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Battletech 15: Close Quarters (Bk. 15)



Synopsis

Scout Lieutenant Cassie Suthorn, a cunning and resourceful member of the freewheeling Camancho's Caballeros, suspects danger from a seemingly low-risk assignment, and is forced to use all of her skills against the destructive BattleMechs.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Victor Milan has always been one of my favorite Battletech novel authors. Cassie Suthorn is not your typical charcter, where most main characters pilot the 20-30 meter tall robots, Cassie is a scout, killing these metal giants on foot with guile and planning. Sure there is mech action in the book from the memebbers of her unit, but really, cassie shows you don't need to pilot one of them to bring one down. Definately suggest the series, which also includes Hearts of Chaos and Black Dragon, now available on Kindle!

I liked battletech as a kid, but I am beginning to think the subject sucks. Another book in a long line of, "the large lasers hit me in the front center torso." How tiring.

This must be one of the very best Battletech books I've encountered, and I have read eight or nine. Cassie Suthorn is a scout for a mercenary mech battalion. The Camacho's Caballeros find themselves in a no-win situation, pinned down in the heart of a large city, with all forces turned against them. Cassie must bring off a mission to save them. This writer has an unusual gift for

description. His characters come alive on the page. The pace is excellent, keeps drawing you in. Plenty of hot battles, realistically described. A real winner

2.5 stars. Close Quarters is a solid, easy-to-read story, better written than most Battletech novels. I gave it a low rating because I've read much better books, but I did enjoy it. Close Quarters scores points for originality; not often can I read of cowboys and Indians battling samurai in massive robots. It is a fun book with colorful characters, exciting spy work, martial arts combat, and well-described `Mech battles. However, it elicits little emotional response, and is frequently cliché and overdramatic. Camacho's Caballeros make their debut in this novel. The Caballeros have much more grit, flashiness, and character than most groups in the Battletech universe; only the Clans are more interesting. The Caballeros hail from the Trinity Worlds, called the "Southwestern Worlds," which were settled by people from Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Mexico. The worlds are poor, unindustrialized, agricultural, and unburdened by strong federal enforcement, so the citizens are little different than their pre-twentieth century ancestors. They herd cattle, wear spurs, and speak Spanish or Southern-drawl English. There are proud land-owning, macho cowboys, poor hillbillies, and Norteños, which are apparently northern Mexicans. They also include Indians such as Pueblos, Apaches, Navajos, Kiowas, and Comanches; the Caballero chief medical officer is curandera Doc Ten Bears. Camacho's Caballeros are piously religious. Interestingly, they integrate the widely varied religions within the regiment. In the violent Caballero culture, religious leaders must earn respect, so Catholic priests, Protestant pastors, and Rabbis fight as `Mech Warriors. One `Mech Warrior frequently receives visions of the Virgin Mary. The Caballeros are rowdy and unruly. They routinely fight each other, breaking noses and bones and drawing knives, but they do not hold grudges. They have a macho, male-dominated culture, but they respect women talented enough to rise up into officer positions. They strut into bars and try to start fights with locals. Off-duty, they have little respect for authority as they raise hell, but during battle they show discipline. They admit several times that their `Mech shooting skills are poor, but they are natural pilots; just as their ancestors were born horse riders, their generation are born AgMech pilots. When training against each other in mock `Mech battles, they charge each other and brawl, punching and kicking the enemy machines. They stick together against the outside world and consider their unit an extended family. Milán develops several characters very well, though the others have no depth. The story revolves around Scout Lieutenant Cassie Suthorn, by far the most interesting character. As a young child, invaders attack her world; her father, a local officer, fights them and dies. Cassie watches as a `Mech demolishes her home, leaving her with a fear and hatred of `Mechs. She later hits the streets,

where she becomes a criminal scam artist. She trains in martial arts, growing into a tough self-reliant killing machine. Later she joins the Caballeros as a Scout. Despite being a woman and foreigner, she is one of the most respected members of the Regiment, responsible for a long list of `Mech kills. MilÃfÂjn did a good job of mixing her strength and independence with fear and loneliness. Camacho's Caballeros receive a garrison contract from CEO Chandrasekhar Kurita, another intriguing character. Though Kuritans are supposed to be rigidly self-controlled, callous to their subjects, and obsessed with power, Chandresakhar is obese, prone to small vices, capitalist in a conservative culture, and kindly. Some of MilÃfÂjn's more sophisticated thoughts come through in Chandresakhar's dialogue: "The Combine's weakness has always been that we viewed trade as an adjunct to war, all too often practicing it in a way indistinguishable from conflict. Our reputation for double-dealing and outright piracy is appalling." His combination of intelligence and innocence make him interesting. The plot incorporates shadowy conspiracies and interesting mysteries. Without revealing the plot, I'll say that the power players include the Caballeros, Chandrasekhar, the ISF under the Smiling One, yakuza, some royalty, and representatives of at least three major groups outside of the Combine. Shifting alliances and distrust keep the story from turning dull, and there are some decent plot twists. Close Combat features better combat than most Battletech books. It places more emphasis on martial arts and commando battles than on `Mech battles. MilÃfÂjn described hand-to-hand combat in an intense fashion, taking the time to detail each move. In the commando segments, MilÃfÂjn explains Cassie's reasoning for her tactics. The `Mech battles involve innovative stratagems. MilÃfÂjn gives intense details of shots being traded and `Mechs maneuvering. At the same time, he describes the flow of the larger battle as units probe and fade. I found the descriptions of the Draconians rather silly, and I do realize that the Combine was fleshed out before MilÃfÂjn started this book. It's ridiculous that DEST operatives, the best trained Special Forces in the Inner Sphere, still use swords in 3056. Supposedly they easily cut through combat armor, but clearly these obsolete weapons are only used because fans think swords are cool. It seems cartoon-like that the Combine is a realm of Yakuza crime syndicates, samurai, ninjas, and sword-play. Close Quarters has little emotional impact. MilÃfÂjn includes the technical elements of a dramatic story, but does not use subtlety to develop empathy. Like a soap opera, the characters erroneously think their actions are passionate and epic. For instance, Cassie's friend gives her a teddy bear, and she breaks down in tears. Intellectually, I understand that Cassie is inexperienced with friendship and long-repressed emotions are pouring out, but it's just overdramatic and so I cannot take it too seriously. Characters give short speeches that leave other characters pouring tears. I saw many conflicts of giri, or duty, with sentimentality, but again they did not grab me. In the

end, I am glad I read *Close Quarters*. It is mildly humorous, and the Caballeros have an easy-going, rollicking, adventurous spirit that I enjoyed. Treat this as a good pulp sci-fi.-Zach Zelmar

Milan in *Close Quarters* gives perhaps the first best characterization of those people living in the Battletech era. The similes and metaphors are totally in-character to the setting, not relying upon contemporary comparisons to make the reader understand. However, while this might normally prevent a reader unfamiliar with the setting and some of the major characters, I think that the presentation is such that even a newcomer could understand without trouble. My beef is with the characters. The main character is entirely too superhuman in her abilities. Not only is she the best scout and tactician of the regiment, she is also the best hand-to-hand fighter and the fastest runner and everything else. Her only flaw is a lack of emotion, which is the only aspect of her character that might be considered to change during the course of the novel. She becomes friends with people she normally would not, but her growth I feel is very limited. Also, the other characters are either two-dimensional or clichés, like the unit commander grief-stricken over a family-member's death and unable to function to the commander's son desperate to earn pop's approval. Those elements reduce the quality of the overall work. There is the standard combat scenes which are not as good as others in the Battletech series. Also, the story does not really seem to impact the big picture, just those involved directly in the story. In that respect this is not really a "core" novel in the series and is not terribly essential to the overall comprehension. However, as noted above, the perspective of the characters and setting in this might be the best to this point in the series.

The first time you read this book, you may feel that it is yet another Battletech novel with lots of combat and nothing that makes it stand out from the rest of the crowd other than it is told from the perspective of a non-mechwarrior. Read it again. I didn't get it the first time but *'Close Quarters'* has a deep inner meaning. It is a story about duty. Cassie's duty to the regiment, Lainie's duty to the Oyabun and so on. It is similar to Bob Charrette's *'Wolves on the Border'* in its Ninjo / Giri focus. I would recommend this to anyone, even someone who was not a Battletech fan.

I am a huge Battletech fan, but this is the first Battletech novel that I could not finish. I really do not understand how some reviewers can recommend this to any Battletech fan, because about half way in I got to a point where I felt like it would ruin the whole franchise for me if I read even 1 more page. To each his own I guess. Just like the reviewer before me, I will avoid reading any more Camacho's Caballeros novels.

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