



THE MOVEMENT OF MERCs

This issue marks a more in-depth look into the MERCs table-top miniatures game. Ravage reviewed MERCs last issue. This article deals with the movement system and delves into some of the more tactical approaches used in the system. We'll continue to look at MERCs combat system, specific strategies associated with factions, some lore, and quite possibly some scenarios.

MOVEMENT

As we mentioned in the review last issue, the MERCs cards are both a blessing and a curse. They work very well on two-dimensional maps. They are relatively fast to use and accurate. The cards need to be picked up and repositioned, which can be an issue if you are used to simply extending measuring tape and moving in a straight line. However, MERCs is not meant to be played like other games. Moving in a straight line to the middle of the table and rolling dice isn't what this game is about. Ironically, MERCs seems to be more about movement than combat.

The mechanics of movement are simple. The card's semi-circle slots fit snugly around the 30mm miniature bases. The card is positioned in such a way that the card face is up and the miniature is slotted in at the bottom of the card. The player can rotate the card in any desired direction in the front half of the model. When ready, the player moves the miniature to any of the other semi-circles on the card: this constitutes one Movement Point (MP). Movement points are communicated in the upper left hand of his or her card, and range from one to three. Models can be re-faced with each MP up to ninety degrees. Any rotation over ninety degree is considered a Move and requires an additional MP.



Certainly there can be an argument against the card based movement based on taste, but MERCs innovative card based movement system works on a two-dimensional map. It is easy and precise. However, the hobby exists and is played primarily on a table with terrain: buildings and trees that can get in the way of the smallest tape measure, let alone a card that needs to be laid down. The possible difficulties of the card on a table with three-dimensional terrain is one of the biggest hurdles for potential players. Lifelong gamers are reticent to give up their tape measure.

Oddly enough, this fear quite possibly could be much ado about nothing. A detailed examination of the movement rules reveals that the cards become a measuring tool more akin to the trusty tape measure in terrain where laying down the card just doesn't work. The only difference between the tape measure and the card is the card is a finite distance, which is actually a blessing more than a hindrance in really tight terrain.



The key to three-dimensional movement with the MERCs cards are the non-descript white hash marks on the left and right edges of the card. Giving the cards a once over, it is doubtful players will think these anything other than decoration; they certainly aren't advertised as measurement marks. It is not until the player gets into the book that he realizes that those little unremarkable marks are the key to using the cards on a terrain filled table.

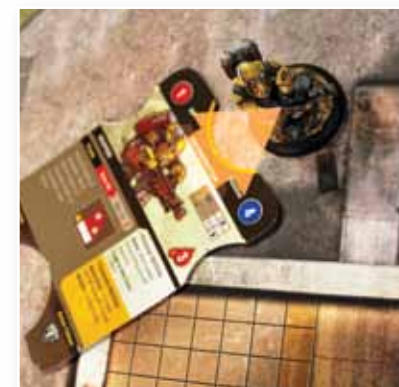
The card is turned vertically with the longest edge, the edge with the hash marks, on the table. The front of the miniature is lined up with the first mark and moved so the back of the miniature is lined up with the second. The front to back nature of the movement is different than most games, but it is consistent with the basic nature of the game. In effect, the card becomes a tape measure with the added bonus of the regular slot based movement in open terrain.

It certainly looks different, but feels fairly natural. Regardless of the type of terrain used, MERCs movement system is different; there is no argument to the contrary. Not bad. Not better. Just different.



SNAP TO COVER (S2C)

No discussion of the movement system can be fair without touching on one of the more intriguing hooks to the game, Snap to Cover. S2C is the practice of jumping to cover when the moving model is within a base length (30mm) of the afore mentioned cover. The tricks a player can pull off with S2C are myriad. In fact, new strategies using Snap to Cover are discovered with every game among the diehard MERCs community.



Snap to Cover is not defined as a move. This distinction allows the players to pull off some pretty interesting tactical tricks. The most elementary use of S2C is to snap before or after a movement point to take better advantage of the terrain. It allows the player to cover just a little more distance and reach the protection of cover. Or, using S2C to reach a squad member (who is defined as cover in the game rules) in order to use one of the many "kits" (Medkit, Repair Kit, Adrenaline Injection, etc.) in the game. The MERCs rule book only hints at the strategic use of this seemingly simple movement trick.

More experienced players use S2C offensively and much more creatively. It allows for a enjoyably realistic combat interaction in both ranged combat and melee combat. Players' movement decision really become quite important. As discussed in the previous article on MERCs, the consequences of a bad movement or positional choice can be quite drastic. In fact, if one thing can be said about MERCs, in combat or in movement, choices that seems pretty similar become quite substantial. This nuance in the system means the player is as important to victory as the faction he plays.

A player can snap MERCs around a corner and open fire without the moving penalty associated with Move & Fire, because S2C is not considered moving. Conversely, he can fire then snap back around the corner to safety. Just the addition of these two tactics opens up the game. Players are nearly as limited in action as initially perceived. Even this is the tip of the iceberg.

In hand-to-hand combat, player can S2C to the flank or rear of a melee combatant. This creates a very active, and strategic, melee combat that is far removed from the typical static hand-to-hand combat seen in other games. Especially in light of the rather heavy emphasis MERCs puts on getting to the flank or rear arc of a targeted model.

Snap to Cover used in conjunction with the Advanced Combat Maneuvers creates a gaming experience altogether different than experienced in basic MERCs game (or any other miniatures game out there for that matter). The player's ability to see all options on the table top is put to the test.

