

# UNDER THE HAMMER



A L.A.R.P. BY SHANE  
WISHKAH@REDBRICK.DCU.IE  
[HTTP://WWW.REDBRICK.DCU.IE/~WISHKAH/HEAVYGEAR/](http://www.redbrick.dcu.ie/~wishkah/heavygear/)

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*Cycles of détente brought to a violent end, North and South clash in open warfare across the equatorial Badlands. Powerless to stand in the way of the battling giants who would crush their homes underfoot, the town of Matters' Folly is holding a desperate auction – allegiance for protection. But unsurprisingly, with delegates from the four corners of the globe here on neutral ground, nothing is as it seems. Intrigue, plots, feuds, rivalries, lost love, family troubles, prejudice, hopes and dreams... sounds like it's business as usual on Terra Nova.*

Under the Hammer is an 18-player systemless LARP written for a 3-hour slot at Gaelcon 2004. It's set in the Heavy Gear universe on Terra Nova, sometime in the middle of the Interpolar War, in a conference room in the town hall of the Badlands town Matters' Folly.

As the War has worn on, Matters' Folly tried to stay out of it, offering its services as a trading town and major water supplier for the area to any who wanted them. This had unforeseen consequences, however. When Northern troops were in town, the South would treat the town as a valid military target. The same happened with the North when Southern troops were in town. The town's small militia could do nothing against the might of the polar forces, and eventually the mayor hit upon a radical idea – to auction the town's loyalties to a major power, in exchange for sufficient protection to keep any enemies away. Word was sent out, and negotiation parties from the CNCS, AST, Port Arthur and Peace River are in town to bid, and of course follow their own agendas.

You, as GM, have the initial task of reading and being familiar with all 18 characters. You can take notes if you like, they'll probably come in handy when the game is underway. When it comes to printing out the stuff for the game, each player needs:

- their character's sheet
- the intro file on the setting and history
- their nametag
- the file on what they have to offer at the negotiations, if they're from a guest delegation

In addition, there's a file with the names, brief descriptions, and delegations of all the characters that can be printed up and posted on a wall as a useful in-game prop.

When it comes to handing out the characters, there's a few things to keep in mind. Many of the characters are written as gender-neutral and can be played as either a male or a female, and either have gender-neutral given names or male and female versions (these folks will need a marker to fill in their given name on their nametags). Some characters, however, must be a particular gender, and these are listed here in rough order of how important that is.

- Laila Bilanski-Adams must be female
- Herb Bilanski-Adams must be male
- Val Guyet must be male
- Marshal Hadland must be female
- Shad Kolkman must be male
- Milan Kopler must be male
- Mayor Dellasanta should be male
- Soldier Arkhangel should be played by the tallest player!

The overall situation is that each guest group's superiors have agreed to send a three-person delegation in to negotiate under a flag of truce, with the understanding that the negotiations would be over within three hours (or whatever you decide yourself). Each of these groups was collected from a different pickup point (one each about forty kilometres north, south, east and west - roughly - of town) by a squad from the town militia in four-wheel-drive vehicles, and brought to the town hall, where they now are. Each was brought to the pick-up point by a force from their own military, which is in radio contact if required. All delegates are stripped of all weapons before being brought into town, and the host delegation are also unarmed as a gesture of good faith (unless you decide otherwise).

Once the players have had a chance to read their character sheets, assemble them into their respective delegations and let them get to know their allies.

When the game is actually underway, there's little for the GM to do. There's no plot, it's just a case of letting the characters do their things. Do remind everyone of how much time is remaining every half-hour or so, because the town council will want to vote on what they're going to do, probably when there's half an hour left. You'll also probably need to answer lots of questions about all sorts of topics relating to the game and the setting, so know your Heavy Gear!

The other potential problem comes from conflict between the forces the players have at their beck and call, outside of the physical constraints of the game. This is pretty much up to yourself as to which forces beat which forces in various situations, but bear in mind that every military force will notice when another goes on the move and will alert their own delegates. A squad of Gears heading toward town could make for some hasty alliances!

Make time for a good debriefing session at the end, and get each player to say a few quick sentences about their characters and what they achieved and what they failed at. Any character with information-gathering goals should be asked what they found out.

Have fun!