CHALLENGE ™ 58

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

US $3.50

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Megacombat in *Shadowrun*
By Thomas M. Kane

It ain't the lone wolf that brings down the prey. It's the pack. And if you're goin' up for a rumble, your gonna want all the numbers you can get, 'cause you can bet the opposition ain't gonna hesitate to gang up on you. You gotta get there the firstest with the mostest and do it the fastest without bogging down in all the detailed drek. Like the wise man says, chummer, "The best strategy is to be very strong."

A *Shadowrun* referee needs a way of resolving big fights fast—whether the Salish Ranger Force is evicting an Aztechnology outpost from Indian land or the Seattle Ancients are rumbling with the Blood Highway Trolls. *DMZ* offers streamlined rules for combat, but at the man-to-man level, and it is an entire game in itself, only partially compatible with *Shadowrun*. These rules group large numbers of *Shadowrun* fighters into units and resolve all their attacks with a single roll of the dice. In this way, a referee can adjudicate the details of huge fights quickly, returning the focus of attention to the shadowrunners themselves.

To prepare for a mass battle, a referee organizes the opposing sides into units. These can represent organized military formations or simply collections of fighters who intend to do roughly the same thing. A unit may even be a fortress, a single large vehicle or a big critter such as a dragon.

Each unit must have a PC or NPC commander to choose its actions in combat. This character will make rolls for Leadership and Military Theory (Tactics). For these purposes only, Leadership defaults to Charisma with a +2 penalty to target numbers and a –2 penalty to Initiative rolls. Tactics defaults to Intelligence with a +2 penalty to all target numbers.

These default penalties do not follow

the usual skill web rules. However, they present a more accurate picture of the typical shadowrunner's abilities. Few archetypes have tactical skills recorded because these usually depend, not on the character, but on the player. In order to give PCs an active roll in mass combat, one can assume that they acquired some knowledge of tactics and leadership in the day-to-day business of shadowrunning.

Every unit has four basic statistics: morale, offense, defense and magic defense. Calculate these attributes as follows.

Morale: Morale represents a unit's loyalty, bravery and ability to fight as a team. Since this figure serves as a target number for the commander's Leadership rolls, the lower the morale score, the better the unit. The referee may assign morale based on personal preference or on the following guidelines:

Unit	Morale
Mob	9
Street gang	8
Mercenary squad	7
Fanatics	6
Regular troops/police	5
Elite unit	4
Trained fanatics	3

When designing units, the referee may use average values or simply overlook minor quibbles. For example, if a crowd storms in the Aztechnology building, you can simply assume that everyone in the mob has the statistics of the pedestrian contact and wields a club. Some of those present probably have the statistics of corporate wage slaves and wield Streetline Specials—the referee may ignore such details.

If a unit contains several distinct components, each of which seems important, the referee can do one of two things. He can break the unit down into smaller units, or he can calculate the statistics for each component and average them together. The latter method involves more mathematics in the preparation stage. However, it reduces the number of units in play, thereby greatly shortening the length of time required to resolve the battle.

Offense: The offense value is a factor combining the different statistics of weapons and combat skills. Calculate each unit's offense value using the most common weapon in the unit and the average weapon skill for unit members. If a unit uses two major weapons, you may wish to determine two offense skills.

Convert weapon damage categories to a numerical value as follows: L=1, M=2, S=3 and D=4.

Offense equals weapon power level plus (character's skill rating divided by staging) plus (weapon damage category times staging):

Offense=Power+(Skill÷Staging)+(Damage×Staging).

Weapons capable of autofire gain an additional +1 to offense. Round uneven numbers down.

For example, a unit consists of street samurai archetypes (Firearms 5) armed with Ares Silvergun pistols (2M3 damage). Applying the formula, 2+(5÷3)+(2×3)=9. The unit has an Offense Value of 9.

Defense: A unit's defense value equals armor rating plus average body rating plus average Quickness rating:

Defense=Armor+Body+Quickness.

A unit may need two defense ratings—one for ballistic attacks and one for impact attacks.

Magical Defense: The magical defense value is the average Willpower score of a unit.

HOW TO PLAY

Keep track of unit damage using the usual damage monitor, with its 10 spaces and four categories of wound. Damage has the usual effects of causing penalties to attack rolls and Initiative. For example, a unit with light damage suffers a +1 penalty to all its attacks and −1 to all Initiative rolls.

Mass combat uses the same turn sequence as the ordinary game. Each side rolls Initiative. Then units and individuals take turns performing actions, beginning with whoever has the highest Initiative and proceeding to the next highest, etc. Individuals acting alone use the same rules as always. However, in mass combat, an action can involve a whole unit, with any number of individual fighters. Units resolve Initiative and combat in slightly modified ways.

Initiative

Each unit determines Initiative by rolling 1D6 and adding the commander's Leadership rating. Wired reflexes, etc. do not apply to Initiative in mass combat. This roll simulates, not the reaction time of individual fighters, but the speed with which a leader can get numerous troops to cooperate on the same action.

Actions

A unit can perform any of the following actions: move, force move, rally and attack.

Move: Movement requires little effort to resolve. A unit moves at the Quickness rating of its slowest member, in meters. For example, a squad of 10 Troll street samurai archetypes (Quickness 7) could move at seven meters per action. Units may combine movement with an attack, just like individuals. They suffer the normal +1 penalty to the attack target number for movement.

Force Move: A forced movement is the unit equivalent of a run. Unfortunately, when whole units run, they risk losing their cohesion. A unit performing forced movement may move at three times its normal movement rate. The aforementioned Troll samurais could force move at 21 meters per turn. Furthermore, the commander of a unit making a force move must attempt a Leadership test with a target number equal to the unit's morale. If this test fails, the unit suffers a light wound.

Rally: Damage to a unit indicates loss of morale and cohesion as much as actual wounds. Therefore, a damaged unit can often recover its strength by taking time to rally. This requires a complete action in which the unit neither moves nor fires. The unit's commander must make a Leadership roll with a target number equal to the unit's morale. All wound penalties apply to this roll. Success reduces the damage by one wound category.

For example, a street gang (base morale of eight) has six blocks filled in (a serious wound). The commander has a target number of 11 to lead a rally (morale of eight plus a wound modifier of three.) If he scores one success, the wound becomes moderate.

A unit which suffers a deadly wound cannot rally.

Attack: When a unit attacks, its commander attempts a Military Theory (Tactics) success test. This roll determines how effectively commanders can use the many individual fighters under their command. One derives the base target number using the offense value of the attacking unit and the defense value of the defenders.

Modify offense and defense scores by all modifiers which would affect individual attacks under the given conditions. For example, a unit under partial cover gains two points to its defense score. A unit which every member has a smartgun link could add its offense statistic. Units using missile weapons must subtract a modifier to reflect range:

Range	Penalty
Short	None
Medium	–1
Long	–3
Extreme	–5

After applying all modifiers, subtract the defender's defense statistic from the attacker's offense. Then consult the table below to determine attack target numbers.

Offense–Defense Differential	Target Number
–5 and below	11
–4	10
–3	9
–2	8
–1	7
0	4
1	3
2	2
3	2
4	2

For every differential point above 2, an attacker gains one automatic success in addition to any other successes he rolls. For example, an attacker with an offense of 17 attacks victims with a defense of 11. This results in a differential of +6. The attacker rolls his normal Tactics dice and also gain four automatic successes (6–2).

Damage to Units

Attacks in mass combat cause a base of light damage. The attacker may bump up as usual, using a staging number determined by the table below. Note that the victim cannot bump damage down (although it may rally on later turns). Therefore, no power level applies.

The staging number in mass combat reflects sheer manpower. To determine the staging number for damage in mass combat, divide the number of people in the attacking unit by the number of defenders to determine a ratio. Round uneven numbers to favor the defender. Then consult the following table.

Ratio	Staging Number
1:5	20
1:4	16
1:3	12
1:2	8
1:1	4
2:1	2
3:1	1
4:1	1
5:1 and better	0.5

For every "odds column" below 1:5, add four to the staging number. For example, an attack at 1:10 has a staging number of 40.

Damage to Individuals

When PCs or other important people belong to a unit that takes damage, they may suffer wounds as well. Each must attempt a quickness roll, with the target number shown on the table below. If the number rolled is equal to or lower than the number shown, that person suffers a wound of the type indicated. The victim may attempt to reduce this damage with armor and a body roll as usual.

Characters roll on this table each time their unit takes damage. Note, however, that the unit damage column shows the damage inflicted in the last attack, not the total damage inflicted. For example, if a unit has nine blocks filled and suffers a light wound, it disintegrates. However, PCs within the unit need only escape the effects of a light wound.

Unit Damage	Quickness Target Number	Wound
Light	5	3D3
Moderate	7	4D4
Serious	9	5D5
Deadly	11	6D6

Unless a commander is a PC, the referee need not roll to determine the commander's wounds in each attack. The chance of killing a commander with a lucky shot is factored into the combat system.

Area-Effect Weapons

These rules assume that each side uses hand grenades, shotguns, guns capable of autofire and other minor area-effect weapons. But magic and heavy artillery allow area damage on a far greater scale—these weapons halve the staging number in an attack.

Weapons eligible for area-effect bo-

nuses include missiles, autocannons, weapons firing shells of over 40 millimeters in diameter and any automatic weapons which normally fire over five shots per action. The presence of even one area-effect weapon within a unit qualifies it for the area-effect bonus.

Heightened Reflexes

A unit may also be entitled to a bonus in combat if its members move significantly faster than ordinary human beings. Units may halve their staging number if either of the following conditions apply.

• All members have wired reflexes, boosted reflexes level two or the equivalent.

• At least 10% of a unit has wired reflexes or the equivalent at level three or higher (possible through magic).

Magic

Just as these rules do not account for each individual bullet, they also do not account for each individual manaball. However, magicians can have a profound influence on the battle. In each action, each magician may divide the dice from his magic pool among the following activities.

Attack: The magician may raise the offense value of any one visible unit. The unit receives a number of offense points equal to the number of dice the magician allots minus the magic defense of the opponent. Any receiving offensive help from a magician may halve its staging number, due to the effects of area-effect spells.

Defense: The magician may add to the defense value of any one visible unit. The unit gains one defense point per die allotted to it.

Magic Defense: The magician may add to the magic defense of all visible units. Every die allotted increases the units' magic defense by one.

Magicians may use elementals and spirits for these strategies as well. A summoned creature can perform any of the three tasks listed above, adding points equal to its force level. Each different task requires one service.

Units vs. Individuals

Not everybody on the battlefield belongs to a unit. PCs in particular are apt to wander off and fight private wars. Most of the time, the referee can resolve

these situations using the ordinary rules. For example, if a team of PCs attacks a unit in the heat of combat, the referee can simply detach a suitable number of archetypes from the unit and resolve the battle. As long as the unit has other enemy units to worry about, the party should not have to fight more than two or three times its own number.

A team of shadowrunners can inflict damage to a unit completely out of proportion to the team's numbers. The simple presence of a subbattle inside a unit has the effects of a light wound. Furthermore, the party can inflict permanent damage on a unit by destroying its commander or members, as shown below. Units may not reduce this damage by rallying.

For damage to units by individuals, see the table below.

Members	Wound Category
10%	Light
30%	Moderate
50%	Serious
90%	Deadly
Commander killed	Deadly

If, for whatever reason, the PCs go where an entire unit of otherwise unoccupied enemies can shoot at them, compute their defense values and resolve combat using the system here. Each PC suffers whatever damage a unit might have suffered. Note that, like units, the PCs cannot bump this damage down. Also note the low staging numbers the attackers are likely to enjoy.

The final effect of these rules should be to make mass combat as simple or as complex as the referee desires. A referee can make player characters commanders of forces and play out long tactical battles, or he can lump whole gangs into single units and settle battles with one die roll. That means the party can find itself in the middle of a war at any time. It's the *Shadowrun* way of life, chummer. Ω