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Mass Battle System

Structured for L5R Limitless
Homebrew, not L5R ANY Edition

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Battles: Of Commanders and Soldiers

In some eras a bushi only draws his sword for ceremonial moments or to fight the occasional bandit. In others, wars between the Clans rip the countryside apart and invasions of oni or worse stalk the night.

When two armies face off in combat, the iconic moments of military samurai drama begin to unfold. Surging battle lines, person to person duels, and feats of daring which change the course of battle are common place. So, of course, are betrayals, moments of indecision, and yes occasional moments when Bushido fails leaving mortal men to face their deaths.

Mechanically, the battle setting rules focus the action of the game on the heroes and their rivals. When in command the heroes spot opportunities and shape the battlefield; when on the field they exploit opportunities or hold the line against opposing forces.

The sections includes:

- **Of Armies** – describes the armies, their size, and Morale;
- **Of Battlefields and Goals** – sets the goal for each side in the battle, the Advantage each needs to achieve it, and any factors of importance on the field; then
- **Of Forming a Squad** – heroes and rivals select roles and positions in the coming fray; and finally
- **Of the Order of Battle** – Establish initiative for the battle, taking actions during the sequence, and performing sequence resolution.

Of Armies: Description, Size, and Morale

“Know thyself and win half the time. Know the enemy and win half the time. Know both and win every time.” – Sun Tsu

A battle occurs when two or more *armies* meet on the field to contest over one or more *goals*. The heroes are associated with one of these forces in various leadership roles (commander, gunso, shugenja) or in supporting roles (staff, heishi, yojimbo).

An army is described by its composition, size and Morale. The composition gives a general sense of Clan (or Realm) affiliation and disposition. The size of an army is compared with the size of the opposing force to determine how much *Advantage* the army must achieve to achieve its goals. The army's Morale indicates how long it can engage in pitched battle before retreating from the field.

Describing the Army: Clan and Composition

Each army has a Clan or Realm affiliation which provides information about how it is described – the color of the armor and banners, the ordering of the soldiers, their equipment and tools.

This description is not mechanically relevant but helps to shape the narrative of the battle.

Sizing the Army: Relative Size

The size of an army is relative to the era. In some eras a group of a thousand samurai is a mighty force; in others it represents a splinter of an army which broke apart before an even larger force.

Relative sizes are as follows:

Insignificant (Rank 1): The force is too small to be a serious threat on the field. A skilled general and heroes may be able to win a few battles with such a group but it simply cannot expect to survive an extended campaign.

Weak (Rank 2): The force is large enough in the era to count as an army but not a powerful one. If ensconced behind a fortification with supplies, a force of this size can stand off a larger foe for quite some time.

Average (Rank 3): The force is what samurai in the era would call an army. In the era of the Clan War this might be a hundred thousand samurai; in other eras it might be as small as a few thousand.

Strong (Rank 4): The force is recognized as being larger, better organized, and better trained than its contemporaries. The Lion Armies are generally the mighty armies of the era, although the Crab can field one or two as well.

Overwhelming (Rank 5): The force is so powerful it is nearly impossible to overcome. Even a poor general can do well with such an army, although maintaining it in the field may prove difficult without extraordinary measures.

The size the opposed army determines how much Advantage the heroes' army needs to win the field.

Morale: Logistics, Training, and Spirit

Size matters when it comes to armies, but so too does logistical support, training, and fighting spirit. Morale is a mechanical measure of these intangible things.

In a set-piece battle (one which takes place during an adventure not focused in a military campaign), an army's Morale is set as follows:

Morale	Condition
1	Harried, exhausted, and starved
4	Militia, well supplied, rested
6	Samurai, well supplied, rested
10	Within a supplied fortification
12	Oni, Shadowlands Madmen

Each battle turn, an army loses 2 Morale. When either army reaches 0 Morale the battle ends and the army with Morale remaining converts that Morale into Advantage.

The rules for a military campaign (below) provide guidance on establishing an army's initial Morale, the effect of battles and reinforcement, and other challenges relevant to extended conflicts.

Of Battlefields and Goals

In any case the stage upon which warriors fight matters. The clash of armies takes place against a backdrop of fields and rivers, castles and storms. Furthermore, armies do not clash for no reason; both (or all) of the forces will have a goal which they will achieve by winning the field.

The Battlefield: Narrative Description

Battles do not happen on flat, empty plains of even ground covered in carefully mowed grass. Hills and valleys; rain, mist, and wind; landmarks and old ruins all play a part in describing the struggle about to take place.

Narratively, the battle description is used to help the players visualize the engagement and create a thread tying together the heroes' actions. The description should include references to sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell, to convey the sense of the place and the fight.

Mechanically, the Narrator may at his discretion grant a +1 Morale bonus to an army which seems to hold a battlefield advantage based on the description.

Example: A weak army of ronin (Morale 4) is facing a matched Imperial force (Morale 6). The description includes the ronin's home village, so the Narrator grants them a +1 Morale bonus, raising their starting Morale to 5.

Additionally, the Narrator may decide that the battlefield contains a threat, something which deals physical or spiritual damage to all characters on the field during sequence resolution. These threats may range from ravaging fires to hungry ghosts.

Example: The Narrator describes a night battle as filled with hungry shadows which leach the life out of all living things. This is a 1d8 spirit threat assessed during sequence resolution.

The Goal: What is Desired

Like any challenge, a battle has at least one goal, and often more which must be addressed. These goals may range from the simple ("Keep the horde from the defenseless children") to the more complex ("seize this bridge to allow our troops passage to the next battle") to the truly esoteric ("uproot the peach tree in the Garden of Honor's Sacrifice").

Each army will have a stated goal, one which it does not necessarily share with the opposing side. Sometimes this goal will be obvious to anyone with eyes; other times will require much deeper consideration and study.

Determining another army's goal is not always important; it is possible to win a single battle without such knowledge. It is, however, vital to success in a campaign, and is therefore one of the most important activities of a skilled commander.

Set Advantage: Winning the Field

In order to achieve the army's goal, it must achieve enough Advantage to overcome the opposing force. The size of the opposing force determines the amount of Advantage the army needs to achieve, as follows:

Advantage	Overcome an X Force
4	Insignificant

8	Weak
10	Average
12	Strong
16	Overwhelming
20	Hold Oblivion's Gate

Example: when the Kakita tried to hold Kyuden Kakita against the Shadowlands Horde, they were a handful of samurai (insignificant force) defending against an overwhelming force. Only the heroic spirit of the Kenshinzen allowed them to hold out as long as they did. They would have had to achieve 16 Advantage on the field, while their foes only needed 4 to win.

The first army to achieve its required Advantage wins the battle during the resolution phase of the battle turn. If neither army achieves the required Advantage then the battle ends in a stalemate and must be rejoined the next day.

Additional information about Advantage, Morale, and winning the battle can be found in the section on *Battle Turn Resolution*, below.

Of Forming a Squad

Battles are about planning, teamwork, and seizing opportunities when they arise. Heroes may choose to act alone; more often they will form squads lead by one character who is supported by others. A character who acts as a leader take actions which engage their squad to create and exploit opportunities; followers provide bonuses to the leader's actions or to the group as a whole.

In some cases, the heroes may be able to select their own role More commonly, the heroes' initial roles are dictated by the overall commander of the forces. Violations of the order of battle, even to exploit immediate opportunities, are considered breaches of Duty and may carry harsh penalties.

There are three "leader" roles a hero may either take or be assigned. These are:

Commander: uses his strategic skills and superior planning abilities to create the conditions necessary for victory. He uses the Strategy skill to take actions in the field of battle and is supported by heroes who choose to serve in the *staff*.

An army may only have one commander at a given time. The actions a commander takes include: *Assess, Blessings of the Heavens, Direct, Feint, Identify, and Reserve*.

Gunso - uses his tactical skills and superior awareness to exploit strategic opportunities and blunt the enemy's advantages. He makes attempts with the Tactics skill to take action on the field of battle and is supported by heroes who serve as his *heishi* (soldiers).

Shugenja - uses his mystical abilities and elemental contracts to invoke powerful effects on the field of battle. He uses the Rites skill attempt to cast spells or engage in magical contests. A shugenja is often supported by *yojimbo*, who protect him from attacks both magical and mundane.

A hero who chooses to assist a leader assumes one of three roles, corresponding to that taken by his leader:

Heishi – all bushi are first and foremost soldiers, trained to fight in battles at their lord's command. While in the field of battle they contribute to a squad lead by a *gunso* and can, when properly lead, engage in heroics. Multiple heishi can take the same stance.

Staff– heroes who support a *commander*. Members of the staff provide advice, special forces functions, and occasionally direct aid in the event of a challenge or attack. Only one character may hold a staff role at a time.

Yojimbo - heroes who choose to stand and defend *shugenja* as they perform their sacred duties.

Yojimbo defend against attack, as well as take the should one occur. take the same stance.

Command Squad:

A **commander** uses his the following actions:

Assess (Water + Strategy)

Learning the enemy's intelligence or various allows the commander to field.

On a successful Assess

reveals one of the opposing army's opportunities, allowing an allied *gunso* to *Hold the Line* to defend it. If there are multiple objectives identified, randomly determine which objective this action uncovers.

Additionally, the commander adds +1d4 to his initiative during turn resolution. A senior student or higher (Rank 2+) of *Iaijutsu* adds his *Iaijutsu* Rank as a bonus to the 1d4 roll.

Blessing of the Heavens (Void + Strategy):

Used by a general to support a *shugenga* in the casting of a spell. On a success, the general can allow one squad to move to defend the *shugenja* in the event a foe or rival uses the *Charge* action to attack. If the *shugenja* is not attacked, he adds +1 to the number of turns he has been casting the spell in addition to his own action.

Direct (Water + Strategy)

Used by a general to give commands to an allied *gunso*. The general may command a *gunso* to take an action; doing so increases the effect of the *gunso's* action by +1.

Feint (Fire + Strategy)

The general uses misdirection and complex maneuvering to confuse the opponent. Increase the number of turns required for the opposing army to achieve its *assessed* opportunities by +1.

Describing Opportunities

The identification, exploitation, assessment, and closing of opportunities governs the flow of Advantage on the field of battle. What are they?

An opportunity is just that, an opening in the opponent's lines that can be used to the army's advantage. Each opportunity is unique; describing them should be a chance to explain the narrative of the battle rather than the mechanics.

physical and spiritual leader's place in a duel Multiple yojimbo may

Commander and Staff Strategy to take one of

plan, through direct forms of assessment, claim victory on the

attempt, the commander

Identify (Air + Strategy)

Used by a general to recognize and begin to shape 1d4 opportunities an ally might exploit. If left unopposed, the strategist's army will take the objective in 1d4 turns (roll for each). The duration of each opportunity is reduced by -1 during battle turn resolution to a minimum of 0; when the resolution would be reduced below 0 the opportunity is "exploited" and the general's army gains +1 Advantage.

Reserve (Earth + Strategy)

Properly manage and deploy forces, allowing a number of heroes equal to the commander's Strategy Rank to change role during sequence resolution.

A hero who takes a **staff** role may select one role from the options below. Each role assists the army in some way, although it might not directly help those who struggle on the field.

Only one person can occupy a given staff role at a time.

Champion

The champion may take the place of a Commander in a duel. He reduces physical damage inflicted to the staff during turn resolution by his Defense Rank. If he takes the commander's place in a duel, the commander fails a Test of Honor.

Engineer

The engineer commands siege engines and their crews, creating 1 opportunity per sequence if he has Artisan or Master or higher Rank with the Engineer area of focus.

Forward Observer

The observer gives a +1 bonus to the limit of Strategy or Tactics attempts (respectively) to a commander and /or gunsos equal to his Investigation Rank.

Healer

The healer works in the medical tents, restoring the injured and easing the dying. His selfless sacrifice reduce the Endurance lost at the end of the turn by 1 during resolution if the healer is a Master or better at Medicine.

Harrier

The harrier works with his brothers to damage supplies and hinder movement. The opposed army loses 1 additional Morale during resolution if the harrier is a Master or better at Stealth.

Negotiator

The negotiator works to end the conflict peacefully by discussing matters with his counterpart. Each battlefield turn, he targets one member of the rival staff or the rival commander and attempts to negotiate.

He selects one skill from the Bushido skills; his opponent chooses the Ring; and the two engage in courtier's duel. The successful duelist gains Advantage equal to the number of times he Focused during the duel; the Advantage lasts until the end of turn resolution.

An army without a commander or one bent on total war (e.g. most Spider armies, all Shadowlands armies) cannot be negotiated with.

Planner

The staff member works with the commander, taking a commander action or granting the commander a +1 bonus to his actions. The planner gains +1 XP to Tactics or Strategy at the end of the battle.

Combat Squads: Gunso and Heishi

A **gunso** leads a unit of *heishi* attempts challenges using the **Tactics** skill to take one of the following actions:

Charge (Fire + Tactics)

If the Commander has *identified* an opportunity, the gunso may attempt to exploit it by taking this action. Alternatively, the gunso may charge an shugenja using *Invoke Contract*.

On a successful charge attempt, the squad engages in a skirmish with the enemy which can last for up to 1d4 rounds. For each round in which no squad members are reduced to 0 or lower Health or Ki, increase the squad's army's Advantage by 1.

At the end of each round (up to the last), the gunso may choose to break off the engagement. The objective targeted by the charge action is exploited (it's duration reduced below 0).

Challenge (Air + Tactics)

The gunso selects a rival and maneuvers his squad so that the rival and one of the gunso's squad members engage in a martial duel.

On a successful attempt, one squad member of the gunso's choice enters into a martial duel with the enemy. The event starts with a martial duel and then devolves into a skirmish which lasts for 1d4 round, during which time no other opponents interfere between the two.

A character who is reduced to 0 Health in this duel cannot take actions and is removed from the battle.

Hold the Line (Earth + Tactics)

The gunso leads his squad into the thick of the fighting, supporting their brothers and sisters and urging them to hold the line at any cost.

On a successful attempt, the squad engages in a skirmish for 1d4 rounds. For each round in which none of your squad members are reduced to 0 Health or Ki, remove one enemy opportunity or reduce the Advantage gained by an opponent Charge by 1.

A Brother's Need (Water + Tactics)

The gunso holds his squad in reserve, watching and waiting for the moment to strike.

On a successful attempt, the squad sets itself to join with another squad who is engaged in a Charge or Hold the Line action. Each squad calculates its effect separately, but the individual members can support one another during the skirmish.

Raise the Colors (Void + Tactics)

The gunso calls for the banners to be raised, holding his ground and daring anyone to attempt to move him.

On a successful attempt, the squad stands its ground in a dramatic fashion. They engage in a skirmish with the enemy for up to 1d4 rounds. For each round in which no squad member falls, increase the allied army's Morale by +1.

At the end of each round (up to the last), the gunso may choose to break off the engagement.

Heishi Stances

A hero who chooses to fight as a **heishi** takes one of the following stances. Each stance provides a bonus to the squad or the Gunso who leads it.

More than one heishi can take the same stance in a squad.

Mobile Stance

The heishi uses his physical abilities to drive his squad to greater heights. The heishi reduces the number of foes faced during a skirmish round by his Athletic Rank, to a minimum of one per starting squad member.

Observant Stance

The heishi helps his Gunso spot opportunities on the field. He adds +1 to the Gunso's "strike with no mind" range on Tactics challenges for this turn.

Offensive Stance

The heishi uses his combat skills to press the enemy. So long as he is a Master of a Jutsu skill, he adds a +1 bonus to his Gunso's Tactics challenges for this turn.

Prayerful Stance

The heishi uses his knowledge of Kuji-Kiri to protect his comrades. He reduces spiritual damage inflicted to the squad during turn resolution by his Kuji-Kiri Rank.

Protective Stance

The heishi uses his knowledge of Defense to protect his comrades. He reduces physical damage inflicted to the squad during turn resolution by his Defense Rank.

Gunso Actions and Skirmishes

Many gunso actions initiate a skirmish. These skirmishes take place during the battle sequence in which they were initiated, involve the gunso and any characters in his squad, and last until the gunso chooses to withdraw.

Each skirmish is a unique event, with a unique description and goal, but share the following general progression:

In the first round of a skirmish, the squad faces a number of opponents equal to two times its starting number. In the second, it faces 3x its starting number (even if one or more members have fallen). Each round afterwards, increase the multiplier by +1.

The opponents Health, Defense, and Resistance are based on the composition of the army. See the *Foe's* section for more details.

The Narrator may vary the initial encounter, the number of coordinated attacks the heroes face each sequence, and the range at which opponent's start when using detailed skirmishing rules.

Ritual Squads: Shugenja and Yojimbo

A **shugenja** may attempt to invoke an elemental contract for the good of his army or the peril of his foes.

The shugenja may use one of the following actions:

Counter

The shugenja marshals his spiritual power and allies to prevent an contract from coming to pass.

The shugenja targets one other shugenja who is *Invoking a Contract* and engages him in a duel. The duel uses the Ring of the contract and the Rites of each participant. It is modified by the appropriate elemental Affinity.

On a successful challenge, the shugenja may choose to deal Focus d8 physical damage to the opposed character.

Invoke Contract

The shugenja attempts to invoke one of the elemental contracts to call upon the powers of the world.

The first turn a shugenja attempts to invoke a contract, he must make an attempt using Ring + Rites + Affinity, where the Ring and Affinity must match the contract invoked. If the attempt is successful, he gains one turn towards invoking the contract.

In subsequent, sequential turns the shugenja does not have to roll the attempt unless his position is charged or another shugenja invokes a challenge upon him.

Invoking a contract creates an *opportunity* the opponent can exploit. A skilled gunso can exploit that opportunity, attacking the shugenja and his defenders to gain advantage.

An allied gunso can *Hold the Line* to remove this opportunity for one sequence.

Yojimbo Stances

A hero taking on the **yojimbo** role may, once per sequence, choose to take one of the following stances. Each stance provides a bonus to the squad or the shugenja who leads it.

Attendant Stance

The yojimbo uses his ritual knowledge to improve his shugenja's actions. The bushi adds +1 to his shugenja's Rite's limit if the bushi has the Rites skill at Master rank or above.

A character with Elemental Affinity for the Ring of the contract the shugenja invokes may add his Affinity to this bonus.

A monk with a Discipline that matches the Ring of the contract may add his Discipline Rank to this bonus.

Protective Stance

The yojimbo uses his knowledge of Defense to protect his charge. He reduces physical damage inflicted to the squad during turn resolution by his Defense Rank. If a member of a gunso squad challenges his shugenja to a duel the yojimbo may intervene without a loss of honor.

Prayerful Stance

The yojimbo uses his knowledge of Kuji-Kiri to protect his comrades. He reduces spiritual damage inflicted to the squad during turn resolution by his Kuji-Kiri Rank.

Sacrifice Stance

The yojimbo sets himself to step into a challenge aimed at his charge. If a the shugenja is challenged the yojimbo's, the yojimbo may step in and take the shugenja's place. If the challenger is a shugenja or monk the yojimbo's shugenja is considered to have failed a Test of Honor.

Of the Order of Battle

A battle plays out through a series of turns, each following the basic sequence structure. Heroes and rivals act during their respective initiative points in the sequence, creating an "order of battle" which persists between battle sequences.

Rolling Initiative

A hero taking a leader role must make at least two initiative roles; a hero in a support role must make at least one.

Leaders must roll:

Battle Initiative: a roll of 2d10 + Fire + any initiative bonuses the hero may gain from kiho, spell, or waza.

Skirmish Initiative: a roll of 2d10 + Water + any initiative bonuses the hero may gain from kiho, spell, or waza.

Followers must role:

Skirmish Initiative: a roll of 2d10 + Water + any initiative bonuses the hero may gain from kiho, spell, or waza.

Battle Turn Actions

In initiative order each leader (commander, gunso, or shugenja) attempts one of the action allowed by his role. The followers provide bonuses which are applied to the team as appropriate.

Figure 1: Summary of Battle Actions and Stances by Role

Name	Role	Action or Stance	Effect
Assess	Commander	Action	Identify one opponent opportunity, +1d4 Initiative
Blessings of the Heavens	Commander	Action	Move unit to protect shugenja on Charge or +1 turn to casting of battle spell
Direct	Commander	Action	Increase effect of one Gunso action by +1
Feint	Commander	Action	Increase duration of all assessed opportunities by +1
Identify	Commander	Action	+1d4 opportunities, each completes in 1d4 turns
Reserve	Commander	Action	Allow up to Strategy Rank allies to change roles
Champion	Staff	Stance	Step into a challenge directed at the commander or staff
Engineer	Staff	Stance	+1 opportunity each turn, completes in 1d4 turns
Forward Observer	Staff	Stance	+1 bonus to actions by Commanders or Gunso up to Investigation Rank
Healer	Staff	Stance	-1 Morale loss each turn resolution
Harrier	Staff	Stance	+1 Morale loss each turn resolution
Negotiator	Staff	Stance	Engage in courtier duel, on success +Focus Advantage during turn resolution
Planner	Staff	Stance	+1 to Commander Actions, +1 XP to Strategy or Tactics at battle completion
Charge	Gunso	Action	Engage in skirmish for 1d4 rounds at an opportunity, gain Advantage for each round
Challenge	Gunso	Action	Initiate a martial duel between rival and a heishi or the gunso
Hold the Line	Gunso	Action	Engage in a skirmish for 1d4 rounds, remove an opponent's assessed opportunity each round
A Brother's Need	Gunso	Action	Join another gunso in his action
Raise the Colors	Gunso	Action	Engage in a skirmish for 1d4 rounds, +1 Morale per round
Mobile Stance	Heishi	Stance	Reduce the number of opponents per skirmish round by Athletics Rank, minimum 1 per hero
Observant Stance	Heishi	Stance	+1 to Gunso action "strike with no thought" range
Offensive Stance	Heishi	Stance	+1 to Gunso actions
Prayerful Stance	Heishi, Yojimbo	Stance	Squad gains Reduction (spirit) during turn resolution equal to heishi/yojimbo's Kuji-kiri Rank
Protective Stance	Heishi, Yojimbo	Stance	Squad gains Reduction (physical) during turn resolution equal to heishi/yojimbo's Defense Rank
Counter	Shugenja	Action	Initiate Rites duel with rival casting Invoke Contract; deal Focus d8 physical on successful attempt
Invoke Contract	Shugenja	Action	Invoke contract, creates an opportunity for rival gunso
Attendant Stance	Yojimbo	Stance	+1 or +Affinity to Invoke Contract challenge
Sacrifice Stance	Yojimbo	Stance	Yojimbo may accept a duel for the shugenja

Battle Turn Resolution

Four events occur during turn resolution:

1. Applying individual damage
2. Applying threats
3. Assessing Morale remaining
4. Resolving Advantage

Individual Damage

The amount of damage a hero sustains during turn resolution depends on how heavily he is engaged.

A hero who takes the role of gunso, heishi, shugenja, or yojimbo takes 2d10 physical damage during resolution. A hero who takes the role of commander or staff takes 1d10 physical damage during resolution.

Battlefield Threats

Additional damage may be assessed during the resolution if there are additional threats on the field. These threats most often take the form of “terrain” and can include everything from unholy corruption to rising waters or raging fires. Threats generally deal 1d8 physical or spiritual damage to each hero and may have a negative effect on the army’s Morale.

Assess Morale and Resolve Advantage

All armies engaged in the battle subtract 2 Morale and assess their Advantage. The first army to meet or exceed its Advantage requirement wins the field and gains its goal.

When an army reaches 0 Morale, it can no longer contest the field. The opposing army adds its remaining Morale to its Advantage; if the result is enough to achieve the Advantage goal it takes the field. If both armies fail to reach their Advantage goal during the battle, neither side conclusively defeats the other and the battle is a draw.

Rewards of Battle

After the battle resolves the heroes gain the following rewards:

- +1 Influence per Battle Sequence;
- +1 XP per Skirmish Sequence (gunso, heishi, yojimbo); and
- +1 XP per Battle Sequence (commander, shugenja, staff)

Experience is awarded to all participants; Influence is only gained by those on the winning side of a battle. The losers may escape with their lives, if they are lucky. In a campaign, Influence awards may be delayed to moments when the heroes can be recognized for their accomplishments.