

## - Mass Combat Rules -

### - Introduction -

“So began a battle that none had expected... Upon one side were the Goblins and the Wild Wolves, and upon the other were Elves and Men and Dwarves.”

In a land darkening with Shadow, a company of adventurers will inevitably find themselves in the midst of massive battles. Imagine legions of Goblins and Wargs defending their strongholds in the mountains against a determined alliance of Beornings and Woodmen; or an army of Great Spiders threatening to close off the Elf-path with their terrible webs. How about Wolves and Vampires swarming from their dark caves, attacking the villages and outposts of The Free Peoples?

When combat involves large numbers of characters other than the fellowship of player-heroes, special rules may be desired to determine outcomes.

### THE LOREMASTER'S ROLE

During mass combats, the Loremaster should pay special attention to his role as a narrator. It will be his creative descriptions of the battlefield drama that will keep the process from seeming too mechanical and boring, much like narrating a journey.

Of course, the Loremaster does not have to use any special rules at all. He can simply choose to narrate the entire war from beginning to end according to his own desires and pre-determined storyline. Or, as an easy random solution, he could roll a Feat die for each side, give a positive modifier to the army with an advantage and “presto” – the highest result wins the battle!

But these methods are unlikely to leave a satisfying feeling with most player-heroes who want direct influence in leading their side to victory. They are looking for specific challenges to overcome to turn the tide in their favor. These rules provide those challenges.

As a director, the Loremaster “zooms in” on the location of the player-heroes to resolve their challenges in detail. The end result of each encounter imparts either a good effect or a bad one. This effect will make a difference in how well their side holds up overall. By keeping the emphasis on the player-heroes and their choices during large scale battles, the Loremaster stays more in line with Tolkien's books.

### ANATOMY OF A MASS COMBAT

Every mass combat involves two main parts: **Battle encounters**, where the player-heroes attempt challenges that can help them win the war, and **Army attack tests**, where the overall results of the combat are determined.

In addition to these two elements, mass combats are divided into rounds representing one hour of fighting each called **mass combat rounds**. The Loremaster will need to referee a series of rounds until there is a clear victory for one side. If the battle lasts long enough, player-heroes may be required to make **Fatigue tests** to stay on their feet and **Corruption tests** to endure the horrors of war.

### Order of a Mass Combat:

1. The Loremaster assigns **Army statistics** for each side in the conflict.
2. The Loremaster describes the onset of the battle, making sure to include distinctive features of the

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enemy and the battlefield.

3. The player-heroes determine *Army Combat advantage*.

4. Mass combat rounds begin. Steps 5 through 11 will be repeated in sequence until one side flees or is decimated.

5. If the player-heroes need to make *Fatigue tests*, they do so at the beginning of every mass combat round.

6. The Loremaster chooses a *Battle encounter* that may be resolved by the player-heroes if they so choose. The results of the challenge are applied.

7. If the player-heroes are required to make *Corruption tests*, they do so at the end of a Battle encounter segment or proposal.

8. Player-heroes choose a *Combat tactic* for their side.

9. Each side makes an *Army attack test*.

10. Damage from successful attacks is applied to Endurance.

11. Check for victory. If an army reaches zero Endurance, it is defeated.

## ARMY STATISTICS

All armies, including both The Free Peoples and the Shadow armies, share the same four basic characteristics: Attribute level, Combat skill, Parry rating, and Endurance. These characteristics measure the overall power, training, toughness, and size of the army.

The Loremaster and player-heroes will utilize these characteristics when making Army attack tests. This will allow for a bit of strategy on a large scale, keeping the players engaged in the entire process.

## Attribute Level

One of the most important statistics any army possesses is its Attribute level. It is a numerical expression of the army's combined power, will, and cunning. This number is used as a bonus on all Army attack tests. It also represents the amount of Endurance damage an army causes on an ordinary successful attack; double this amount when a great or extraordinary success is rolled. Finally, it is used to calculate the army's Parry rating.

By using the Attribute level chart as a guide (found on page 26 of the Loremaster's Book), the Loremaster should assign each opposing force an Attribute level. This number should take into consideration the average Attribute level of the warriors comprising the group.

*An average army of Goblins may be assigned an Attribute level of 3 or 4. They are not that powerful and shouldn't pose too big of a threat no matter what their size.*

## Combat skill

The Combat skill statistic should reflect the training, tactics, and precision of each army. This number is the amount of Success dice used alongside a Feat die when determining Army Combat advantage and Army attack tests.

Using the Skill ratings chart as a guide (found on page 26 of the Loremaster's Book), the Loremaster assigns a rating between 0 and 6 for each army. This number should take into account the average Weapon skill or Battle skill rating of the warriors comprising the army.

*An average army of Goblins should be assigned a Combat skill rating of 2. They will use the Feat die and two Success dice when they check for Army Combat advantage and every time they make an Army attack test.*

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## Parry Rating

Arguably the second most important statistic, Parry rating expresses the defensive capabilities of an army through speed, shields and tactics. Parry rating is equal to an army's Attribute level plus a modifier given by the Loremaster between -2 and +3. Divisions of larger creatures are slower and less tactical, making it easier to hit them, while agile and shielded soldiers are harder to hit. Parry rating will be used to modify the Combat TN needed to successfully attack and damage an army during a round of mass combat.

Because Parry rating utilizes the Attribute level of an army, it can change through special rewards or penalties given after Battle encounters (see *Battle Encounters*).

*An army of shielded Barding warriors has a Parry rating of 6. They are facing a shielded horde of Orcs with a Parry rating of 4. The Bardings choose the Careful tactic to attack the enemy. As a result, the Combat TN to hit them will be 18 (Combat TN 12 + Parry rating 6). To hit the horde of Orcs, the Bardings will have a Combat TN of 16 (Combat TN 12 + Parry 4).*

## Endurance

The number of Endurance points given to each army will measure its overall size, armour, and resilience. The Loremaster makes the final judgement about how many points to assign, but as a rule of thumb, 5 points should be given for every division (50 units) of normal-sized troops in an army. In addition, a 1 point bonus should be awarded for each division with superior armor and a 5 point bonus for each division containing large or hearty troops, such as Trolls.

*A horde of Orcs contains 300 units (6 divisions) wearing mail armour and helms. The Loremaster determines that it should have 36 Endurance points (6 divisions x 5 points + 1 point x 6 divisions of superior armour = 36 points).*

Over the course of a battle, an army's Endurance will deplete as it takes damage from successful Army attack tests. When an army's Endurance reaches zero, it is defeated.

## ARMY COMBAT ADVANTAGE

Scanning the land and the formations of the enemy, the captain of The Free Peoples may devise clever commands that provide an advantage for his side. Working similarly as Assigning Combat Advantage described on pages 41-42 of the Loremaster's Book, a **Battle** roll is made to determine a number of Success dice that can be used for future Army attack tests. The player-heroes can make this roll using the Battle rank of the captain leading their side (the Loremaster should provide this information), or they can choose a captain from among themselves to make the roll.

The Battle roll is normally made at a *moderate* difficulty (TN 14), but the Loremaster can modify this to reflect a more cunning enemy or difficult circumstance, such as charging into a narrowing valley (TN 16+). He can also adjust it to reflect a natural advantage for The Free Peoples or a mindless enemy (TN 12 or lower).

The quality of the roll determines the number of Success dice assigned.

*Each ordinary success grants one Success die, a great success grants two dice, while an extraordinary success grants three dice.*

When it is time to make an Army attack test during the mass combat round, the player-heroes must decide whether or not to use any Success dice they have to supplement the roll. If they do, they should describe how their side is taking advantage of the battlefield or the stupidity of the enemy.

## FATIGUE TESTS

As stated previously, every round in a mass combat is equal to one hour on the battlefield. That is an extensive amount of time for an individual to be

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swinging a long sword or deflecting blows with a shield. Player-heroes will naturally become Worn during this period through the rigors of Battle encounters.

They will also need to make Fatigue tests regularly after a number of mass combat rounds equal to their Body score. The Fatigue test has a Target Number of 14 and should be made using the character's Battle skill.

A point of Hope may be spent on this test to invoke a Heart Attribute bonus. This represents the warrior's resolve to fight on even though he is weak.

If the test is failed, the player-hero loses 1 point of Endurance, bringing him ever closer to total exhaustion and collapse.

Player-heroes should make this test at the beginning of every mass combat round when required.

## BATTLE ENCOUNTERS

After narrating the opening scene of the battle, the Loremaster continues the story, centering the action on the player-heroes by choosing a Battle encounter they can choose to participate in.

*For example, "You stare down the hillside toward the threatening front line of the enemy. Hundreds of Goblins pound their swords and shields and helmets in an eerie cadence. Then, with a loud screech, they rush toward you. Arrows rain down upon them as your side carefully defends the higher ground.*

*A large squad has quickly scaled the hill and is coming straight for you. Take them all out and you will reduce their army's Endurance by 10 points. If you fail, your army will lose 10 Endurance points!"*

Battle encounters are meant for three purposes:

1. To afford the player-heroes an opportunity for personal combat in the middle of a massive battle.

2. To give player-heroes specific challenges that can affect the outcome of the war.

3. To keep the focus of the game on the player-heroes who are the main characters of the story.

## Sample Battle Encounters

There are many different kinds of Battle encounters that the Loremaster can propose. The storyline, distinctive battlefield features, and nature of the enemy will all factor in when creating a specific challenge. However, they should all offer a reward for success and a penalty for failure.

The sample Battle encounters below are generic scenarios that the Loremaster can tailor to meet his particular storytelling needs.

### Capture The Outpost

The heroes must take command of a key outpost. This can be a tower, a trench, a section of forest, or any area that gives an advantage when holding it.

If the heroes are successful in capturing the area, the Parry rating of their army increases by 4 for this round only.

If they fail, the Parry rating of the enemy army increases by 4 for this round only.

### Cut Off The Head

An opportunity has arisen for the heroes to eliminate an enemy captain or prominent leader such as an Orc-Chieftain or a Hill-Troll Chief.

If the leader is captured or killed, the heroes remove an important source of inspiration, whereby decreasing the morale of the enemy army, lowering their Attribute level by 2 for the remainder of the battle.

A failure in this challenge means the heroes' army decreases by 2 Attribute levels for the remainder of the battle.

Note: Attribute level can never fall below 1.

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## Take No Prisoners

The company faces a long string of enemy warriors and must eliminate them. This can happen when the company is on the front lines, in the thick of battle, or if they are ambushing a unit.

If the heroes are successful in the challenge, reduce the opposing army's Endurance points. The number of points depends on the number and types of enemies killed. Reduce Endurance by 1 point for every 5 enemies killed and 2 points for every Troll or other large creature they killed.

If the heroes fail the challenge and flee the battle, their side's army loses a number of Endurance points pre-determined by the Loremaster (usually equal to the number of points they would have reduced their opponent's by if they had been successful at the challenge).

## Wear Them Down

The heroes must fight in an impossible situation that can only lead to death. Their purpose is to weaken the enemy and allow fresh troops to finish the job. They must survive 10 personal combat rounds against a heavy assault to complete the challenge.

If the heroes live, the enemy's army has become Weary and can no longer count 1s, 2s, and 3s on its Success dice for the duration of the battle.

If the heroes die...The Free Peoples will remember them in their songs and tales for years to come. If they flee before the 10 rounds is over, their side's army is considered Weary for the rest of the war.

## Creating New Battle Encounters

The sample Battle encounters above are just a small selection that the Loremaster can adopt. It is encouraged that new challenges be created with their own unique set of rewards.

Although it is the main responsibility of the Loremaster to create new Battle encounters, the player-heroes may contribute to the effort by

suggesting missions of their own. In this way, the Loremaster and player-heroes collaborate in writing the tale. This should provoke a satisfying gaming experience for everyone. As always, however, the Loremaster's word is final.

The types of Battle encounters that can be presented are only limited by depth of imagination. New challenges may offer rewards that permit heroes to make 2 Army attack tests in the round instead of 1. This challenge could be based on how quickly the heroes accomplish something. Or maybe the Battle encounter calls for accuracy and grants the ability to re-roll dice. How about a mission using the Inspire skill to gain a temporary increase in Attribute level?

Whatever challenge the Loremaster approves, the reward should always affect Army statistics or functions related to an Army attack roll. This is the measure of the player-heroes' influence on the battlefield.

Another consideration is balance. Battle encounters should not be impossible challenges, nor should they be too easy. Rewards should not be too great, nor should they barely make an impact. However, the challenge and the reward should compliment one another. In other words, the reward needs to be worth the risk and the risk needs to be worth the reward.

## CORRUPTION TESTS

When a Corruption test is required, it should be made at the conclusion of a Battle encounter or the proposal of one that the heroes turned down.

Coming face-to-face with masses of malevolent creatures can be very distressing. Add to that the disturbing violence of the battlefield and a player-hero can easily become vulnerable to the power of Corruption.

The battlefield qualifies as a source of Anguish and falls under, "*Gruesome killing, dreadful experience, Orc-work (senseless destruction), display of the power of the Enemy.*" This is found on the Anguish

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table (page 57 of the Loremaster's Book). As such, any player-hero that fails a Corruption test will gain 1 Shadow point.

The Loremaster should decide how often to require Corruption tests during a mass combat hinging on the specific horrors that the player-heroes witness. Otherwise, at least one test every four hours of battle is the suggested amount.

Some Battle encounters may be crafted to test the Shadow resistance of the player-heroes. They will be faced with difficult decisions and temptations. If any Misdeeds are performed during these challenges, the Loremaster should give Shadow points accordingly (see page 58 of the Loremaster's Book).

## COMBAT TACTICS

Once a Battle encounter ends, along with any mandatory Corruption tests, the Loremaster “zooms back out” to focus on the entire battlefield. It is now up to the player-heroes to declare a Combat tactic for their side's army (Aggressive, Smart, or Careful).

Combat tactics are similar to Combat stances in character scale battles. Each tactic sets the Combat TN for all attack tests that round. The Combat TN is then modified by the defender's Parry rating.

### Combat tactics:

| TACTIC     | COMBAT TN | DESCRIPTION   |
|------------|-----------|---|
| Aggressive | 6         | Charging headlong into the fray and taking wild risks to eliminate opponents. |
| Smart      | 9         | Advancing methodically, using clever manoeuvres to ambush the enemy.          |
| Careful    | 12        | Holding and defending, using shields and formations to protect key areas.     |

*The player-heroes control an army of superior Elves with Parry rating 10. They choose the Smart tactic (Combat TN 9) as they set ambushes against their Troll enemies who have Parry rating 7. The new modified Combat TN to attack the Trolls is 16, while the modified Combat TN to attack the Elves is 19.*

Unless otherwise restricted by a Battle encounter penalty of some kind, the player-heroes can change their Combat tactic every mass combat round.

## ARMY ATTACK TESTS

After the player-heroes choose a Combat tactic for their side's army, both sides make an Army attack test. Initiative is irrelevant in mass combat, so these tests can be made simultaneously.

An Army attack test is made by rolling the Feat die and the army's Combat skill dice to get a result. The result is then modified by adding the attacking army's Attribute level and any additional Success dice rolled for Army Combat advantage.

**Army attack test:** *Feat die + Army Combat skill dice + Army Attribute level + Army Combat advantage dice.*

The final result of the Army attack test is compared to the Combat TN of the defending army. If the result is equal to or higher than the Combat TN, the defending army has been “hit” for damage and will lose Endurance. This is an abstract way of determining casualties taken in the current hour of mass combat.

A Gandalf rune  result on the Feat die is considered an automatic success, as usual, for the player-heroes, while the Eye icon  is an automatic success for the Shadow army.

*The player-heroes roll a Feat die and 3 Combat skill dice to attack the army of Trolls. They get a 5 on their Feat die, and a 5, 3, and 1 on their Success dice for a total of 14. They modify that total with their Attribute level of 8 for a total of*

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22! That easily exceeds the Combat TN 16 needed to hit the Troll army.

## ENDURANCE DAMAGE

The quality of an Army attack test determines the amount of damage that should be applied to the defending army's Endurance.

Each ordinary success causes a number of damage points equal to the attacking army's Attribute level, while a great or extraordinary success doubles this amount.

*Having rolled no 6s among their Success dice, the player-heroes' army (Attribute level 6) achieves an ordinary success. They cause only 6 points of damage to the Troll army this hour. If they had gotten at least one 6, they would have done 12 points of damage!*

## VICTORY CONDITIONS

Victory comes when one side flees for fear of decimation or when one side reaches zero Endurance.

It is possible that *both* armies reach zero Endurance in the same mass combat round. When this happens, compare the amount of damage each side delivered on the last Army attack test. The army that caused the most damage technically wins the battle, even though they have suffered terrible losses. Subtract the lower amount of damage from the higher and the result is how many Endurance points the winning army is really left with.

*For example, the player-heroes cause 12 points of damage against the Troll army to drop it to zero Endurance. The Trolls cause 7 points of damage to drop the army of the heroes to zero Endurance. Since the heroes caused more damage, they technically win the battle. Subtracting 7 from 12, it is determined that the heroes' army is left with 5 Endurance points. That is 50 or less warriors!*

If both sides still have Endurance points left, there is no victor and the mass combat round will begin all over again. At this point, one side can choose to retreat from the battlefield and concede victory.

## EXAMPLE OF A MASS COMBAT ROUND

The following scenario features an army of 200 mail clad Dwarves, led by the player-heroes, versus an army of 350 Goblins and Wolves. The battle takes place in an open field of the Long Marshes southwest of Esgaroth.

1. First, the Loremaster assigns the following Army statistics to each side:

|                     |     |                             |
|---------------------|-----|-----------------------------|
| <b>Dwarven Army</b> | vs. | <b>Goblins &amp; Wolves</b> |
| Attribute Level 5   |     | Attribute Level 3           |
| Combat Skill 2      |     | Combat Skill 1              |
| Parry Rating 7      |     | Parry Rating 4              |
| Endurance 24        |     | Endurance 35                |

2. Then, the Loremaster describes the battlefield as wide-open, flat, and scattered with muddy ground and deep pools.

3. Thirdly, the player-heroes make a Battle skill roll to determine Army Combat advantage. The Loremaster decides that there is a very limited opportunity for manoeuvres and gives the test a TN 16. The highest Battle skill rank among the heroes is 3. So, they roll a Feat die and 3 Success dice getting a 4, 4, 6, and 2. That's a 16 and a great success! The player-heroes' army will have 2 extra Success dice to use for Army attack tests during the course of the mass combat. But once they are used up...they are gone.

4. The mass combat round begins!

5. Since this is the beginning of the battle, the heroes do not have to make any Fatigue tests yet.

6. The Loremaster "zooms in" on the action and tells the heroes that they have a limited chance to

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kill the leader of the Goblin army right away. If they do so, they will lower the Attribute level of the Goblins by 2, bringing them down to a measly 1! This will also modify their Parry rating by 2.

The Loremaster now adjudicates the Battle encounter using the rules for personal combat found in the main rulebooks. The player-heroes will face two Wolf-riding soldiers and the Goblin captain. All they need to do is kill the captain to gain the reward for their army. They are successful!

That drops the Attribute level of the Goblins & Wolves to 1. This will have a tremendous impact on the overall battle because now the Goblins & Wolves are limited to 1-2 Endurance points of damage per successful attack against the Dwarves. If they are to be victorious over the Dwarves, it will take them a minimum of 12 mass combat rounds, or 12 hours of fighting in the Long Marshes!

On the other hand, the Dwarves can potentially defeat the Goblins & Wolves in a little over 3 hours. But to do so, they must pull off three great or extraordinary successes in a row.

7. Since this is only the first mass combat round, player-heroes do not need to make Corruption tests.

8. Having given the heroes a chance to affect the battle, the Loremaster “zooms out” of close combat action and now focuses on the tactics of the whole army.

He asks the player-heroes to choose a Battle tactic and they decide to be Aggressive, making the Combat TN 6 for the round.

9. The Combat TN to hit the Goblins & Wolves is only an 8. The player-heroes make their Army attack test rolling the Feat die, 2 Success dice for Combat skill, and one Army Combat advantage die. They get a **✓** on the Feat die (an automatic success!), and two **6**s! No need to add up the totals or modify the result with their Attribute rating. That's an

extraordinary success!

The Combat TN to hit the Dwarves is 13. The Goblins & Wolves roll their Army attack test and come up with an 8 on the Feat die and a 5 on their Success die. Barely a success!

10. Because the heroes rolled an extraordinary success on their Army attack test, they cause 10 points of damage to the Endurance of the enemy. The Goblins & Wargs now have 25 Endurance points left.

The Goblins & Wolves inflict 1 point of damage on the Dwarves, dropping them to Endurance 23.

11. Neither side has been reduced to zero Endurance points yet, so there is no victory. However, the Goblins & Wolves realize that they are never going to win the war and they run for their lives back into Mirkwood, even though they have more troops left!

When historians record the events of the war, they will remember that it was an aggressive move by the player-heroes that took out the captain of the Goblins, which led to a quick and overwhelming victory.

## *Mass Combat Rules*

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