Customizable
MASS COMBAT
For 5e

By Aidan Fisk

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History of Wargaming and D&D

One of the features that Dungeons and Dragons is notably lacking is rules for handling massive battles; like when two feudal kingdoms meet in a battlefield, a necromancer's undead horde assaults a castle, or any other situation where hundreds or thousands of combatants clash.

What's odd about this is that D&D originally started as a simplification of wargames where you controlled large armies instead of individual characters, so in theory it should be easy to just reverse this and have big battles, but as it turns out this isn't quite the same. Sure, you could say that the gnoll stat block was really an army consisting of hundreds of gnolls instead of just one individual, but there's something that gets lost in the translation that loses the feeling of a "Grand Battle".

What are we trying to accomplish?

Before we get into the weeds and talk mechanics, it's a good idea to get a shared idea of what these rules are trying to do. Firstly, lets establish what we mean by "Mass Combat".

Historically during the medieval ages, these "large scale" army battles would average in sizes of 700 to 1500 soldiers on a side, though there are records of some armies having as many as 10,000 troops. Additionally, since these armies would be so large, it became necessary to break them up into units which had their own commander. While these units are commonly thought to be separated by type (Such as cavalry and infantry) A unit could contain units of mixed roles (Such as a shield wall supported by pikemen, or infantry protecting a group of archers).

It's important to note that in massive scale battles like this, killing the opponents wasn't the only way to win a battle. Often it was enough to demoralize the enemy into fleeing, or simply breaking down their will to fight and forcing a surrender. This makes sense when you consider the medieval armies likely consisted of poorly trained farmers listening to their neighbors dying by the bushel.

The other consideration we need is to decide how long it should take for a battle to occur. Traditionally a combat encounter in D&D aims to last around 3 to 6 rounds, which in real-time is less than a minute, but medieval wars would last hours, if not days at a time. We'll need to abstract the battles to take place over a longer set of time, with "attacks" representing an abstraction of a long combat.

THE MECHANICS

before we can fight, we need an army, so let's call in the political favors and assemble one.

Making Units

From this point on, we'll be referring to Units as our groups in the army, and troops as the individual characters in the units.

Following the historic precedent, we'll cap the number of troops in our units to be 400 spaces to start, since this seems to best reflect the medieval battles of the time. Any more troops in a unit and the commander will have trouble relaying orders. this also works out nicely where we can say that each "unit" is represented by a 100x100ft square. For battles it is encouraged to use a battle map where each grid represents an area of 100 feet.

Since we have a basis of 400 spaces for troops, we need to make considerations for troops of a non-medium size. A troop of large or bigger creatures will take up a number of spaces equal to the space they take up on a normal battlemap. I.e., a huge dragon would take up 9 spaces. Creatures smaller than medium, such as halflings or pixies, will take up one space as they would on a normal battlemap. Creatures that are mounted count as one creature with a combined CR of the mount and the rider, using the space of the mount for determining space. I.e., a CR 1 knight mounted on a CR 1 horse would take up 4 spaces and be a CR 2 troop.

As Strong as the Weakest Link

There are some situations where information from a creature's stat block may be needed for the unit, such as for a unit's speed, Initiative, or Saving throws. Unless otherwise specified, use the lowest score of the troops in the unit.

How strong is our Unit?

Since we're abstracting the individuals in our armies to simplify combat, we need some way of summarizing the strength of the troops by a generalization of their stats and abilities. Luckily D&D offers an elegant solution to this: The Difficulty Class!

When you make a Unit, take note of what troops are in it, how many of them there are, and what their CR is. The CR of the troops will be added up when you fight to determine the strength of your unit, so it's important to know what the individual CR of your troops are.

So, for instance, a warband of gnolls might consist of 300 Gnolls, which are a CR 1/2 creature, and 50 Dire wolves. This gives us a Unit of 300 CR 1/2 creatures, and 50 CR 1 creatures.

After you've finished assembling your Unit, Likely through the course of several game sessions petitioning different leaders for troops or going on quests, you'll need to decide on a commander for it. Pick an NPC or player character and take note of their charisma modifier, as this will be used later.

LETS FIGHT

Now that we have our Unit prepared, let's talk about how the battle will play out. In general, treat war like a normal combat encounter, rolling initiative and proceeding through turns with actions and movement. Where a Unit starts is dependent on what the Dungeon Master believes best represents the situation leading up to the confrontation.

Combat on A Bigger Scale

While the Warfare rules are intended to be similar to normal combat in 5th edition, Some changes are made to increase the scale of the battlefield.

Firstly, Each grid on a battlemap represents 100 feet.

Secondly, Each round of combat represents 1 hour

BATTLES

When a unit is next to an enemy Unit, they can use their action to initiate a battle. Battles are bloody, with both sides suffering losses when they occur. Keep in mind that these battles occur over an hour of fighting and not a one-sided attack against an opponent. There are a few steps to setting up the battle, and a bit of math involved. Try to get the whole party involved, or split up the steps into roles (i.e., one person picks troops, another calculates the CR, etc)

The Commander Deploys Troops

When a unit attacks, The commander of the attacking Unit determines the percentage of the troops that are involved in the fight, both on their side and the opponents. Take the commanders charisma modifier and times it by 10, this will give you a percentage which you can use to determine how many of troops from the unit are involved, to a minimum of 10% of a unit's starting amount of troops.

To give an example, let's say a commander has a charisma modifier of 1. This means that 10% of a unit's troops are involved in the battle. If they have 400 troops, 40 of them are involved in the attack. The enemy unit will also use 10% of their troops in the battle, and if the enemy unit only had 100 troops, that means it would be 40 allied troops against 10 enemy troops.

Once you know how many troops are involved, the next step is to figure out which troops are involved in the fight. Since this ruleset aims to be open to units having more than one type of creature in them, the troops deployed in the battle matter. The defender choses their troops first, leaving the attacker to decide which troops they wish to attack with in response.

Quick steps: how to battle

- Determine what percentage of a unit's troops are involved
- choose a number of troops to deploy, defender choosing first
- add up the CR of the troops on either side
- Resolve the battle

Ranged Battles

If you only deploy troops with ranged attacks, you can initiate battle at an enemy unit within their range. Unless the enemy unit you target deploys ranged troops that can respond to the attack, you suffer no loss of troops as a result of the battle.

Ranged troops used in this way, have disadvantage against melee troops until the start of their next turn.

Resolving a Battle

Once the troops have been determined, Add up to total CR of the involved troops and compare the two sides. Troops kill each other at a rate of **1 CR to 1 CR**. This means that if one side had a total CR of 100 and the other had a Total CR of 200, the side with 200 CR is the winner. The losing side loses all the troops involved in the battle, while the winning side of the battle loses troops equal to the CR of the losing side, choosing a number of troops to destroy with CR equal to the enemy troops CR.

For example, if the battle is won but the enemy's troops had a CR of 100, we would have to discard 100 creatures of CR 1, 200 Creatures of CR 1/2, 50 creatures of CR 2, or any combination of those as the commander wishes.

After a unit loses a battle, the commander needs to make a **Morale Check** To maintain control of the Unit (morale is explained in more detail later on). If they fail the check and are at the bottom of the morale scale, or if the unit has lost at least half of its starting units, the Unit disbands and is removed from play.

Run, Don't Die!

Due to the nature of how battles work, DM's are encouraged to weigh the DC of morale checks to be more difficult as fewer troops remain in a Unit. Once a Unit is at a quarter of their starting troops, these checks should be notably difficult.

Movement

A Unit can move a number of feet equal to its lowest speed troop multiplied by 10. If you enter an enemy's threatened area (the spaces next to an enemy unit) or start your turn there, your speed is reduced by half.

Advantage and Disadvantage

Advantage/Disadvantage either doubles or halves the CR of the troops involved in a battle. One example for when Advantage could be given is when Two Allied units flank an enemy (One on either side of the unit).

Other Unit Actions

Aside from initiating a battle, there are some special actions a unit can take.

Dash

The movement speed of a unit is doubled for this turn.

Disengage

A unit can move its full speed, ignoring the movement restriction of a threatened area.

Defend

A Unit fortifies themselves against attacks, forming a shield wall or otherwise fortifying their position, giving Enemy units that attack them **Disadvantage** for that turn.

Ready an action

A Unit can choose to delay their action until another point in the Initiative, Choosing what the action is, as well as what the trigger for the action: etc, Readying an attack for when another friendly unit is in a flanking position, or moving when an enemy unit is defeated.

Coordinated Attack

A Unit delays it's attack to follow the orders of another commander. When an allied Unit makes an attack against an enemy adjacent to you, you can remove any flanking advantage you would have provided and instead act as if your units troops were combined with your Allies Unit. I.e., if you had 400 troops and your ally had 300 troops, The attacking commander would determine his deployed troops as if he had all 700 troops in his Unit.

Morale

It was often the case that in medieval battles fights would come down to beating the other side into a state of no longer being willing to fight. Count into fact that the average foot soldier was an underpaid farmer, and some battles could last for days, and it's no wonder that soldiers would try and desert.

Morale is a way of determining how willing to fight a troop is. To simulate morale, use the scale below, which starts at normal and can be increased up or down through conditions prior to the fight, or through failing a morale check. Once the tracker goes below "Mutinous", the unit is no longer functional, as the troops desert and leave the unit.

Morale

Level	Effect
Fanatical	Each troop gets + 1/2 CR
Motivated	Each troop gets + 1/4 CR
Normal	No special effect
Demoralized	Unit's base speed is reduced by 100
Mutinous	The Unit requires a DC 10 Morale check to initiate a battle.

When a unit loses a fight, there is a chance they suffer the Morale Penalty. The Commander of the army must make a **Morale Check**. A Morale check is a charisma check to maintain control of the unit. If the commander fails the check, move the Morale Tracker down a level. Additionally, if a Unit is below half their starting troops and fails a Morale check, they disband and desert the unit.

It is also possible to raise or lower morale of troops outside of the battle. It is up to the DM's discretion whether something raises or lowers the morale. some good suggestions include improving the army's equipment, giving them comfortable accommodations. Whereas some negative actions might include not eating properly, Fighting alongside troops they don't like, being under paid, etc.

Involving the Players

One of the appeals of Playing Dungeons and Dragons is that you play a notably heroic character doing heroic things, or at least that is the case in most settings.

To allow the players to shine as individuals during a big battle, consider using these options listed below to introduce some elements of player control.

Skirmish

A notable enemy commander needs to be taken out? Need to sneak in and open the castle gate? Perhaps the army was just about to charge in for a final assault when a Massive dragon swoops down and blocks the armies path. These are all good excuses for the Dungeon Master to call a Skirmish!

A skirmish is simply an encounter that takes place in between rounds of the battles and serves as a way for the players to work together to affect the outcome of the war in ways that only heroes can. While skirmishes are most likely going to be combat encounters, due to the nature of being in a battlefield, a skirmish might also be some other type of encounter, like escorting the king out of a castle during a retreat, diplomatically trying to convince another commander to call off his army, or any other situation you or your players think of.

Player Actions

It should come to no surprise that as players level up, they gain access to spells and features which would make them a formidable force on the battlefield. If a player is in a unit, either commanding it or as a foot soldier, they can forgo the unit's action to Take an action as their character, such as casting a spell, using a magic item, or just attacking a specific troop in the enemy unit.

Examples: A Wizard lobs a fireball at the approaching goblin hoard, A Fighter action surges and takes down a Troll trying to tear down the castle walls, The Druid summons woodland creatures to bolster their army, and the Cleric casts Clairvoyance to look for an ambush beyond the hill.

Fortifications and Siege Weapons

The above rules work fine for two enemies meeting on an open field or battleground to duke it out, But what if an Enemy is inside some form of fortification like a Castle?

Fortifications

Units within a fortification cannot be the target of a battle while the fort remains secure. To assault a fortification will require some ingenuity, Either through Player intervention Or through the use of siege weaponry.

Rules for hitpoints of different parts of fortifications can be found in the dungeon masters guide, but for sake of this ruleset assume that fortifications can only be damaged by siege Weaponry or player actions
   At the DM's Discretion, troops within a fortification may be ranged weapons, though this will depend on the specific fortification and the nature of attacking units, and the attackers will almost certainly have disadvantage.

Siege weapons

Siege weapons can be an invaluable asset for battles. Take a look at the siege weaponry options, which can be found on page 255 of the DMG.

   Most siege weapons can attack a fortification directly, either breaking down gates or crumbling walls

A siege weapon can be incorporated into a Troop by accounting for the space it takes up. siege weapons are different from normal troops in that they don't have a static CR. Instead, a number of troops equal to the number of actions it takes to operate the siege weapon can forgo adding their CR to the battle, and instead work together to operate the weapon,

Destroy the Siege weapons!

When a Unit containing a siege weapon is attacked, the defending Commander can include the siege Weapons in the troops they deploy. Treat the siege Weapons as if they were attacking to determine their CR, but don't add this number to any casualties that would be dealt, siege weapons are incapable of dealing damage at a close range.

Some Specific Rulings for siege Weaponry are listed below:

Siege Tower
The siege tower allows 200 troops to initiate a battle against an appropriate fortification at a time. The Unit containing siege towers moves at half speed, accounting for the size and difficulty involved with moving them. If a siege weapon is attacked in a battle, It counts as having 9 CR, to represent the strength of the construction, though it deals no damage to enemy troops.

Suspended Cauldron
This siege weapon doesn't count as part of a Unit but must be installed in a fortification. When a Unit in the fortification defends against an attack, they can forgo the CR of 4 troops to attack with the Cauldron.
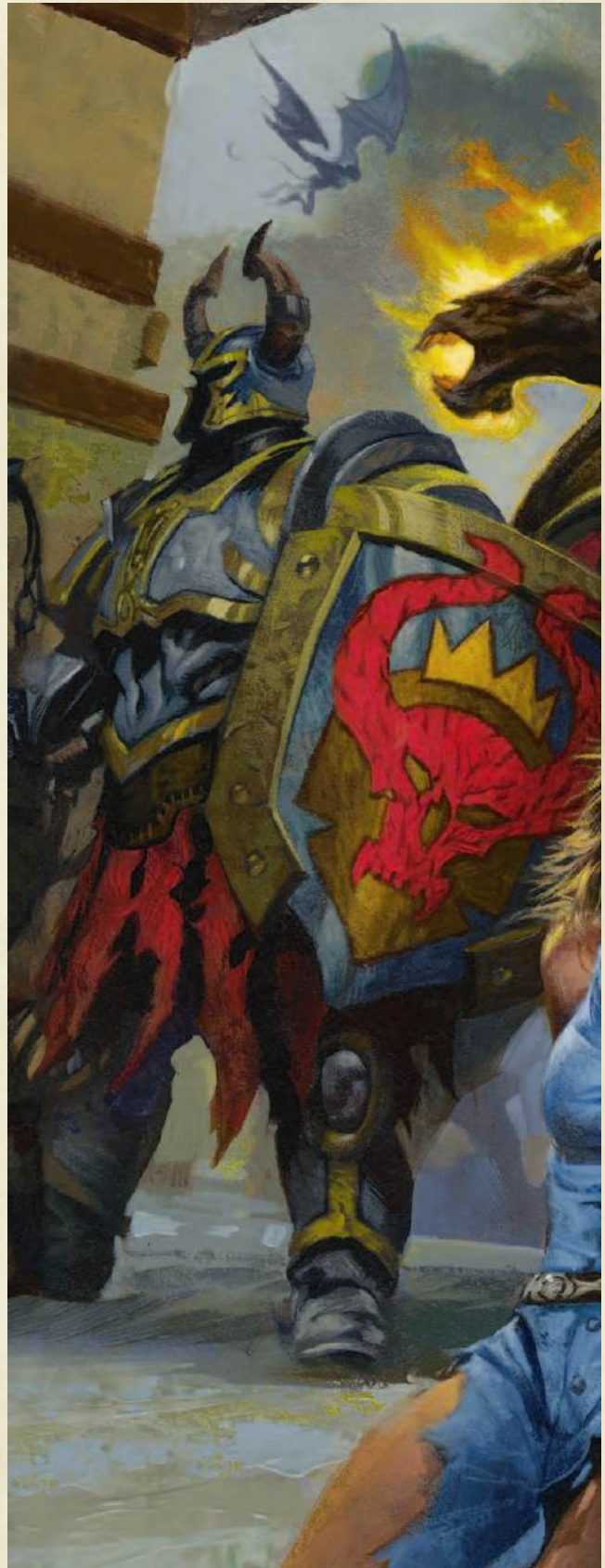
Themed Units

For the more advanced warfare enthusiasts, the rules present may not offer enough choice in building units, or differentiation between warring factions. One solution for this is to theme your Unit around a type of creature or race and use their features that would be relevant to a large scale battle.

Examples of Features for Troops

Kobolds

Kobolds boast both **Pack Tactics** giving them advantage when they have an ally nearby (in a Unit of 400 Kobolds, this can be assumed to be the case). This is offset by **Sunlight Sensitivity**, which is disadvantage when in direct sunlight.

Imagine a battle taking place in the late evening, The kobolds on the backpeddle until suddenly: the sun sets. Their opponents, **Blinded** by the lack of light are suddenly overwhelmed the vicious kobolds working together.

Wood Elves

Aside from their **Higher Movement Speed**, Wood elves have **Mask of the wild**, allowing them to hide while only lightly obscured. Imagine the guerrilla tactics of fighting these troops who attack from a range, then dissapear into the tall grass or foliage before troops can get close

Gnolls

Rampage makes gnolls a formidable force: defeating enemies and then going in for another attack immediatley lends them to a more aggressive style of battle

Consider making the **Rampage** bonus apply only to troops that survive the first battle, to balance out having multiple attacks per turn. That way they can still make multiple attacks, but the second one will be weaker.

Undead

Immune to Exhaustion, bound to the will of their commander, and not requiring food or drink make undead a terrifying force on the battlefield.

Undead troops like skeletons and zombies don't need to make morale checks, they exist only to obey the will of their necromancer masters.

Tabaxi

These dextrous felines boast a natural **climbing speed** as well as an ability to double their movement speed for a turn using **Feline Agility**.

Tabaxi can easily zip around the battlefield, providing flanking bonuses to allies. In addition, their claws allow them to scale fortifications and get in a melee with those forces without the need of ladders or siege towers.

Halflings

Aside from being **Lucky**, Halflings are also **Brave**, giving them advantage on Morale checks.

Other Features not listed here

There are tons of different creatures in D&D with different features and abilities, get creative! Maybe a mimic colony disguises itself as a castle keep, which springs into actions when enemies try to place siege towers, dragononic troops flying overhead prompting morale checks, or even just an excessive number of rats that prey at night.