

Running a Co-Op Campaign using MekHQ/MegaMek

Guide by Ulysses Sockdrawer

Introduction & Thanks

I've written this guide as a helping tool to allow players who want to run a co-operative campaign using the MegaMek software suite to do so in as straightforward a manner as possible.

One thing to get out of the way now is that both methods presented here assume a good level of familiarity with MekHQ and MegaMek, as well as how the two pieces of software interact with each other via .MUL files. If you aren't familiar with the software, you may want to first start by running a solo campaign for yourself with ATB/StratCon following the guides in the /documents/ATB stuff folder of your MekHQ install.

Method 1 is for those who want MekHQ to do much of the heavy lifting – it's less focused on roleplay, and far more focused on generating battles you can fight with your friends against the bot whilst seeing progression for your merc' company.

Method 2 is much more in-depth; it's the approach I use when running a campaign for my friends. It is, however, not fully co-operative. As GM you will be playing the hostile forces to give your player group a thinking enemy with their own objectives, but you should also be prepared to lose, and lose gracefully, to allow whatever story your group is telling to advance.

I would like to extend my thanks to the following people/groups:

- Hammer, for encouraging me to write this guide.
- The entire MegaMek dev team for making fantastic software
- CGL, FASA, and anybody and everybody who has ever been involved in making Battletech the awesome franchise it is today.

Method 1 – Against the Bot/StratCon

Method 1 Introduction

When picking this method, you will want to pick which version of the software to use. At time of writing, the two recommended options are version 0.48 (stable) or version 0.49.3 (Development). The version you pick will determine what kind of campaign experience you have.

As GM, you should always hold the MHQ save file for your campaign on your machine. You may choose to share this with players to let them make changes or spend money, but you should always have a master version. This guide also assumes you will be set up to host the games for your friends.

V0.48 still uses the Against the Bot tonnage balanced campaign system, which generates random forces and missions based on a number of settings in MekHQ. V0.49.3 includes NickAragua's brilliant StratCon system which uses an abstract map to drive more in-depth contracts and is BV balanced.

Please be aware that StratCon is still in development, so you may encounter issues. If you do, please raise them to the team via GitHub.

Tools used:

MegaMek v0.48/0.49.3






MekHQ v0.48/0.49.3

Discord/VOIP programme with screen share capability

Method 1 Guide

Initial Setup

Set up an ATB campaign in whatever way suits your group best. A guide for tweaking the settings for ATB can be found in the docs/ATB stuff folder of your install. You can also find the historic rules document for ATB in an Excel file here which can be used for unit creation.

This PC > Stuff Drive (F:) > Program Files (x86) > Battletech Stuff > mekhq-windows-0.48.0 > docs > AtB Stuff				
Name	Date modified	Type	Size	
 Against_the_bot.txt	05/03/2021 09:42	Text Document	19 KB	
 Against_the_Bot_Starter_Guide_v35.pdf	05/03/2021 09:42	Adobe Acrobat D...	813 KB	
 AtB documentation.19_8 (WIP).txt	05/03/2021 09:42	Text Document	24 KB	
 Custom RATs.txt	05/03/2021 09:42	Text Document	4 KB	
 Official AtB TT Rules 2.31.xls	05/03/2021 09:42	Microsoft Excel 97...	326 KB	

When creating your merc' unit, I would advise having a minimum of one lance per player, perhaps with one spare 'mech in storage per lance to give a bit of a safety net. If you want larger battles or more tactical options, go for one company per player. The number of 'mechs each player controls will determine how 'brittle' your campaign is to a bad engagement, so think carefully.

Work with your players to pick a starting budget and buy their starting 'mechs as per the ATB rules, or just build a company of your favourite 'mechs and give yourself a slush fund to start – how you setup this experience is entirely down to what you and your friends are looking for.

You will also want to pick an era to play in; if it's your first time playing a Battletech campaign, I would recommend starting between the year 3000 and 3025 to set your force firmly in the 'introtech' era to limit the depth and potential for confusion.

Follow the ATB beginner guide to get the system set up how you want it, with the right settings. Or go to the #stratcon channel in the MegaMek Discord and follow the guides there if you want to try Nickargua's new campaign system. If you are migrating a campaign from ATB to StratCon, be aware that you cannot enable StratCon whilst actively engaged on a contract. You should finish your current ATB contract, then migrate to StratCon.

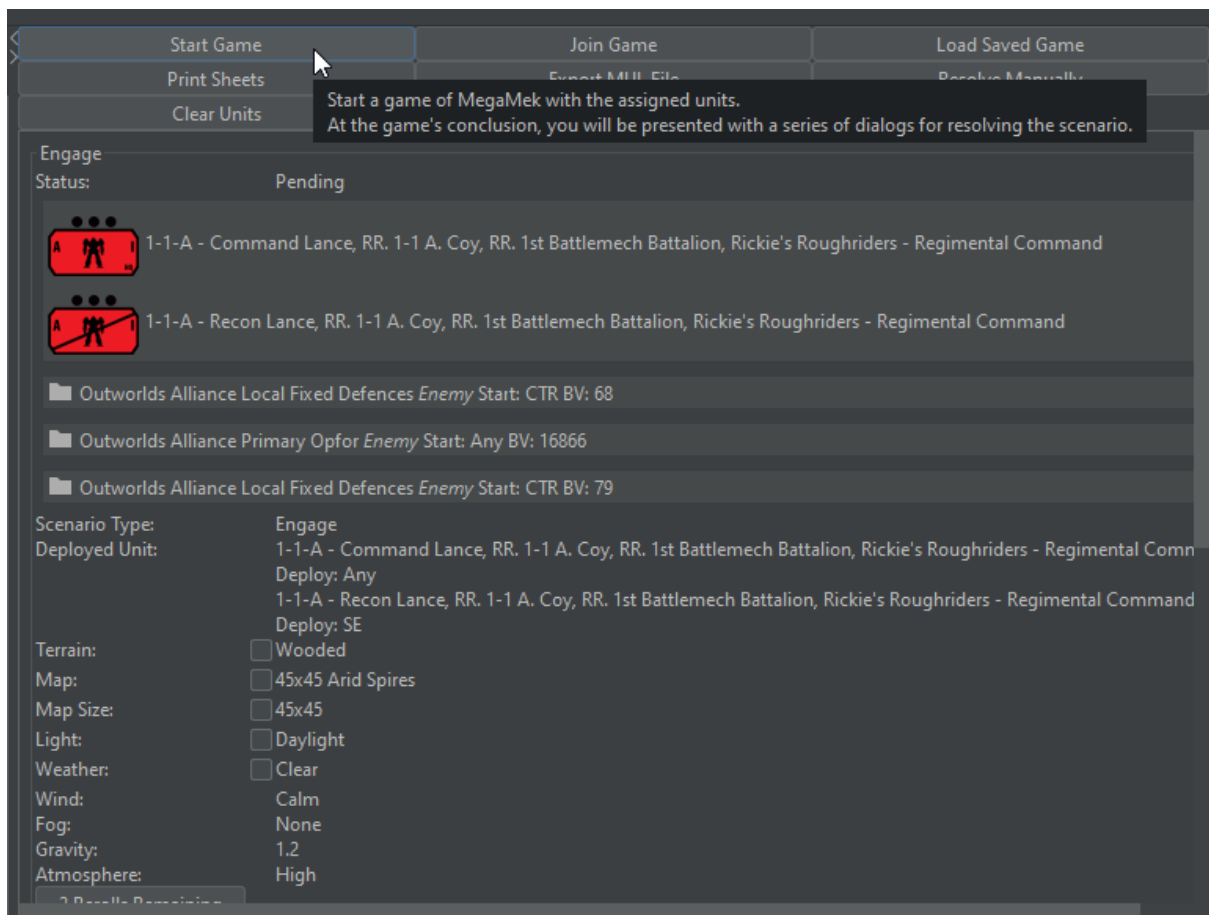
Picking a contract and playing games.

Once your campaign is setup, it is time to pick a contract. Follow the ATB guide to do so, perhaps giving your players the choice of contract by screensharing MekHQ with them via Discord or some other VOIP tool. Once you've done the admin to get yourself to the planet and assigned your units to the deployment, you're ready to start playing games.

ATB will generate scenarios automatically, dependent on intensity ratings and the contract chosen. StratCon will require you to deploy units on the abstract map. Either way, you will eventually end up with scenarios being generated. These will appear in the briefing room. ATB and StratCon will assign units to these scenarios differently, but you can always assign more units from your TO&E or from the StratCon interface if you want more of your players in the game.

Current Mission	Add Mission	Add Scenario	Edit Mission
3049 - DC - Quiberas Planetary Assault	Complete Mission	Delete Mission	[GM] Generate Scenarios
3049 - DC - Quiberas Planetary Assault			
Active			
Location: Quiberas			
Employer: Draconis Combine			
Enemy: Outworlds Alliance			
Mission Type: Planetary Assault			
Ally Rating: Regular/F			
Enemy Rating: Regular/F			
Start Date: 3049-07-29			
End Date: 3049-12-29			
Monthly Payout: 166,896,680 C-Bill			
Command Rights: Liaison			
Battle Loss Compensation: 100%			
Total Value Salvaged (Mercs): 39,415,253 C-Bill			
Total Value Salvaged (Employer): 117,285,791 C-Bill			
Salvage Percentage: 25% (max 60%)			
Enemy Morale: Very Low			
Scenario Name	Resolution	Date	Units Assigned
Space - Blockade Run	Victory	3049-07-30	0
Battle	Decisive Victory	3049-07-31	0
DataCenter - Hostile - Destroy	Victory	3049-08-01	0
Irregular Forces	Decisive Victory	3049-07-31	0
Engage	Victory	3049-08-04	0
OrbitalDefense - Hostile - Destroy	Victory	3049-08-04	0
OrbitalDefense - Hostile - Destroy	Victory	3049-08-09	0
BaseOfOperations - Hostile - Extract	Victory	3049-08-09	0
EarlyWarningSystem - Hostile - Prevent Evac	Decisive Victory	3049-08-13	0
Pursuit	Victory	3049-08-18	0
Engage	Pending	3049-08-24	8
BaseOfOperations - Hostile - Extract	Pending	3049-08-24	4

When you're ready to play the game, start the scenario from the Briefing Room. Have your players connect to your game, assign them their units, and make sure you're all on the same team using the buttons available in MegaMek.



At the end of the battle, it should (99 times out of 100) gracefully track back to MHQ. You will be presented with the results dialogue and salvage screens as you would in a single player game. As GM, you will be driving the screen in MHQ, so make sure your players can feel involved and direct what they want to happen to their units or who they want to deploy.

Conclusion

This is pretty much all you need to do to play a co-op campaign of MekHQ ATB/StratCon, provided you have a basic setup with forwarded ports so that friends can connect.

Happy co-op campaigning!

Method 2 – RPG-lite, map campaign, using Campaign Operations

Method 2 Introduction

This method of running a co-op campaign is significantly more labour intensive than method 1. If you choose to do this, be prepared for the fact you are taking on as much work, if not more than, you would do to GM a traditional tabletop RPG like Dungeons & Dragons.

You will be the storyteller, opponent, map maker, employer, and everything else. Your players have the easy job of playing the game and deciding where to deploy their forces.

This will also be possibly the most rewarding way to play the software suite and bring it to its full potential.

I'm not going to cover the minute detail of every step I take to do this, but I will go through how the different tools listed interact with each other to create the player experience.

Tools Used:

MegaMek v0.48/0.49.3

MegaMek Map Editor

MekHQ v0.48/0.49.3

Discord/VOIP programme with screen share capability

Campaign Operations Sourcebook

Roll20/other Virtual Tabletop software

Touring the Stars sourcebooks

Inkarnate/other mapping software

Method 2 Guide:

Initial MHQ Setup

The first step is setting up your MekHQ save file as you want it. Pick your era of play at this point as MHQ will need a start-date.

Load the 'Campaign Operations' pre-set packaged with MekHQ as a starting point and then customise this to your liking.

The pre-set by default does not allow SPAs, quirks, and other advanced rules, so you may wish to turn these on for a more in-depth game, or one linked to the Mechwarrior Destiny or A Time of War roleplaying systems.

Do NOT enable ATB/Stratcon when editing the pre-set.

Once the MekHQ save file is created and you are in the programme, it's time to go to Campaign operations.

Using Campaign Operations

The Campaign Operations sourcebook (recently had a 2nd printing at time of writing) is the baseline for setting up this campaign – I'd highly recommend it as it provides an easy to

follow, step-by-step workflow for creating a mercenary company, randomly assigning a budget, and purchasing rules.

Like with all BT advanced rules, you can choose to use as many or as few of these as you want. My group for example ignores maintenance rules and the purchasing rules in favour of using MHQ's implementation but uses CamOps to generate contracts and their pay.

Create your mercenary company following the CamOps workflow and choose the era you will play in.

As you follow the CamOps workflow, record the information in MekHQ – the starting budget, purchasing 'mechs and vehicles, assigning crew, etc.

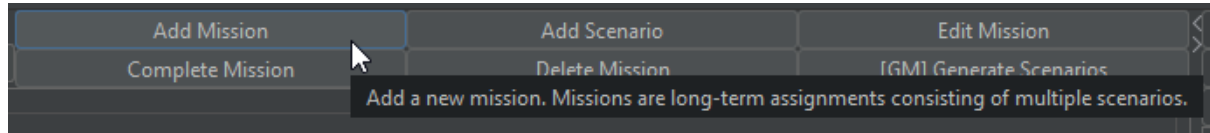
By the end of the workflow, you should have a company with staff, administrators, technicians, and potentially your own means of space travel. You are now ready to generate your contract offers.

Generate Contracts and MekHQ Contract Setup

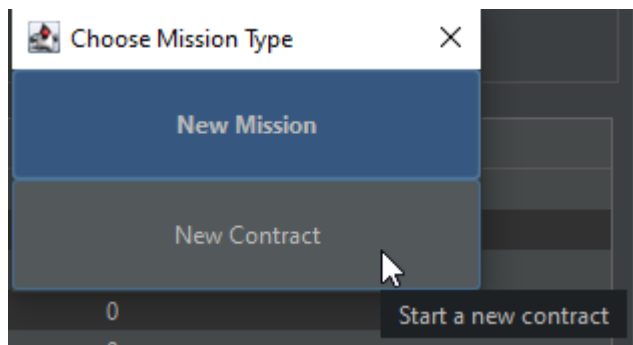
Follow the workflow in CamOps for generating your unit's first contract offers from a hiring hall world (depending on your era, this might be a nation capital, Galatea, Outreach, Arc Royal, or somewhere else.)

Once you've followed the CamOps workflow (building a spreadsheet can be helpful for this), you need to create this contract in MekHQ's briefing room and tweak the payments so that the software knows what to pay your unit on the first of every month.

Click the 'Add Mission' button:



Pick the 'New Contract' button:



You will get the contract configurator dialogue:

Contract Parameters

Contract Name:

Location:

Mission Type:

Employer:

Negotiator:

☒ Pay MRBC Fee

Start Date:

Contract length (months):

Payment Multiplier:

Command Rights:

Overhead Compensation:

Transport Terms:

Salvage Rights:

☐ Exchange Rights

Battle Loss Compensation %:

Straight Support %:

Signing Bonus %:

Advance %:

Contract Description

Write Preview

H H H B I -

Calculated Totals

Contract Pay	0 C-Bill
Base Amount:	0 C-Bill
Overhead Amount:	0 C-Bill
Straight Support Amount:	0 C-Bill
Transportation Amount (2-way):	0 C-Bill
Transit Amount (2-way):	0 C-Bill
MRBC Fee: (-5% of Gross Contract Pay)	-0 C-Bill
Advance Money	0 C-Bill
25% of Contract Pay:	0 C-Bill
Signing Bonus:	0 C-Bill
Total Monthly Money (est.)	0 C-Bill
75% of Contract Pay:	12 months @ 0 C-Bill
Total Overhead (est.):	12 months @ -0 C-Bill
Total Maintenance (est.):	12 months @ -0 C-Bill
Total Payroll (est.):	12 months @ -0 C-Bill
Transportation Expenses (2-way)	-0 C-Bill
Estimated Profit	0 C-Bill

OK Cancel

Use this dialogue box to set the contract up in MekHQ as per the details you created from CamOps. You will likely need to tweak the payment multiplier in MekHQ until you get to the right total c-bill payment for the contract, as MekHQ's base calculation is different to that included in CamOps.

Once you have created the contract in MekHQ, follow the steps you usually would in ATB to transport your company to the planet.

N.B: CamOps does not have rules for choosing which planet or which employer exactly you'll be working for, but instead leaves these as broad strokes. It is up to you as GM to drive the story for the contract(s) you've generated.

Running the Contract, Map Campaign Example, Creating Scenarios

With ATB disabled, you as the GM will be responsible for generating scenarios for your players on the contract. CamOps doesn't specify a method for doing so, and instead offers three different ways to play:

Narrative: where you set up missions to tell a story.

Map: where you use an AO or planetary map with counters representing strategic level formations to determine where and when engagements happen

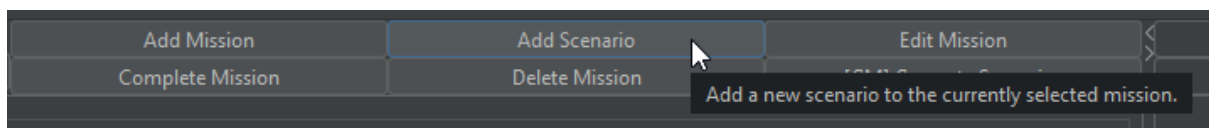
Chaos Campaign: using the Chaos Campaign rules to generate scenarios.

I personally use a map campaign style for my players and this works well. By extracting the TO&E images used in MekHQ, I was able to make counters for Roll20, a virtual tabletop application that all my players can access to make their strategic level moves.

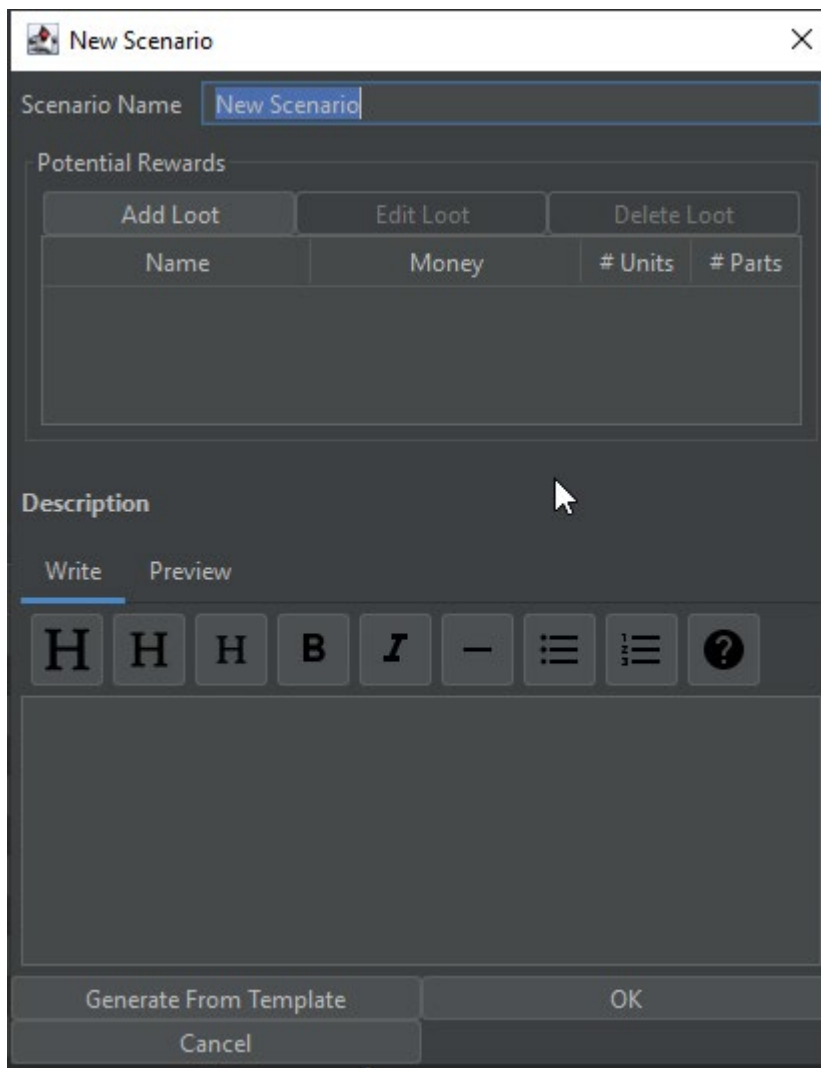


Map sourced from 'Touring the Stars: Butte Hold' for personal use, tokens created using MekHQ's TO&E force image editor, campaign hosted using Roll20, with OpFor (red) tokens hidden on the GM layer until scouted.

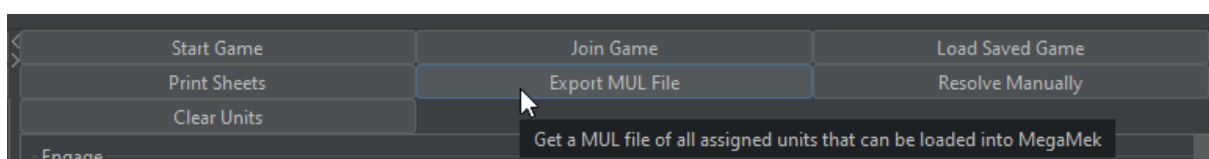
However, you choose to play, you will eventually need to create a scenario in MekHQ to generate the mission forces. Do this with the 'Add Scenario' button.



You will then get the scenario creation dialogue for you to enter as much or as little detail as you want:



Once you have generated the scenario and assigned your players' forces from their TO&E, export the MUL file, but don't start the game yet, you will need an enemy to fight!



Creating the Enemy, and Allies

There are two ways you could choose to create the enemy and any allies for your players:

- (1) Use MegaMek's 'Create Random Army' feature once you have started the scenario.
- (2) Use additional MekHQ save files to provide persistent hostile and allied forces for your players to encounter.

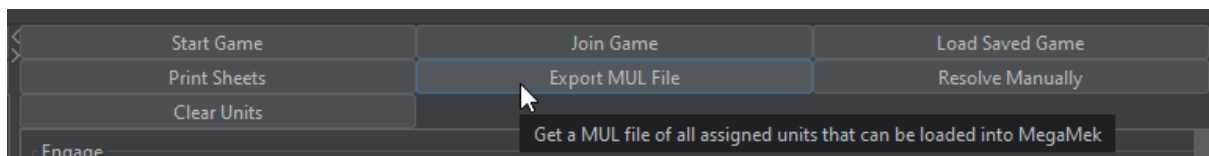
I personally use (2) as it is much more satisfying and can lead to a real sense of achievement for the players to see enemy forces dwindle on planet, to turn captured machines against them, or a sense of dread when the enemy turns one of their own salvaged 'mechs against them.

If you want to use persistent hostile forces for your contracts, you will need to create at least one other MekHQ save file, and potentially more depending on if you want allied forces as well.

These save files should use the barest minimum of presets in MekHQ, as they are essentially a 'holding pen' to allow you to assign enemy forces easily.

The OpFor and BluFor save files should be synchronised to the same date as the players' campaign save file, and should have a TO&E made up of their forces.

Each OpFor/BluFor save file should have a 'Mission' and not a contract created for each deployment. Then, when a scenario is about to occur, create a scenario as you would for the players. Assign units from the TO&E, and click 'Export MUL File':



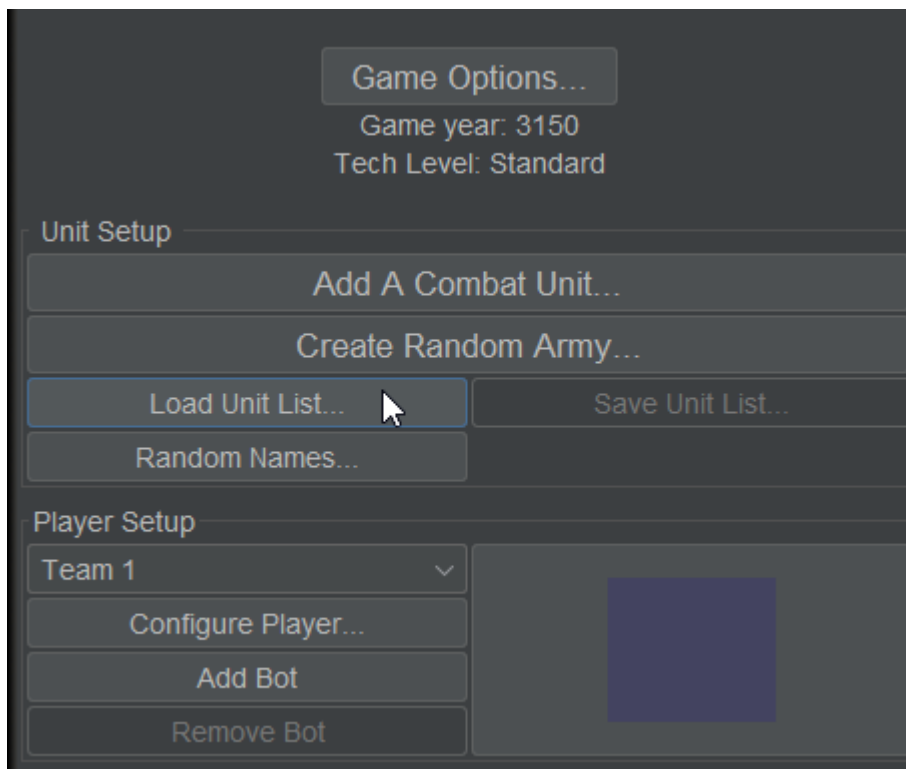
This MUL should be given a memorable name and ideally saved in its own folder to keep things neat.

Playing the Scenario

Do NOT start the scenario from inside MekHQ. Instead, once all the MUL files needed have been created, start MegaMek as a standalone instance.

Share your IP, or the IP of the server, with your players. Once everybody is connected, you should import the players' MUL file first, particularly if you are using blind drop/double blind rules.

Use the 'Load Unit List' button to do so:



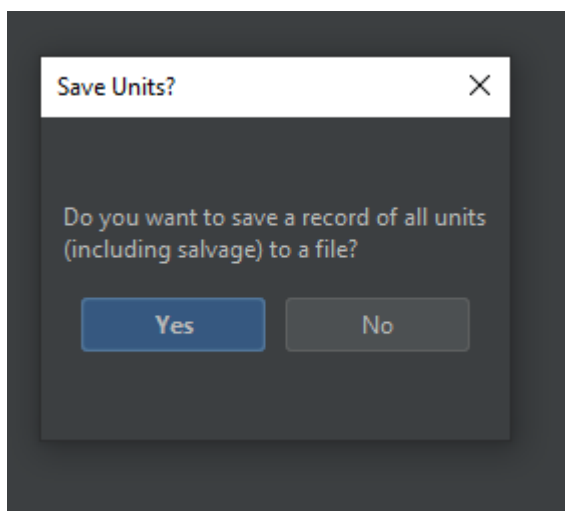
You can then select and right click on the units imported and switch them to a player:



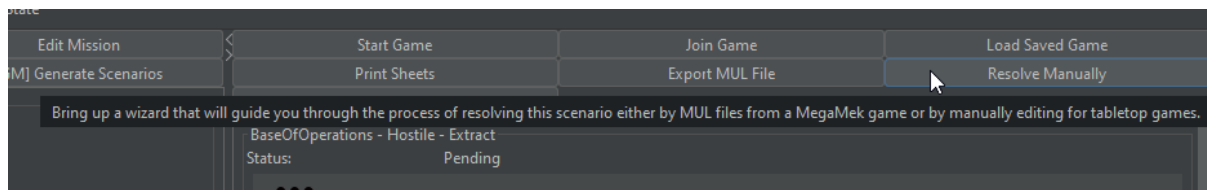
Once all the players have their units, you can now import the OpFor's force and leave them under your control. Make sure you pick a suitable map for the scenario or have created your own using MegaMek's built in map editor ahead of time, then play the game!

Handling Scenario Results

Once you have finished playing the scenario, you, and at least one player, MUST save the output MUL file from MegaMek when prompted on the 'graveyard' screen:



Return to MekHQ and use the 'Resolve Manually' button. Load the MUL file when prompted and divvy up salvage, manage damage, and assess crew and pilot injuries as you would for an ATB game:



Conclusion

The above steps have, hopefully, given you a good 'basic' guide to running a detailed 'RPG-lite' campaign using MekHQ and the Campaign Operations sourcebook. You could do similar with the old 'Field Manual Mercenaries' sourcebook also.

To take your campaign further, there are a few things you can do:

- Use MegaMek's built-in map editor to create your own custom scenario maps to bring even more life and flavour to your campaign.
- Create your own planetary or tactical operations maps using mapmaking software such as Inkarnate, Wonderdraft, or others.
- Merge your play with the A Time of War or MechWarrior Destiny RPG rules for even more depth to your campaign
- Set up a Discord server for your campaign and use channels for text-based roleplaying and decision making.

An example of how I use Discord to run my own campaign's' roleplaying element can be seen below:

