

WHISPERS FROM THE PIT

Mass Battle Options

In this episode of Whispers from the Pit, we actually branch off from my usual discussions and musings about the *Savage Worlds* rules and actually give you some optional rules to use in your games.

Yes, we are very kind to you!

Although the existing Mass Battles rules work well, individual characters tend to be reduced to a simple die roll. Given that it's called a "mass" battle, of course, it makes sense that individuals have to give way to the majority of nameless warriors.

However, for those of you who want to make the heroes more pivotal, add more color to your battles, or add more options, here are a handful of suggestions for tweaking the Mass Battle rules.

These rules don't cover any in-depth tactical planning, moving of massed units, or anything like that. *Savage Worlds* is about the heroes and focuses the action purely on them—it isn't a wargame. Everything else is pretty much background flavor for the GM to use in his descriptions of the ebb and flow of battle.

Specific Foe Battles

Although an enemy army might be made up of goblins, orcs, chieftains, trolls, and shamans, the characters' opponents in mass battles are, as written, nameless minions, whose individual abilities have no real impact on the conflict. They might be fighting a lowly goblin, or a fearsome orc berserker, but the outcome of each round of action is still determined by a single die roll.

With this option, characters get to fight a specific foe. It means more work on the part of the GM, as every monster in the battle the characters could face needs a full stat block, but if he's using an army of orcs in his campaign (for example), chances are he's already got individual stats written out anyway.

Foe List

The first step for the GM is to determine what creatures make up the enemy army, and then create a d20 table based on the rough percentage of the army they make up. For instance, if the orc army is 75% orc warriors, they'll naturally be faced more often. When the battle reaches the Characters in Mass Combat section, each player rolls a d20 to see what foe he faces.

Here's an example list.

Example Orc Army

d20	Opponent
1-2	Orc Shaman
3	Goblin Shaman
4-10	Goblin Warrior
11-16	Orc Warrior
17-18	Orc Berserker
19	Troll
20	Orc Chieftain

Combat Rolls

Okay, you have an army list and the poor player knows what he's fighting, but how does it work? Well, first you need to decide whether you're going to run the combat as a full combat or just a single blow.

Full Battle

Full combat is literally what it says. You stop the battle, and run through a regular combat against the foe. Unlike regular combat, the hero can't get aid from his buddies—he's fighting on his own because everyone else is equally engaged. However, if two players roll the same opponent and it's something you'd consider a "tough match," say a troll or orc berserker, you can allow both those players to be facing the same opponent.

Even against different foes, play all the battles as you would a regular combat round. This way, no one is left sitting by while the fights are run one at a time.

Characters may flee the battle by declaring they are abandoning the fight. However, the foe receives a free hit, as per *Withdrawing from Combat*, regardless of the distance he is away. This simulates the foe chasing down the character and giving him one last smack for old times' sake.

The advantage of using this method is that it focuses on the hero and his abilities. The disadvantage is that it slows down the mass battle. There's also a greater risk of danger to individual characters.

Single Blow

Single blow combat is much quicker. Both the hero and his opponent make a single blow against each other, using whatever Edges they can make work. Roll damage as normal as well.

Don't worry about dealing initiative cards, or worrying if a character uses Shooting against a foe using Fighting, as this method condenses an entire regular combat into a single action, with each protagonist taking his best shot.

Character Results

The regular Character Results table assumes the character fights more than one foe during a battle round, which is, after all, a bit longer than a regular combat round. Even though the Specific Foe method pits a hero against a single foe, there's nothing that says this has to represent the character's entire action for that round of the battle.

For instance, a troll is a fearsome opponent, and the fight may well represent everything the character achieved that round, but against goblins or orcs, he may actually slay as many as a dozen (although he still only has to fight one, not all 12). The fight is merely an indication of how the character did, and allows bragging rights ("Yeah, I slew a troll at the Battle of Windbush Temple.").

At the end of the fight, we need to see how the character did in terms of the broader conflict. Each system needs its own outcome comparison.

Find the description which matches the outcome of the fight, and this will give you the result for the round that you can use to gauge the character's impact in Mass Battle terms. Failure, success, and raises give bonuses to the Battle roll as normal.

Full Battle

The outcome of a full battle is actually fairly obvious at first glance, but there's more to it than meets the eye. Sure, the hero slew his opponent, but was it enough to swing the tide of battle?

Outcome	Impact
The character is dead, Incapacitated, or has abandoned the fight. His mass battle is over.	Failure
The character kills his foe or it flees, but he takes 2 wounds or more.	Success
The hero kills his foe or it flees, but he takes a wound.	Raise
The character kills his foe without suffering a single wound.	Two Raises

Single Blow

With a single blow, there's much less chance of killing your foe. After all, you may miss him or watch your blow bounce off his armor. Here's how the regular table equates to the results of the fight.

Note that we say "wound" here rather than "kill." This is simply because the chances of slaying a Wild Card opponent in a single hit are slim (and definitely worth bragging rights if you pull it off).

Outcome	Impact
The character receives one of more wounds but does not wound his opponent.	Failure
The character wounds his opponent, but is also wounded.	Success
The character wounds his foe but is Shaken.	Raise
The character wounds his foe without suffering any damage.	Two Raises

Random Event Battles

In random event battles the characters face specific events, but what happens to the heroes is more a matter of luck than GM decision. In this version, the heroes decide where they wish to be in the battle (in relation to the action), and then roll to determine what event befalls them each round.

We've included a complete table for you to use, along with appropriate descriptions of the events, but you should feel free to alter it to suit your style of campaign.

Using the Table

On the first round of the battle, each character declares whether he is Leading, Engaged, or Disengaged.

Leading characters are in the frontline. They get all the glory, but also take the most risks. Engaged characters are with the bulk of the army, holding the middle ground. Disengaged characters are lurking in the rear.

A character may move one category forward or backward each round. So, a character who is Leading on round 1 can move to the Engaged column on round 2, and the Disengaged column on round 3.

Next, each player rolls 2d6 and consults the table to determine what he faces. Some results are beneficial (either to the character or his army), whereas others are not.

Events

Here's a list of how the events affect the battle. All combats are assumed to use the standard resolution system, but there's no reason you can't use the Specific Foe battle resolution instead.

Allied Commander

The hero finds himself fighting next to his general, who is being attacked by a Strong Foe. If the character scores a failure this round, his general has been killed. The army must make a Morale roll this round, whether it loses any tokens

or not. In addition, the replacement general is not as good as his predecessor, and his Knowledge (Battle) is one die lower (minimum d4).

Ammunition

The character finds a supply of ammo, whether that be bullets, arrows, sling stones, or magic crystals. He recovers 3d6 shots or Power Points, as applicable. He must make an attack roll against a Weak Foe this round as well.

Baggage Train

The character has fought his way through to the enemy's baggage train. He makes an attack roll as normal against a Moderate Foe. He then rolls 1d6 for each success or raise, and multiplies the result by \$100 to determine the goods he has looted.

Enemy Commander

The hero comes across the enemy general, who should be a Strong Foe. If the character scores a raise or higher, he has killed the enemy commander. The enemy army must make a Morale roll this round whether it loses any tokens or not. In addition, the replacement general is not as good as his predecessor. His Knowledge (Battle) is one die lower (minimum d4).

Follow Me!

The character is caught up in a charge and carried deeper into the battle. The character must make an Agility roll at -2. On a success, he stays where he is and rolls again for another Event. With a failure, he moves one column to the left and rolls again for an event.

Foe (Strong, Moderate, Weak)

The character is engaged against an opponent. If you use the standard resolution system, the character has a +2 bonus to attack rolls against a Weak foe, no modifier against a Moderate Foe, and -2 (or higher) against a Strong Foe. In our orc army, a Weak Foe may be a goblin, a Moderate Foe a regular orc, and a Strong Foe an orc berserker or a troll.

Healing

The character receives attention from the medics (or priests). He recovers 1 wound, and does not take part in any action this round.

Rally to Me

On the field of battle, being in command is often a case of being in the wrong place at the right time. A unit has lost its commander and is on the verge of routing when the hero steps into the breach.

The character must make a Persuasion or Intimidation roll (his choice) to rally the men. On a success, the unit holds. With a raise, the unit rallies and pushes forward, earning the hero's side a +1 to their Battle Roll for each raise. With a failure, the unit routs and the hero's side automatically lose a token.

Respite

The character manages to take advantage of the relatively quiet rear lines and can recover his breath. He takes no actions this turn, and is not attacked.

Singled Out

A powerful or specialized foe has singled the character out for special treatment. This may be a knight challenging a character knight, a spellcaster who has been ordered to stop the character, or even a sniper (possibly leading to a sniper duel if the character has a missile weapon).

With the standard resolution system, the character treats the opponent as a Strong Foe, but the penalty is -4. For either of the optional systems of combat resolution we've presented, the foe is a Wild Card at least equal to the hero in ability.

Valuable Resource

The character attacks a valuable resource. This might be a spellcaster, an artillery weapon, a knight with a magic sword, an officer (not the general), or maybe even an enemy ammo dump. The resource is guarded by a foe of the GM's choice.

A raise or higher with the standard resolution system destroys the resource. This may have additional game effects. An artillery piece would no longer be able to fire, so the enemy would suffer a reduction in their Artillery bonus (to a minimum of +0). A dead knight doesn't need his magic sword, but the player can now use it, or the enemy suffers a -2 penalty to their Battle Roll due to ammo shortages.

Random Battle Event Table

2d6	Leading	Engaged	Disengaged
2	Allied Commander	Singled Out	Foe (Strong)
3	Baggage Train	Ammunition	Healing
4	Rally to Me!	Follow Me!	Foe (Moderate)
5	Foe (Weak)	Foe (Strong)	Ammunition
6	Foe (Moderate)	Foe (Weak)	Respite
7	Foe (Strong)	Foe (Moderate)	Foe (Weak)
8	Foe (Moderate)	Foe (Weak)	Healing
9	Foe (Weak)	Foe (Strong)	Follow Me!
10	Valuable Resource	Rally to Me!	Foe (Moderate)
11	Ammunition	Respite	Ammunition
12	Respite	Healing!	Foe (Strong)

Semi-Tactical Battles

Semi-tactical battles allow the players to use a small amount of tactics during the battle yet still keep the game running fast.

You'll need at least two sets of index cards (or scraps of paper). Write the words Charge, Attack, Envelop, and Hold on a separate card for the players. In order to keep things moving, it's best you have one set per player. You can manage with just one set, but you'll need to deal with one player at a time rather than collectively.

Before the characters make their attack roll, they place a card of their choice face down in front of them to represent their actions this turn. The GM then places one of his cards face down in front of each player to represent the various enemy maneuvers.

Turn over the cards, and consult the table below. Positive numbers give the players a bonus to their attack roll, whereas negative numbers are a penalty.

Semi Tactical Battle Table

Enemy Action	Players' Action					
	Charge	Attack	Ambush	Hold	Envelop	Retreat
Charge	+0	-1	+0	-2	+0	-4
Attack	+1	+0	+1	-1	+0	-2
Ambush	+0	-1	No attack	+1	+0	-1
Hold	+2	+1	-1	No attack	+2	No attack
Envelop	+0	+0	+0	-2	No attack	-2
Retreat	+4	+2	+1	No attack	+2	No attack

Other Options

As well as beating each other senseless, combatants also got a chance to loot the dead and take captives for ransom. Soldiers typically didn't get paid much, and looting was an accepted practice in olden times.

Battle Length

How long does a battle last? Well, before nightvision equipment, usually until it got dark. However, trying to keep track of time isn't much fun. For convenience, assume each round of battle lasts either 30 minutes (for a small battle) or an hour (for a large battle).

Unless the adventure specifically mentions the time of day a battle starts, or if when it ends is crucial, it's best not to worry too much.

Extra Character Results

As it stands, a character who scores a critical failure only suffers the same effects as someone who failed their roll. Here's some extra punishment for them.

Critical Failure: The character suffers badly at the hands of overwhelming foes and suffers 6d6 damage. Worse still, his side gets -2 to their Battle Roll.

Failure on a 1: If the character rolls a 1 on his attack die (regardless of his Wild Die), he suffers 5d6 damage and his side gets -1 to its Battle roll this round.

Loot

How much plunder a soldier can acquire after a battle depends on the quality of his foes. A unit of undead or orcs won't have much of value, but a detachment of slain knights have expensive armor, not to mention horses. For lower quality foes, assume each soldier gets just 1d6 x \$25 of loot. For well equipped foes, this increases to 1d6 x \$100.

Feel free to adjust this for characters' actions as well. A hero who scored several raises might get a bonus of \$50 per raise from his liege, for instance.

Captives

In days of yore, the taking of prisoners was a tried and tested method of making money. A knight, for instance, was usually at least a minor noble, and could be ransomed for cash, as could his armor, weapons, and horse. Few civilized races will ransom back a peasant, zombie or orc, however, though orcs fighting their own kin might conduct ransoming.

Taking Captives

Okay, so now the players have read this, they no doubt see the money train that is taking prisoners and ransoming them. Here are some examples of how they might grab a captive.

- Score a raise using the standard resolution system.
- Score two raises.
- Make a Fighting roll if the enemy fails a Morale roll. Each success and raise grants one captive.
- Make a Fighting roll as above, but only when their side wins the battle.
- Use the full combat option and either make their foe surrender or make him Incapacitated.

You'll have to determine the value of any prisoners they take based on the enemy they are fighting. If you're using a Specific Foe list, they'll know who they're fighting anyway, or you can roll on that if you need a random result.

Getting Captured

So when does a player character get captured? Well, here's some options for you.

- As soon as he is Incapacitated (he's dragged off the field).
- If he is Incapacitated and his army lose the battle.
- Any time his army loses a battle (though you might allow a Stealth roll against the victors' Notice for him to sneak away).
- If rolls a critical failure on an attack roll (assume his unit was overrun).
- If he deliberately surrenders to a foe to save his own life.

Can a character escape his imprisonment? Of course he can, but you'll need to create an adventure for that.

Ransoming Captives

Assume that each important character carries a ransom of \$200 per Rank (GMs should assign important NPCs an equivalent Rank), which must be paid within a year (or the prisoner is executed).

Certain troops are worth more. Wild Cards, nobles (includes characters with the Noble Edge), and spellcasters each increase the base ransom by \$200. For instance, a Wild Card character who happens to a nobleman and a wizard is valued at a hefty \$800 per Rank. Better hope he has some savings.

If a character wants his gear back, his friends have to raise the money for that separately.

Assume the faceless extras that make up the bulk of an army are worth \$10 each (if anyone bothers to pay for them at all).

Prisoner Exchange

Alternately, prisoners can be exchanged. This allowed both sides to liberate their better quality troops without having to pay money. Use the prices above as a guide for what a character is worth, and then add in his gear as well.

Captives are traded for an equal amount of prisoners. Thus, a character worth \$400 (excluding gear) can be traded for two characters worth \$200, or one worth \$300 with an extra \$100 of gear.

So, my little warriors, you've now got some options for Mass Battles which really put the heat, and spotlight, on the heroes. As always, feel free to use, abuse, or alter these as you see fit.

Wiggy

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