

Quick Combat

Sometimes the Game Master may need to sum up a combat encounter rather than fighting it out tactically. Perhaps the purpose of the combat is really just to convey information, such as how savage a foe is or what the weakness of some greater threat might be. Or maybe the group just doesn't have enough time and needs to get on to the more important scenes.

When this occurs, you can use this quick and simple system to sum up the results of a fight and still keep a little tension and drama in the scene.

No cards are dealt in Quick Combat. Instead, the Game Master sets the scene, then each player chooses the primary skill he wants to use and how he plans to use it. The skill should generally be a combat ability such as Fighting, Shooting, Spellcasting, or the like, but anything is allowed that makes sense and fits the action described.

Each player then rolls the chosen skill and adds or subtracts the following cumulative modifiers:

Quick Combat Modifiers

Modifier	Circumstance
+2 / -2	The party outclasses their foes / the foes outclass or significantly outnumber the party. Increase this to +4 / -4 if the difference is particularly great.
+2 / -2	The party has a tactical advantage of some sort / the foes have a tactical advantage

Results

The Game Master then interprets and narrates the results, allowing for each character's intended plan and her player's input. "Failure" may not mean the hero actually failed in her desired plans, by the way—it may simply mean she took some damage or is affected in some other negative way.

Heroes may spend Bennies to soak damage from failure as usual. Healing abilities (spells, potions, the Healing skill) may be used as well.

- **Critical Failure:** The hero's plan gets her into serious trouble. She suffers d3 wounds.
- **Failure:** The character suffers a wound.
- **Success:** The warrior manages to get through the fight unharmed.
- **Raise:** The hero truly shines during the fight. The player and GM should work together to narrate a particularly heroic moment. Afterwards, the hero gets a Benny.

Death

Note that this quick and dirty system won't Incapacitate characters unless they're already wounded. Whether death is possible or not is up to the Game Master, the situation, and the "grittiness" of the setting, but players shouldn't feel cheated—narrating a heroic death can be just as tragic—or epic—as dying in a tactical fight.

Defeat

The party always "wins" Quick Combat fights unless everyone fails their roll. Then the Game Master may decide the group fails with whatever consequences that entails. This might mean they're actually defeated, are forced to retreat, or are even captured.

This can be very unsatisfying, of course, so another option in this rare occurrence is for the Game Master to start a regular combat from the end of the narration. For example, if a typical fantasy party is defeated by an orc patrol and everyone fails their Quick Combat roll, the GM might start a regular combat as the surrounded heroes get their second wind—with whatever wounds they suffered in the "first" part of the battle simulated by Quick Combat.

Ammunition and Power Points

The Game Master must decide how much ammunition or how many Power Points are used in Quick Combat based on the circumstances, success level, and most importantly, the character's stated plan.

Generally, this should be from 1–3d6 rounds, bursts, Power Points, or whatever is appropriate. Remember this is all narrative and subjective. The important thing is to take into account the player's intent for her character, the overall situation, and her success level.

Examples:

A wizard wants to conserve Power Points and use his Fighting. With a Critical Failure, the plan might fail and he rolls 3d6 Power Points. With success, the GM decides he spends 1d6. With a raise, he saves all his Power Points.

A machine gunner in *Weird Wars* wants to lay down heavy fire to fend off waves of shambling zombies. Whether he gets a Critical Failure or a raise, he expends 3d6 full-auto bursts because his plan was to burn ammo. The GM might also give him a +2 tactical bonus for blowing through so much ammo if the general tactical situation makes sense as well.

Design Notes

I've been doing Quick Combat for years. Sometimes I don't want to just completely hand-wave a fight—it might provide a clue, indicate the wrong “path,” wear the party down, or just serve as a warning for straying into a deadly area. But it's not a big part of the plot.

A recent trip to several Italian conventions with our translators at Jolly Troll really drove this system home. I brought a typical American convention adventure of around three hours length, but that's just now how they do things there. Italian convention demos are supposed to be around 45 minutes long.

The adventure I ran was for *Deadlands*, and it's essentially a gauntlet of javeranas (desert pigs called javelinas in the real world with piranha-like teeth). A sinister power is controlling the unending horde of devil-pigs to herd the heroes to a particular destination and the big finale.

I had planned on running the first couple of battles tactically, then backing off as they got closer to the end and using my usual short-cut—the rules you see here—for the rest.

But given the incredibly short time limit, I had to use Quick Combat for all the battles. My job was to herd the group and whittle down their ammo, Power Points, and wounds a bit. Combined with incredibly creative descriptions from great players and embellished by all of us after seeing the die rolls, it worked great.

Like I said, I'd been doing it for years—maybe a decade—but had never had such an extensive test of it. I ran a half dozen sessions in rapid order and watched it work over and over. I saw the

smiles on the players' faces as we narrated the tale together and felt I wasn't taking anything away from them. And I was also happy when we got to the big finale and the game had all the tactical crunch I wanted—the best of both worlds.

Having a good grasp of the “real” game also helped when determining the rough modifiers for Quick Combat, especially when compared to the actions they wanted to take. Sometimes they'd do something that fit their skills, gear, and Edges perfectly. Sometimes they'd do something that was important for the story even though their characters weren't particularly good at it. That was always entertaining as well, whether they rolled well, poorly, or right in the middle—which I usually described as “desperate” but ultimately successful.

Part Two

I was at a convention recently where I actually just played rather than running games (a rare thing for me). Most of the Game Masters did a fine job, though I noticed a few of the adventures were just combat after combat. If you're reading this, you hopefully think fights in *Savage Worlds* are fun too, but I felt like some of these encounters were similar to what I was trying to do with my javeranas adventure. Since these Game Masters didn't have this Quick Combat tool in their bag of tricks, I decided it was time to formalize it.

As soon as I did, some of the playtesters asked about modifiers based on certain Edges and Hindrances, the foes' Special Abilities, etc. I highly advise you to avoid that temptation. The whole point is to quickly sum up a character's potential in total and *relative* to his foes, take into account what the player wants to do, and quickly roll the dice. Then narrate what happens, figure out any wounds or ammo / Power Point loss, and move on. Keep it Fast, Furious, and Fun!

You also shouldn't feel *obliged* to use Quick Combat. Even a fight that isn't particularly important to the plot is still a great time to let your players shine, especially if they enjoy good tactical fights and built heroes specifically to take advantage of what we feel is one of the most satisfying encounter systems around!

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