be the solution to every problem. You know what isn’t stealthy? A 40-foot-tall death machine. (now a 20-foot-tall death machine with a stealth system. . .)

Really if we can get a lot of mileage just by extrapolating on “things a big robot does that a human doesn’t”. What do giant robots tend to do? Generate a lot of heat. From Battletech to Gundam a common hazard for big stompy robots is doing so much cool stuff in a short period of time that they overheat and must stop doing cool shit.

In conclusion, to capture the feeling of being inside a giant robot I am going to focus on what the pilot can and can’t bring to the cockpit. Are they good at shooting pistols? While using their giant pistol they get bonuses. Are they good at talking? Well maybe they can use their giant robot to threaten people but it’s not gonna give them any system bonuses. Performing actions inside of the machine will generate heat, crossing different thresholds of heat will cause different actions to occur in game leading all the way up to violent explosion. The giant robot is a tool for the player to use and should feel like a tool rather than an extension.