MASS COMBAT SIMPLIFIED

A 5e plugin for mass combat & grand strategy by Trekiros

Introduction

Participating in a siege, either as an attacker or as a defender, is one of heroic fantasy's staples. Thousands of nameless faces staring death in the face, and you are one of them.

This is what this document is attempting to provide: a way to easily integrate mass combat into 5e. Whether you plan to run mass combat only once per campaign, or run an entire campaign about waging a war with an enemy nation, these rules are designed to fit

This supplement is the result of a video on my Youtube channel, which you can find here.

Credits

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Table of Contents

Mass Combat Rules

The following are rules for how to set up and run a mass combat encounter.

Encounter Outcome

This system presents players with deeply tactical decisions to make. But for those decisions to matter to the story, you must prepare a wide range of possible end states for your mass combat encounter. Make sure you communicate to your players which criteria they are being judged on, and what rewards or punishment they can expect, so they can plan accordingly.

Financial Rewards. The sovereign has promised the player characters a reward of 5,000 gold pieces for leading their troops to victory.

But for each battalion under their command which survives the battle, they can expect a bonus of 1,000 gold pieces. Otherwise, that money would need to go to the families of the deceased.

NPCs in jeopardy. There are 5 to 10 non-player characters, from the backstories of our heroes, who have been conscripted in the army, or have volunteered to take part in this battle. These could be members of the PCs' families, their dearest friends, or simply the owner of a magic items shop the PCs often frequent.

Every time a battalion is reduced to half its maximum hit points, or to 0 hit points, there is a chance for that NPC to be counted amongst the casualties.

Divine Favor. This battle is watched by the gods. Should the player characters' performance be deemed sufficiently heroic, they will be rewarded with a divine boon, or a magic item.

However, should their performance be lacking, the gods might take offense from how the lives of their devouts were neglected. In this case, divine retribution might be in the cards for the player characters.

Information. It sometimes takes interrogating hundreds of prisoners to finally learn about the evil plans of your enemy. And to capture that many prisoners, the victory has to be decisive.

For every 2 battalions which survive the battle, the player characters learn one piece of information they didn't know about their enemy.

Reputation. Potential allies can sometimes have a hard time putting their trust in mere adventurers, with no track record to speak of.

If the player characters win their battle convincingly, this will give them much more solid ground to stand on during future negotiations (advantage on persuasion checks, lower DC, etc...).

A favor. Sometimes, the best reward isn't money, it's having someone powerful in your debt.

If the player characters let the Viscount take credit for their blowout victory, the noble will owe them, big time. Now all that's left is to go earn that blowout victory.

Army Compositions

Here are guidelines for how to choose how many battalions each army should be made up of.

Enemy Army

Your first step should be to choose an army composition for the antagonists.

Unit count. Start by building a balanced encounter, using your favorite encounter builder, between your player characters (plus NPC allies if applicable) and the enemy army's commanders.

If, for story reasons, the enemy army doesn't have enough commanders to result in a balanced encounter at this stage, add battalions until you have an encounter of your desired difficulty.

Then, add a number of battalions so that the total number of creatures in the enemy army (including battalions & commanders) is somewhere between 10 and 20. The number of battalions you add at this stage becomes your players' "military budget" (see below).

Unit types. About half of the enemy's army should be made up of core battalions: infantry, archer, and cavalry. There should be slightly more infantry than either archers or cavalry.

The other half of the army should be made up of other types of battalions, as well as commanders and special units.

Scouting. Before running the encounter, make sure your players have an opportunity to scout ahead, and discover the size and composition of the enemy army.

The players' army

After designing the enemy's army, build an army for your players.

Military budget. The military budget (see above for how it is calculated) is a fund used to recruit battalions. For example, if the players have a military budget of 5, they can recruit 5 battalions of their choice.

You can either let your players choose, or design an army for them to save some precious table time. If you design an army for your players, follow the same guidelines for unit types as described above for the enemy army.

The Player Characters. In a mass combat encounter, your player characters will be on the battlefield, fighting alongside their troops.

To give them better mobility across the battlefield, and ensure they can get in on the action, give each player character a **warhorse**, or another type of mount or vehicle which fits their character's aesthetic better.
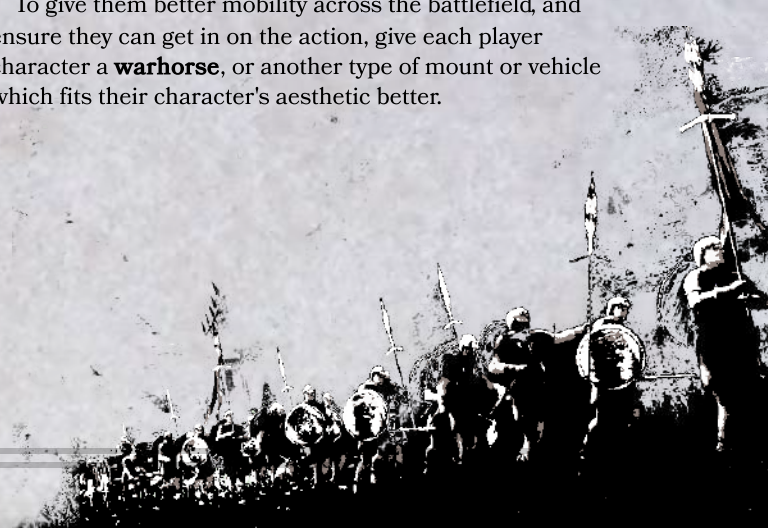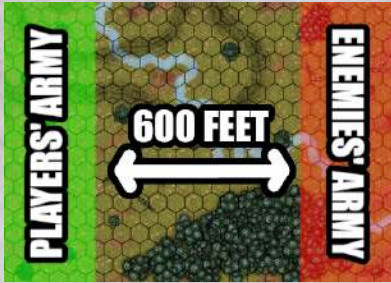
Running Mass Combat

Here are guidelines for how to run the actual mass combat encounter.

Engagement. Place the armies on opposite sides of a battlemap, each side separated by 600 feet, as pictured below:

Initial advance. Before rolling initiative, let the armies approach one another. Only roll initiative when it becomes necessary: when the timing of an action becomes too important not to handle without turn-based rules. Typically, this happens when one of the sides declares they want to make an attack.

Commander initiative. In a mass combat encounter, only the commanders roll initiative. The battalions act on initiative count 0 (see below), and battalions allied with the player characters act before enemy battalions.

Orders. As an action, a commander can give an order to an allied battalion within 120 feet and which can hear them. A battalion always follows the last order they were given, unless they have a condition which prevents them from doing so. Battalions allied with the player characters act first, in whichever order they desire, and then enemy battalions act.

Resolving attacks. When a battalion attacks another battalion, or forces another battalion to make a saving throw, do not make an attack or a saving throw. Attacks hit automatically, and saving throws fail automatically.

For damage, use the average instead of making a damage roll. If the attack had advantage, it deals double damage. If it had disadvantage, it deals half damage.

If a commander attacks or is attacked by a battalion (or another commander), roll attacks, saves, and damage as usual.

Win Conditions. Battles between armies aren't typically fought until the total extermination of the other side. Typically, once all of the commanders of an army have been defeated, or were forced to flee the battlefield, their army is routed and the battle is lost. Here are a two other common scenarios (other scenarios such as rescue, infiltration, etc... usually shouldn't use these mass combat rules)

- **Protect/Destroy:** One side must protect a certain creature or object for 10 rounds. The other must destroy it. Example targets: the gate of a castle, a mage performing a ritual, hundreds of hostages being sacrificed to an evil god.
- **Escape/Chase:** One side starts surrounded by the enemy on all sides. They win if their commanders escape from the battlefield.

Additional traits

To make armies feel more unique, each army should have one of the following additional traits. Every single battalion in that army gains the benefits of the chosen trait (this is accounted for in their Challenge Rating). You can either let the players choose the trait for their army, or choose one for them.

For story reasons, it might be possible for a single army to include battalions with different traits. But be careful, as too many traits can quickly become difficult to keep track of.

Aggressive. As a bonus action, the battalion can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature that it can see.

Amphibious. The battalion can breathe air and water, and gains a swimming speed equal to its walking speed.

Demonic Horde. This battalion's maximum hit points are halved, but it has the following action:

Summon (1/day). Flip a coin. On heads, an identical battalion is summoned within 30 feet of this battalion. The summoned battalion doesn't have this action.

Elemental Army. Choose one damage type other than bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing. The battalion is immune to that damage type, and its attack always deal damage of that type.

Giant Army. The battalion's maximum hit points are increased by 50.

Incorporeal Movement. The battalion can move through other objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 15 (3d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Infernal legion. Magical darkness doesn't impede the battalion's vision.

Nimble Escape. The battalion can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

Poison Splash. When this battalion takes damage of any type but psychic or poison, each other creature within 5 feet of it takes 9 (2d8) poison damage.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the battalion to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the battalion drops to 1 hit point instead.

Vampiric. Whenever this battalion hits with a melee attack, it regains hit points equal to half the damage taken.

The Battlefield

The last part of the equation of how to make a fun mass combat encounter is to make the terrain itself interesting and have it create tactical decisions.

You can find example battlefield maps at the end of this document.

Whether you use theater of the mind, or a battlemap (recommended: use a 30-foot per cell scale), make sure your battlefield incorporates at least a few of the following elements:

Slopes. High ground can be used to see more of the battlefield, or to give the arrows of your archers more range.

Forests/Ruined Structures. Entire battalions can hide inside of thick vegetation, or behind the crumbling walls of a ruin. Creatures inside this terrain are heavily obscured to other creatures 90 or more feet away from them.

Swamps/Mud/Uneven Grounds. Armies are slowed to a crawl by the muck: it counts as difficult terrain.

Cliffs/Rivers/Ponds/Lakes. These obstacles are practically impassible by battalions, unless they're a battalion of druids.

Caves/Tunnels. Sometimes, the battle can happen not just on the ground, but also beneath it, in three dimensions. By incorporating a network of underground tunnels into the battlemap, you give more potential vectors of attack to both armies.

Fortifications. The walls of a city or of a castle are an important defensive position during a siege. They provide siege equipment such as ballistas and cauldrons of boiling hot water, as well as crenalations to hide behind.
- Creatures on the wall have advantage on attack rolls made against creatures who are not on the wall.
- Creatures not on the wall have disadvantage on attack rolls made against creatures who are on the wall.

Fortifications can be destroyed: they might have anywhere from 100 to 500 hit points, depending on how important the fortress is.

> **Rules Reminder.** As the rules above explain, attacks between battalions always hit, but an attack with disadvantage deals half damage, and an attack with advantage deals double damage.

Battalion Stat Blocks

Battalions are divided into Core Battalions and Support Battalions. Here are their stat blocks.

Core Battalions

The three core battalions make up the bulk of almost every army. Each of them has their own strengths, and weaknesses.

Infantry can easily stop a cavalry's charge, but arrow fire will slowly whittle them down. A skilled tactician will protect their own archers with infantry, and outflank enemy archers with cavalry.

Infantry. A battalion specialized in melee combat, with sturdy armors and shields.

Archers. A battalion specialized in ranged combat, especially great if they can lord over the battlefield from an elevated position.

Cavalry. Mounted combatants specialized in blindingly fast charges, to take out important targets hidden in the back of the enemy lines.

Support Battalions

These secondary types of battalions provide utility to the army, enabling tactics which wouldn't otherwise be possible. They are the cornerstone of an army's strategy, and must be protected at all cost.

Artillery. Mangonels and catapults are easily destroyed, but they can change the face of a battlefield by setting it on fire. Use them to target chokepoints and retreat paths, throwing a wrench in your enemy's plans.

Arcane Battalion. Wizards provide a lot of utility on the battlefield. A good tactician will find endless creative uses for their spells.

Divine Battalion. Clerics and paladins can bolster their allies' morale and heal the wounded. They can also perform complex rituals to have their gods turn the tide of battle, though this can make them a target.

Druidic Battalion. With a strong bond to the natural world, this battalion can navigate even the roughest terrain, and outmaneuver armies in the wilderness. However, in urban environments, their abilities are much more limited.

Flying Cavalry. If enemy archers are dealt with, griffon riders or drake knights can become nearly unstoppable. Otherwise, it is best to keep them on defense.

Infantry Batallion

Gargantuan swarm of medium creatures, any alignment

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 100 (8d20+16)
Speed 30ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills intimidation +3, perception +3
Damage Resistances bludgeoning
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages common and two other languages
Challenge 5 (1800 XP)

Group Morale. While it has more than half its hit points, the battalion has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, frightened, paralyzed, stunned, restrained, or knocked prone.

Shield Wall. This battalion occupies a space that can be either a 30-foot square, or a line, 90-foot long and 10-foot wide. It chooses whenever it moves.

Actions

Brawl. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, one target, 5ft. reach. *Hit:* 25 (6d6+4) slashing damage, or 12 (3d6+2) if the battalion has half of its hit points or fewer.

Archery Batallion

Gargantuan swarm of medium creatures, any alignment

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 100 (8d20+16)
Speed 30ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Stealth +7, perception +3
Damage Resistances slashing
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages common and two other languages
Challenge 5 (1800 XP)

Group Morale. While it has more than half its hit points, the battalion has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, frightened, paralyzed, stunned, restrained, or knocked prone.

High Ground. For every 30 feet above a target this battalion is, the range of its Volley attack increases by 30 feet, to a maximum of 600 feet.

Actions

Volley. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, one target, 150ft. range. *Hit:* 25 (6d6+4) piercing damage, or 12 (3d6+2) if the battalion has half of its hit points or fewer.

Cavalry Batallion

Gargantuan swarm of medium creatures, any alignment

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 100 (8d20+16)
Speed 60ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Intimidation +3, perception +3
Damage Resistances piercing
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages common and two other languages
Challenge 5 (1800 XP)

Group Morale. While it has more than half its hit points, the battalion has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, frightened, paralyzed, stunned, restrained, or knocked prone.

Actions

Trample. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, one target, 5ft. reach. *Hit:* 25 (6d6+4) bludgeoning damage, or 12 (3d6+2) if the battalion has half of its hit points or fewer.

Artillery Battalion

Gargantuan swarm of large constructs, any alignment

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 50 (4d20+8)
Speed 30ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	6 (-2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)

Skills perception +7
Senses passive Perception 17
Languages common and two other languages
Challenge 5 (1800 XP)

Group Morale. While it has more than half its hit points, the battalion has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, frightened, paralyzed, stunned, restrained, or knocked prone.

Actions

Bombard. The artillery launches flaming debris at a point on the ground it can see within 600 feet of itself. The ground within 30 feet of the point of impact starts burning for the next 10 minutes. Whenever a creature starts its turn within the burning area, it must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Once it has used this ability, this battalion cannot use it again until it reloads successfully.

Reload. Roll a d6, or a d4 if this battalion has less than half its maximum hit points. If the sum of all the reload rolls made since the last time this battalion has moved is 10 or above, it reloads successfully.

The battalion cannot take this action if it moves on the same turn.

Arcane Battalion

Huge swarm of medium creatures, any alignment

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 50 (4d20+8)
Speed 30ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills arcana +7, perception +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages common and two other languages
Challenge 5 (1800 XP)

Group Morale. While it has more than half its hit points, the battalion has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, frightened, paralyzed, stunned, restrained, or knocked prone.

Telepathic Hub. As part of a short or long rest, this battalion can create a telepathic link between itself and any number of creatures or battalions within 500 feet of itself. Until this battalion is reduced to half its hit points or lower, the targets can speak telepathically with one another.

Actions

Arcane Barrage. Each creature in a line 120-foot long, 30-foot wide starting from the battalion, must make a DC 15 Dexterity save, taking 14 (4d6) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one. If the battalion has less than half its hit points or fewer, it deals 7 (2d6) damage instead.

Tactical Illusion (1/day). This battalion create many overlapping illusions in a 60-foot radius sphere centered on a point within 120 feet of themselves. A creature outside the sphere can only see and hear what the illusions look and sound like, unless it has true sight.

The illusion lasts for 10 minutes. As an action on subsequent turns, this battalion can change what the illusion looks and sounds like.

Rules Reminder. An enemy battalion outside the illusions can still attack a battalion they can't see within the illusion, but they will have disadvantage if they do. As the rules above explain, attacks between battalions always hit, but an attack with disadvantage deals half damage.

Divine Battalion

Huge swarm of medium creatures, any alignment

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 50 (4d20+8)
Speed 30ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)

Skills religion +7, perception +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages common and two other languages
Challenge 5 (1800 XP)

Group Morale. While it has more than half its hit points, the battalion has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, frightened, paralyzed, stunned, restrained, or knocked prone.

Morale Boost. Other allied battalions within 120 feet act as though they had more than half their hit points.

Actions

Cure Wounds. Each allied creature within 30 feet of this battalion regains up to 18 (4d8) hit points. If this battalion has less than half its hit points or fewer, they regain 9 (2d8) hit points instead.

Miracle. The battalion rolls 1d20 and records the result. If the total of all rolls since the last time the battalion has moved or taken damage is 100 or higher, the battalion's deity intervenes.

The DM chooses the nature of the intervention; the effect of any cleric spell would be appropriate, for example. If the deity intervenes, this battalion cannot use this action for 7 days.

Druidic Battalion

Huge swarm of medium creatures, any alignment

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 50 (4d20+8)
Speed 30ft, swim 60ft, climbing 30ft, burrow 15ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Skills nature +6, perception +6
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages common and two other languages
Challenge 5 (1800 XP)

Group Morale. While it has more than half its hit points, the battalion has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, frightened, paralyzed, stunned, restrained, or knocked prone.

Actions

Trample. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, one target, 5ft. reach. *Hit:* 25 (6d6+4) bludgeoning damage, or 12 (3d6+2) if the battalion has half of its hit points or fewer.

Tree Stride (1/day). This battalion, and any number of willing creatures of its choice within 5 feet of it, teleport to an unoccupied space within 300 feet that is within a forest. This action can only be taken while inside a forest.

Flying Cavalry

Huge swarm of medium creatures, any alignment

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 50 (4d20+8)
Speed 30ft, fly 60ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills perception +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages common and two other languages
Challenge 5 (1800 XP)

Flyby. This battalion does not provoke opportunity attacks when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

Group Morale. While it has more than half its hit points, the battalion has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, frightened, paralyzed, stunned, restrained, or knocked prone.

Actions

Talons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, one target, 5ft. reach. *Hit:* 25 (6d6+4) piercing damage, or 12 (3d6+2) if the battalion has half of its hit points or fewer. Additionally, the creature must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, or it is grappled (escape DC 12).

Dropped Spikes. Each creature 90 feet or less underneath this battalion must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 25 (6d6+4) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one. If this battalion has half its hit points or fewer, it deals 12 (3d6+2) damage instead.

Grand Strategy Simplified

But what if you actually want to run a kingdom management campaign, and focus on mass combat rather than simply run it once or twice?

This last section details how to run a full campaign focused on mass combat, by bringing a layer of long-term strategy on top of the short-term tactics described above.

In strategy, reckless aggression will exhaust itself against a strong defense, but defenses are expensive and will eventually be outpaced by a well-developed economy. A skilled tactician will build just enough defenses on the outskirts of their territory, while building either an economy or an army.

Factions. Factions are the participants of a conflict. The player characters control one faction, and the Game Master controls their enemy's faction. There must be at least two factions, but there can be more, and factions can forge or break alliances through role play.

Each faction has a treasury, measured in an abstract unit of "gold", which starts at 0. The role of the player characters is to choose how this budget is spent.

Provinces. Each faction controls a number of provinces, which are presented as areas on a map. Each province has three attributes which can evolve over the course of a campaign: Economy, Defense, and Troops.

Strategy Turns. A strategy turn represents a 1-week long period. At the start of the turn, each faction's treasury receives funds equal to the sum of the Economy, minus the Troops, of every one of their provinces.

Then, each commander (player characters and important NPCs in the enemy faction) can issue one order, from the following list:

- **Develop:** spend Treasury equal to a province's current Economy (min 1), to increase that Economy score by 1, to a maximum of 10.
- **Fortify:** spend Treasury equal to a province's current Economy (min 1), to increase its Defense score by 1, to a maximum of 10.
- **Mobilize:** spend Treasury up to a maximum equal to a province's Economy, to increase its Troops by the amount of treasury spent.
- **March:** move any number of Troops from one province to a neighboring one. If you send army to an enemy province, they clash (see clash below).

The enemy's faction acts first, in secret, and the players act second. Note that actions which cost Treasury cannot be taken if the faction's treasury is currently negative.

Missions. Before giving out orders during a strategy turn, the player characters can choose to go on a mission. There are 3 kinds of missions they can choose to go on, each with different rewards:

Reconnaissance:
- Example Tasks: ambush an enemy messenger, sneak into an enemy fortress, negotiate with an information broker, etc...

- Example Rewards: information about the economy/defense/troops of an enemy province, about the enemy's treasury, or about the last orders they gave.

Sabotage:
- Example Tasks: burn crops, plant explosives in an enemy province, destroy a warehouse
- Example rewards: -5 enemy treasury, -2 Defense or Economy in an enemy province

Gathering allies:
- Example Tasks: perform a small quest to put a friendly lord in the party's debt, pay a bribe, solve a famine, etc...
- Example Reward: +5 treasury, +5 Troops in a given province, a new province, +2 extra orders this turn.

These missions are carried out using the regular rules for combat, exploration and social interaction; they do not involve mass combat.

Clashes. A clash occurs if two enemy armies meet. This can happen if an army is marched to an enemy province, or if two enemy armies are marched and their paths happen to cross. To resolve a clash, use the following steps:

First, if an army was marched to a province: reduce the army's Troops by a number equal to the province' Defense. Second, the Troops of each army taking part in the clash are reduced by the Troops of the opposite army.

If the clash happened in the wilderness, the surviving army can choose to continue marching, or return home. If it happened in a province, the surviving army takes (or keeps) control of that province.

Taking part in a clash. Once per strategy turn, the player characters can choose to participate in one of the clashes that are happening this strategy turn, to try to alter the outcome of the clash. If a capital is being attacked, the player characters **must** participate.

If they do, use the mass combat rules from this document to resolve the clash. The amount of battalions in each army is equal to its number of Troops. If a province is being attacked, use a battlemap with fortified walls. These walls and gates have a number of hit points equal to 50 times the province' Defense score.

At the end of the battle, count the number of surviving battalions to determine the surviving Troops.

Win conditions. Each faction chooses one province as its Capital. If a faction gains control of their enemy's Capital, they win the entire campaign.

Initial conditions. At the start of the campaign, give a clear advantage to the enemy faction, but give your players a healthier treasury (a higher weekly income). This way, it is only through the heroes' cunning strategies, and their interventions during clashes, that the campaign can be won.

Province	Economy	Defenses	Troops	Income /Week	Starting Count (players)	Starting Count (enemies)
Military Outpost	0	5	5	-5	2	4
Major Town	5	2	2	+3	5	5
Big Bad Evil Guy's Capital	10	10	5	+5	0	1