

GF_x Mass Combat Rules

Adventurers often enjoy pitting themselves against formidable foes and defeating them in a fair fight. This requires skills and talent, long hours of training, courage and plenty of luck. There may come a time however, when the strongest will not prevail alone and the players find themselves in command of tens, maybe hundreds of others. When a roaming tribe of orcs attacks the village, the charisma to encourage and to lead will make the peasants take up pitchforks and scythes, wipe the rust from their grandfathers sword and stand up to the menace. GF_x has rules to handle these situations. The emphasis has been placed on speed during the combat while counting casualties can be done later.

When to use mass combat rules

To have a mass combat, you need by definition to have a great number of participants. It is difficult to draw the line between bunch of fighters acting on their own and the same men fighting as a unit, but here are some guidelines to consider:

- Mass combat and individual combat can be handled together, but this is somewhat cumbersome. All fighting sides should have at least one fighting unit that is governed by mass combat rules and is engaged with other units of the opposing sides. Having individuals fight among themselves during this is easy to handle.
- The acts of player characters and important non-player characters should never be governed by mass combat rules. After developing their characters from one games session to another, it will be frustrating for players to learn that their character has died of statistical reasons.
- The most important factor is time. A good combat should last some time, but at a certain point everyone will agree that it will benefit the game to lose in realism and gain in time spent actually playing, not scribbling monster stats on numerous sheets of paper and rolling hundreds of dice.

Terminology

- A unit is a number of individual soldiers who operate as one during a particular combat
- A commander is the person directly commanding a unit
- Mass combat round consists of 6 individual combat rounds
- A manoeuvre is any action that a unit undertakes in one mass combat round. Manoeuvres correspond to actions in individual combat

Relevant skills

The rules of mass combat focus on leading armies or army groups. Hence the swordfighting skills of the adventurers become irrelevant and what counts is their ability to lead and to command. However — a great leader can only do so much without a great plan. You need to lay out your tactics and lay it out well. In game terms you need the following skills: Tactics and Leadership.

Tactics is a specialization of Warfare (a Knowledge skill). In mass combat, a Tactics roll is roughly equivalent of a damage roll in individual combat. Note that there is no such thing as tactics in general and you can specialize in tactics several times. Every specialization deals with certain army types.

Leadership is specialisation of Persuasion (a Personality skill) and can be compared to the attack roll. Executing a

manoeuvre requires a Leadership roll.

Both the Tactics and Leadership are rolled by the unit commander.

The soldiers

Leadership and Tactics are for the commanders, but the battle is not fought by them. The skills, training, equipment and morale of the soldiers play a role as important as the skills of commanders. After all, the really tough ones win against all odds.

In game terms, the skills and attributes of the men forming a unit add a modifier — positive or negative — to their commanders Tactics roll.

Next, the most important modifiers are explained. In many cases you have to work with average values: the average size of the soldiers, the average weapon. You can go as far as to do some math, but as mass combat is about simplification, so you should trust your judgement. If you are the GM, never forget to reward players who have spent resources upgrading their units. Even if the upgrades are statistically next to insignificant, you should consider giving a +1 modifier to reward players actions.

The modifiers range from -1D to +1D for every category. If the unit fulfills the requirements partially, determine the modifier as follows:

- If there are around 25% of men in the unit who fulfill the criteria, give a modifier of +/- 1
- If anything between 25% - 75% of men meet the criteria, use a modifier of +/- 2
- If around 25% of the men do not meet the criteria, use the full 1D modifier.

The modifiers

- Armament

The better the weapons available, the greater the damage to your enemy. For purposes of mass combat, there are three kinds of weapons: Light (up to 2D+2 damage, Medium (3D - 5D+2 damage) and heavy weapons (6D - 8D+2 damage). In this case, damage includes the units average Strength score (do not include size however, this is handled separately).

Lightly armed units get a -1D penalty and heavily armed units a +1D bonus.

- Armor

As with weapons, armor is divided into three categories. There are no specific numbers, only some guidelines. As opposed to weapons, heavy armor adds a penalty and light armor a bonus to the opponent for whom this makes you either harder or easier to hit:

Unarmored units give the opponent a +1D bonus

Units in medium armor - leather, natural armor, brigandine, give no penalty or bonus

Units in heavy armor - chain mail, plate mail and variants, give the opponent a -1D penalty

You have to be creative in taking into account helmets, shields and other equipment men might have dangling on them.

- Size

The bigger the enemy, the more fearsome he is. For every size category smaller than medium, the unit will receive a -1D penalty. For every category that it is larger, hand out a +1D bonus.

When figuring out the average size of unit, here is a somewhat debatable but a rather fast formula:

2 individuals of category X = 1 individual of category

X+1. Two hobbits make up a human, two humans add up to an ogre.

- Numbers

Sometimes you will win by simply overrunning your enemy. Then again there are narrow passages that negate the advantages of attacking in force.

If one side is at least 2x larger, it gets a +1D bonus

If one side is at least 4x larger, it gets a +2D bonus

If one side is at least 8x larger, it gets a +3D bonus

If one side is at least 16x larger, it gets a +4D bonus

From this point on, there is not much use having more men, because you only can attack your enemy from four sides. If it happens that the larger unit is aerial, you can add an extra +1D for a unit being 32 times larger or for those frequent underwater combats, a unit 64 x larger will get a whole +6D all in all. For spaces with more than 3 dimensions, every GM should make up her own rules.

But as said, the larger unit cannot always take advantage of its numbers. For mass combat purposes, every unit can be attacked from four (see above for exceptions) sides. The number of protected (impassable during normal combat) sides limits the bonus for the larger unit: +1D for one side, +2D for two sides and so on.

- Knowledge of the enemy

Knowing the strengths and weakness can help you avoid a potentially fatal move and strike where it hurts the most. This is a vital part of all tactics and is reflected in mass combat rules. If a unit is attacking an unknown enemy, it will receive a penalty of +1D. If the commanders have spent time studying the tactics of said enemy, or had frequent previous encounters with it, a bonus of +1D can be applied.

Note that while it might be possible to study the tactics of one specific unit (and this must be a rather successful one to last long enough to lend itself to scholarly interest), the tactics rather belong to "Royal Guards", "Orcs of the Dark Marshes" or similar.

- Magic users

This is an exception to the 25%/50%/25% rule introduced above and is highly dependent on the particular world the battle takes place in. In an average world, having some magic users in an army unit would be considered normal and not having them a penalty. In worlds of little magic, even a single priest could add a whole +1D of bonus. First figure out what is normal for your world and then apply penalties and bonuses according to this. Note that a bonus of more than +1D is exceptional (take, for example, the size modifier – you might see halfling home guard units here and there (-1D size penalty), but how often will you run into a full *army* of leprechauns (-2D) or hill giants (+2D)?)

- Strength

Units can be wounded or stunned as individual combatants. To better differentiate between units and individuals, units do not have health, but strength instead. Technically this is the same though. They can be at full strength, wounded, routed or destroyed.

The strength of a unit is the average of the men in it. While more complicated rules for dealing with damaged units appear later in this chapter, units receive the same penalties for wounds and stuns as do individuals. Every stun gives a -1 penalty and every wound a -1D penalty.

Routed and of course destroyed units cannot take part in combat anymore.

- Mounted units

Mounted units get a +1D bonus. This is not

cumulative with the higher ground bonus.

- Higher ground

Higher ground gives advantage to the unit. For gentle slopes, the bonus might be +1, for steep mountainsides +2 and for sheer cliffs and vertical surfaces like castle walls, +1D. In the latter case opponents must have some sort of equipment or method to reach the higher-situated unit.

- Fortifications

Fortifications and simpler makeshift defences give a penalty to those in the open. Even a hedge might give a -1 penalty while stone walls, preferably with parapets give a -1D penalty (for castles, the defender would get 1+D from higher ground while the attacker would get +1D from defences)

- General advantage/disadvantage

Many other situations can influence the outcome of a mass combat encounter. For example partly ethereal enemy, uneven ground, darkness, fog or dense forest might all be taken into account. When dealing with these situations, consider the following:

- If a condition affect both sides alike (darkness), both should get a bonus or a penalty. Otherwise the condition gives a bonus to whoever benefits from it. In rare cases, where the only effect of the condition is making a unit harder to hit (like armor or defences), will it give a penalty to the opponent.

- A bonus should take into account the intensity or scale of the condition with +1/-1 being a noticeable, but not very significant condition and +1D/-1D the best or worst case scenario. A bonus or penalty of more than 1D is exceptional.

Leadership

The previous modifiers dealt with the Tactics roll and the better you roll it, the more damage you deal to your opponent. To actually make that roll, a commander needs to execute a suitable manoeuvre, like an attack or a defence. To do this successfully, he needs to roll for Leadership.

In the middle of a combat, there is plenty of opportunity for confusion and error. This is also where morale and discipline really pay off. GF_x mass combat rules reward military training to a great degree. This is again in the form of modifiers. As with the Tactics skill modifier, figure out the averages as you see best and follow the guidelines below:

- Military Training

The habit of following orders gives you an advantage. But not all training is about holding the line. A party of brigands who have carefully prepared their ambush, can in this situation be considered having at least medium training, maybe even better.

Ill-trained units give a penalty of -1D and well trained units a bonus of +1D.

- The commander

Some officers have songs dedicated to them some are your run-of-the-mill type of nameless functionaries, or armchair generals whose incompetence is the talk of the whole army. A famous leader is sure to have an effect on the unit. Depending on the type of fame, this can be a penalty or a bonus, ranging from 1 to full 1D.

A commander need not be famous, bonuses and penalties can be given out if the unit has served under the same commander before and they have experience working together.

- Higher command

If the battle is commanded by third parties, who use clear signals (trumpets, flags, drums) and the units have been trained in these signals, the commanders

job becomes a lot easier. Apply a bonus, taking into account the signalling method and how well these signals are understood by the unit.

- **Morale**

Last but not least – the morale of the soldiers in the unit is something to be considered. Cowards will rather run than fight and thus get a -1D penalty. Others will stay and fight to save those they love or fulfill oaths taken. They will receive a bonus of +1D

The mass combat round

Mass combat is played in rounds as normal combat is, but the length of a mass combat round is 6 normal rounds. This reflects the somewhat cumbersome movement of large units. If individual combats take place along mass combat, then play out a mass combat after every 5 rounds of individual combat. To understand why, look at this diagram where x stands for individual combat, M for mass combat and | divides mass combat rounds: xxxxxMx|xxxxMxx|xxxMxxx|xxMxxxx|xMxxxxx|M

During every mass combat round, units will declare the number of manoeuvres they will undertake. As with individual combat, every manoeuvre other than the first will add a 1D to the difficulty of all manoeuvres to Leadership. There is a difference however in how manoeuvres are resolved: in one wave, both sides act simultaneously.

Individual combat tracks every swing of the sword and it is possible to place events in sequence – someone who just lost an arm is unlikely to hit you back with it soon. In mass combat, things are more messy and things just happen. Initiative does play a role however, but this is handled by other means and affects the manoeuvres a unit can undertake.

There are two general rules concerning mass combat:

1. A unit will follow an order until a new order is given or circumstances change considerably. A unit who has been ordered to move in one direction will do so, until it can or until it makes sense.
2. There should be no situations where only one side can inflict damage on the other (archery and magic are exceptions). For every attack manoeuvre, there is a defence manoeuvre.

The manoeuvres a unit can undertake are more limited than actions in individual combat, but every GM is free to modify this list. Next, all manoeuvres are listed along with the DC, a short description and the results of a failed roll (if this is not described, see above nr 1).

- **Move (DC: VE)**

Movement of a unit is 3 times the normal for given size category. 30 steps for humans and so on.

You can only move out of combat using the retreat manoeuvre.

- **Hold (DC: VE)**

Unit will do nothing. You need to use a Hold manoeuvre to stop a moving unit.

- **Charge (E)**

Make one move and attack your enemy (roll Tactics). Gain initiative. If both sides charge simultaneously, initiative is won by the side with higher Leadership roll.

A failed roll results in a simple move.

- **Attack (DC: E)**

Try to inflict damage to your enemy, roll for Tactics. Only the unit with initiative can attack.

A failed roll results in a Defend manoeuvre

- **Defend (DC: E)**

Try to inflict damage to your enemy.

Can be used as a reaction action against Charge and

Attack manoeuvres.

A failed roll means you are pushed back half your movement rate and the enemy can follow you as a free action. You still roll for Tactics.

- **Counterattack (DC: M)**

Attack your enemy and gain initiative.

A failed roll results in unit pushed back, as a failed Defence.

- **Retreat (DC: M)**

Move away from battle. Damage is not dealt unless the enemy takes an extra reaction action to follow you.

A failed roll results in the unit dispersing. Men will fall out of order and run in all directions. Unless this is a very large combat, the unit ceases to exist for the time being.