

Crash Bang Wallop! Alternative Battle Rules For The SAGA Roleplaying System

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Introduction

This is an alternative battle or mass combat system for use with the SAGA roleplaying system. That system already has mass combat rules in the **Dragonlance: The Fifth Age** (called from now on **DL5A** because I'm lazy) supplement **Heroes Of Steel**, but I found the rules to be too heavily based on numbers and calculations, which seemed to be in contradiction to the SAGA system's philosophy of "less rules, more story". Although the **Heroes Of Steel** rules are fine for playing wargame scenarios with the SAGA rules, they're not really a great fit for a SAGA roleplaying game in which you'd want to keep drama foremost. These rules are an attempt to capture the dramatic storytelling aspects of a battle as seen in films or books, where the focus is on the main characters, with the battle serving as a backdrop for their actions.

These rules are based on the mass combat system from the original (non-d20) **Legend Of The Five Rings** roleplaying game.

A note on terminology. If you're only familiar with the SAGA game, then references to "PCs" or "player characters" are to what SAGA calls "Heroes", and the "GM" is the "Narrator". I'm a bit too set in my ways to pick up new gaming terminology with every new rulebook I read! If you're using this with the Marvel Superheroes version of the SAGA rules (or some other variant), then the Dragon cards mentioned in places below are mishap cards. I think everything else is the same.

Preparation

Before running a battle, the GM needs to make a small amount of preparation. By looking through the rules here, the GM should be able to tell what information they will need to prepare beforehand. Basic statistics for NPC generals are useful, as are notes on the makeup of the enemy force. These needn't be in-depth, and something as simple as "85% goblins, 15% ogres" is fine. As long as the GM has some idea of what the average troop type is in each army, then they should have no problems. If the PCs expect (or don't!) to meet certain NPCs on the battlefield (see step 4 "Battle Events" below), then it would be good to have those NPCs' details at hand. It's assumed that most battles in a SAGA campaign would not be random, and that the GM has at least some idea of the location of the battle, but it is useful to formalise some of the details as they might apply to these rules (familiarity of the land to the armies, availability of fortifications, etc).

The most important detail to define, however, is the duration of the battle and its victory conditions. This can be as simple as "first army to win three Battle Rounds in a row" or "best out of five", or it could be something related to the battle's special events, such as killing the general, or stealing the opponent's flag. Any number of combinations are possible ("kill the enemy general to win; partial victory if the enemy general remains alive, but your army wins three Battle Rounds in a row").

The Battle Turn

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| 1 | Tide Of Battle I |
| 2 | Character Position |
| 3 | Battle Defence Actions |
| 4 | Battle Events |
| 5 | Tide Of Battle II |

1. Tide Of Battle I

Note which side is winning based on step 5 of the previous Battle Turn. If this is the first Battle Turn, then the "winning" side is the one with the highest Initial Advantage.

Initial Advantage

In the first Battle Turn, work out which side is "winning", by adding up whichever of the following modifiers apply to each army. The army with the highest total is considered to be winning for the purposes of the Battle Table.

Significantly Larger Force	+1
Better trained troops	+1
General has a better Ability Code in her leadership Ability than her opponent does in his	+1
Army is using fortifications	+1
Army is on familiar ground	+1
Army has information of the opposition's tactics, deployments, etc	+1
Won previous engagement against same opponent	+1
General has Reputation of Hero or above	+1
Opponents are surprised	+1

The GM should think carefully about these modifiers, and only apply them when certain. For example, a rabble of untrained peasants led by a small force of elite warriors would probably not count as "better trained" than a force of normal competent soldiers, no matter the abilities of those elite warriors. If the elite troops were alone, then their better training would count, but it would also cancel out the soldiers' bonus for larger numbers, and vice versa.

Also think carefully about whether the modifier applies to the leadership or the army as a whole. A leader who knows the territory better than his army does won't normally receive the "familiar ground" bonus unless he has given his troops the relevant information.

Likewise, the definition of "surprised" can apply to the general, her troops, or both. In all other ways, surprise works as in **DL5A** p60, except that the benefit of surprising the opponent is not a free attack, but the modifier above. If both generals are NPCs, or neither army has a general and is making tests from "average trooper" values (see step 5), then use the NPC action rules in **DL5A** p53 "Other Characters", or decide some other way.

2. Character Position

Each player decides where in the battle their character will be.

The general's position is up to the player (or GM) running the character. Some prefer to lead from the front, while others prefer to stand back and organise their troops from the back, like a chess player moving his pieces.

If the general does get involved, she moves in exactly the same way as the PCs.

3. Battle Defence Actions

Each player plays a card from their hand and adds its total to their Agility, making note of the total. Trumps apply.

There is no target number or opposition Ability, as this test does not represent defence from a single attack. As such, there is no real chance of a mishap occurring, although a GM may rule that if a Dragon card is played for this test, then the character is swept up in the battle and moves one step closer to Heavily Engaged.

►Defend Yourself From The Enemy Hordes!

Difficulty:	Special
Action Ability:	Agility
Opposition Ability:	None/Special
Comments:	?
Mishap:	?

4. Battle Events

By cross-referencing the total of their Battle Defence Action (step 3), their position in the battle (step 2), and the current Tide of Battle (step 1), each player finds their current situation on the Battle Table, and works out the effects of any hits suffered, as per normal DL5A rules. These are unavoidable hits, to represent the fact that virtually no one walks through a battle unscathed. That said, damage should not be resolved until the nature of any special events have been determined, as some special events (like "Protected By Fate" below) might affect the damage suffered. It's not necessary to play through the special event at this stage, just that it is known whether or not it will affect damage from unavoidable hits. If a special event is noted at the character's position, this is played out. Sample special events are given below.

It may be useful, especially if there are a lot of characters moving about, to use counters or miniatures and use the Battle Table almost as if it were a board game.

If two or more characters end up in the same spot on the Battle Table, and a special event is noted, then they both take part in the event, unless the GM decides otherwise.

PCs can stick together if they wish, but if doing so must nominate one player to "lead". This PC makes all movement decisions and Battle Defence Actions until the group separates. The group may nominate a new leader each turn.

It may simplify things to fade NPCs into the background and to bring them forward if there's a special event that might participate in, but there is nothing to stop them using the same movement system as PCs if the GM wants them involved.

Should a character take more than one hit at this stage, then it should be noted that the effects of hits are worked out separately. In other words, the character must make a separate Defence Action for each hit, and must expend cards to "soak" wounds for each individual hit. The damage is not added up and soaked in one go.

Depending on the situation, a character might take a large amount of hits during the battle, before they even get to any special events. If the GM or players find the number of hits to be excessive, then adjust the maximum number as desired. It is recommended that the maximum be no lower than three or four hits, however.

Since each Battle Turn takes an hour in game time, the GM may allow characters to take actions during each turn that do not directly apply to the battle, such as healing through magic use, or recovering spell points. However, it is recommended that the GM not allow such extra actions if the character is Heavily Engaged. It may even be impossible to take the time to do anything other than fight at the Engaged level, at the GM's discretion. Always remember, the characters are on a battlefield, and that limits what they're able to do.

5. Tide Of Battle II

The armies' generals make opposed generalship tests, modified by the effects of step 4. The winner of this test determines which army is considered to be winning in step 1 of the next Battle Turn.

If victory conditions have been met by either side, then there is no next turn. Victory Conditions should be worked out in the preparation stage (see above).

➤ **Leading Your Army To Victory!**

Difficulty:	Average (8)
Action Ability:	Presence
Opposition Ability:	Presence
Comments:	?
Mishap:	?

By default, a generalship test is based around Presence. This is more for the sake of simplicity than anything else, however. If a general leads an army through clever planning rather than through willpower and example, then Reason may be a better Ability to use. Also, if your SAGA game uses skills, then a generalship or leadership skill would be an appropriate one to use.

Should the opposing force have no general (or second-in-command, in the case of a dead general), then the generalship test is made against the Presence (or Intellect or other applicable Ability) of the average member of the race that makes up the army. A goblin horde without a leader, for example, would make the test using the average Intellect or Essence of a goblin (4 and 5, respectively).

It is likely that one or more of the generals is an NPC. Although NPCs usually do not take actions, it is usually more fair to allow them to do so in this case (as explained in **DL5A** p53 "Other Characters"). The GM should feel free to use any method they wish to determine the generalship abilities of NPC generals, but this method is simplest.

Aftermath

This system offers no rules for determining casualties, prisoners and so on, as these are modified substantially by what special events the GM chooses to use, and how she decides to use them. However, nothing here contradicts the rules in **Heroes Of Steel** for handling such matters, so feel free to use them.

Special Events

Here is a list of events that might crop up as a special event (a Duel or Heroic Event) on the Battle Table, and their effects on the battle as a whole. You should substitute or modify any or all of these to fit your battle.

I have tied some battle-affecting events to suits in the Fate Deck, as this seemed appropriate. However, there is no reason to stick to this if you don't want to.

Also, the events are described in bare detail, and in terms of game mechanics, many are largely identical. It is up to the GM to describe these events as what they are - dramatic highlights in the chaos of battle. Try to avoid stuffy, stale descriptions and make the events truly special. It is likely that the players will be excited enough that they're helping to influence the battle, but they'll like it even more if each event is memorable.

In order to speed up play, or to be kinder to the players, a GM may rule that combat encounters as part of a special event are "one-hit-and-down", in other words, if the PC scores a successful hit, then the opponent is killed or otherwise out of action regardless of the actual damage caused. This also serves to differentiate these encounters from duels, in which "one-hit-and-down" should not be used.

Duels

Since many special events involve a fight, it is more memorable to have the enemy in a duel be someone a bit better than the rank and file trooper. This needn't be an NPC that the character knows, let alone a particular nemesis, although it could be. It could just be a hero or champion, or even a particularly talented squad captain, but the duel should always be dramatic. Even if the enemy isn't important in the PC's life

when they first meet, the results of the duel may lead to the NPC (or someone close to him) becoming a nemesis or recurring nuisance.

Heroic Events

Attack Missile Troops

Resolve a combat with an average enemy missile trooper. Your general trumps on any Agility cards he plays for this turn's generalship test, in addition to his normal trumps.

Protect Missile Troops

You and your unit stand guard over your missile troops, in an attempt to give them some uninterrupted shooting time. Fight a combat against an average enemy trooper. Your general trumps on any Dexterity cards he plays for this turn's generalship test, in addition to his normal trumps.

Reinforce Beleaguered Fighters

Resolve a combat with an average enemy trooper, then do the same again! Your general receives an Endurance trump bonus this turn on generalship, in addition to other trump bonuses.

Push On Through!

You and your unit break through the enemy lines. You are Heavily Engaged next Battle Turn, but your general receives a Strength trump bonus this turn on generalship, in addition to other trump bonuses.

Foil Enemy Plan

You come across a group of enemy troops planning some sort of special attack (flanking, tunnelling, etc). Resolve a combat with one of these troops. Your general trumps on any Reason cards he plays for this turn's generalship test, in addition to his normal trumps.

Obvious Opening

You spot a weakness in the enemy line, and move to exploit it. Fight a combat versus an average enemy trooper. Your general trumps on any Perception cards he plays for this turn's generalship test, in addition to his normal trumps.

Take Prisoners

Resolve a combat with an average enemy trooper. This part of the enemy force surrenders to your detachment without much of a fight. Your general trumps any Spirit cards he plays for generalship this turn, in addition to normal trumps. He does this again next turn, if you spend the turn moving back to Reserves with your prisoners.

Capture The Flag!

Resolve a combat with the flag-bearer, who is an average trooper. You capture the enemy banner, giving your general a trump on any Presence card played. He does this again next turn, if you spend the turn moving back to Reserves with the flag.

Since, by default, generalship is a Presence action and as such Presence cards would trump anyway, the GM might want to change this event so that it has an effect on Spirit cards instead, or if leave it in place if the general doesn't use Presence to lead (see above).

Clear Shot

You get a chance at an unimpeded ranged attack on the opposing general. This attack is Challenging (12). If the attack kills or otherwise incapacitates the enemy general, then your general automatically trumps this Battle Turn's generalship test, even if there is a second-in-command in the opposing force. If there is no second-in-command, then your general trumps generalship tests until she fails one.

Protected By Fate

Character suffers no damage this turn, from unavoidable hits or any other battle-related source.

Revenge!

You spot an enemy soldier up to something despicable like murdering prisoners or innocent bystanders. Although you lose him almost immediately, you can spend the rest of the battle looking for him. At the end of each step 4, you can move again one spot vertically or horizontally on the Battle Table in order to land on a Duel to face the villain. There are no game mechanic benefits for defeating this character, although there may be in-game rewards (or even punishments) for bringing the villain to justice.

Battle Fever!

Once per Battle Turn, you trump once on any battle-related action, in addition to your normal trump bonuses. This trump may be to the first card you play for the action or any subsequent card, unless the card is a Dragon card.

Protect The General!

The general has lost his personal guard in the chaos of battle. You can stick with him or not (using the guidelines outlined above). If you stick with him, you can decide to take any or all unavoidable hits he may suffer as he moves about, or help him out in any special events he encounters. There are no game mechanic benefits for sticking by him, but in-game benefits are likely.

Save A Wounded Comrade

You help an injured comrade out of the battle. You count as Heavily Engaged for two Battle Turns as you drag her back to reserves. There is no game mechanic benefit, but your character has likely made a friend for life.

Save A Wounded Enemy

Even though you are on opposing sides, a wounded enemy soldier calls for you to help him. This event is as "Save A Wounded Comrade" above, except the in-game effects are rather more interesting. Although in terms of game mechanics, you are dragging the enemy soldier to the Reserves, this needn't literally be your army's reserves. You may take the soldier to your army's reserves, perhaps putting him under arrest as you do so, or you may try to pass him off as an ally or innocent bystander. You may even take him to his own reserves, which may have interesting consequences. Or you may just take him to a quiet spot away from the battle which is controlled by neither side.

Hold This Position!

You stay in this spot on the Battle Table, representing you and the troops around you holding a position on the battlefield. You must fight one average enemy trooper per Battle Turn from now until the battle's end, but your entrenchment means that you can ignore any unavoidable hits at this spot.

You are in this part of the fighting:

Your Side Is Winning	<u>Reserves</u>	<u>Disengaged</u>	<u>Engaged</u>	Heavily Engaged		
Armies Are Evenly Matched		<u>Reserves</u>	<u>Disengaged</u>	<u>Engaged</u>	Heavily Engaged	
Your Side Is Losing			<u>Reserves</u>	<u>Disengaged</u>	<u>Engaged</u>	Heavily Engaged
Total of Battle Defense Action (Agility+card)						
1-3	PC takes 2 hits	PC takes 3 hits	PC takes 4 hits	PC takes 4 hits	PC takes 5 hits <u>Duel</u>	PC takes 6 hits
4-6	PC takes 2 hits	PC takes 2 hits	PC takes 3 hits	PC takes 4 hits <u>Duel</u>	PC takes 4 hits	PC takes 5 hits
7-9	PC takes 1 hit	PC takes 2 hits	PC takes 2 hits	PC takes 3 hits	PC takes 4 hits <u>Duel</u>	PC takes 4 hits Heroic Event
10-11	PC takes 1 hit	PC takes 2 hits <u>Duel</u>	PC takes 2 hits Heroic Event	PC takes 3 hits <u>Duel</u>	PC takes 3 hits Heroic Event	PC takes 4 hits <u>Duel</u>
12-14	PC takes 0 hits <u>Duel</u>	PC takes 1 hit <u>Duel</u>	PC takes 2 hits	PC takes 2 hits Heroic Event	PC takes 3 hits Heroic Event	PC takes 3 hits Heroic Event
15-17	PC takes 0 hits	PC takes 1 hit <u>Duel</u> Heroic Event	PC takes 1 hit	PC takes 2 hits	PC takes 2 hits <u>Duel</u>	PC takes 3 hits <u>Duel</u>
18+	PC takes 0 hits <u>Duel</u>	PC takes 0 hits	PC takes 1 hit <u>Duel</u>	PC takes 2 hits	PC takes 2 hits <u>Duel</u>	PC takes 2 hits Heroic Event