

## Little Wars: Designing SCA war scenarios for 30-40 players

This paper is intended to have three main parts.

The first part will cover the purpose of this paper, basic definitions and rule concepts that I have drawn from the theory of game design.

The second part consists of specific advice for the design process for a set of war scenarios for 30-40 players. This covers characteristics of SCA wars, and provides a checklist for the design process.

The third part is a discussion of specific design tools for use in individual scenarios, campaign structures, and some thoughts on practical war marshalling.

### Purpose

I think the art of designing SCA war scenarios can be helped by treating SCA war as an act of ‘play’ that takes the form of a ‘game’. Taking this approach allows me to draw on concepts and lessons from different theories of game design. I view design as an art, not an exact science. I make mistakes, I learn, I try and do better next time.

The goal of successful game design is meaningful play.

### Definitions

This section draws heavily on the book *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (by Salen and Zimmerman). I think the theory is useful for building a vocabulary that facilitates critical analysis of scenarios. Topics to be covered include:

- Meaningful play
- Design
- Interactivity
- Game
- The magic circle

#### Meaningful play

There are two ways to define meaningful play:

- (1) **Descriptive** – meaningful play emerges from the relationship between player action and system outcome (“No shit, there I was...”)
- (2) **Evaluative** – meaningful play is what occurs when the relationships between actions and outcomes in a game are both *discernable* and *integrated* into the larger context of the game:
  - *Discernability*: A player can perceive the immediate outcome of an action (“Did I hit him?”)

- *Integration*: The outcome of an action is woven into the game system as a whole (“Did we beat them?”)

### Design

Design is the process by which a *designer* creates a *context* (or scenario) to be encountered by a *participant*, from which *meaning* emerges. The designer is the individual (or team) that creates the game. The context of a game takes the form of:

- Spaces
- Objects
- Narratives
- Behaviours.

The participants of the game are the players (and marshals, support crew, spectators, etc).

Meaning – the result of player actions taken in the course of play (see discussion above).

In terms of design difficulty, SCA war scenarios have the advantage of transparency – the game rules are not concealed in a ‘black box’ – so everyone has the potential to design fun SCA war scenarios.

### Interactivity

An interactive context presents participants with choices. Choices can be short (tactics) or long-term (strategy). Choices lead to actions, which lead to outcomes. A key part of successful scenario design is to critically evaluate the choices that your scenario presents to the participants.

The following framework can help choice analysis:

- What happened before the player was given a choice?
- How is the possibility of choice conveyed to the player?
- How did the player make the choice?
- What is the result of the choice? How will it affect future choices?
- How is the result conveyed to the player?

Games of physical skill involve a continuous flow of action, with less self-contained moments of decision-making.

### Game

A game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules (that limit player behaviour), that results in a quantifiable outcome (or goal).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It took Salen and Zimmerman 80 pages to get here.

## The Magic Circle

Every game exists within a frame: a specially demarcated time and space. The frame communicates to players, consciously or unconsciously, that a game is being played. (When the cannon goes off...)

The magic circle of a game is the explicit space within which a game takes place. Within the magic circle, the game's rules create a special set of meanings for the players of the game. These meanings guide the play of the game.

The lusory attitude is the state of mind required to enter into the play of the game. To play a game, a group of players accepts the limitations of the rules because of the pleasure a game can afford.

## **Rules**

Rules have the following qualities:

- Rules limit player action
- Rules are clear and unambiguous
- Rules are shared by all players (interpretation of the rule must be shared)
- Rules are fixed (modification in-play is highly regulated)
- Rules are binding (meant to be followed)
- Rules are repeatable (between games and players)

The game rules of any SCA war scenario exist on three related levels:

- Core rules: the rules of the list and most of the Marshal's Handbook (core rules do not explicitly indicate how players should enact these rules)
- Scenario rules: the rules of play for a particular scenario
- Implicit rules: assumptions relating to etiquette and behaviour (often unstated, and can vary between different groups of players, but often involve the local interpretation of the core rules).

Elegant rule design helps maintain proper player focus. (The mantra of the game designer is KISS - Keep it Simple!)

Scenario design is a second-order design problem – a game designer designs the rules of a particular SCA war scenario *directly*, but designs the player experience *indirectly* – this is because you cannot control the behaviour of the players in the game.

SCA wars contain both repeating patterns and completely random chaos. This complexity creates a situation where bottom-up behaviour will emerge to create new patterns in the

There are three primary ways of looking at games:

- Formal rules
- Play experience
- Cultural context

This article concentrates on rules, as that is what a designer of SCA war scenarios has the most influence over. This is not to say that the other schemas are unimportant, because both play experience and cultural context underlie all aspects of formal rules.

game – patterns which the designer may not always anticipate – which we can call *emergent play*. The whole of a scenario is greater than the sum of its parts. Anticipating how small changes to rules will influence play behaviour is a key design skill.<sup>2</sup>

## Characteristics of SCA wars

A non-fighter can design SCA war scenarios –but they have to be able to understand the mindset of the combatants and how their behaviour will influence the scenario. Here are a few things I think are important for a scenario designer to keep in mind:

- Who the players are
- What makes war different from tournaments
- Kinds of decisions made in SCA wars
- The nature of the SCA army.

### Who are the players in a SCA war scenario?

Stating the obvious, the players in SCA war scenarios are the authorized combatants who have had their armour checked and are out there on the field waiting for things to get started. Other people are participating in the activity as well, such as marshals, water-bearers, medics, and the audience.

### What makes a war scenario different from a tournament?

The key differences are mass numbers and combined arms.

While some melee tournaments allow command and teamwork skills to be practiced, they find their full scope of the war field. A natural consequence of not focusing on 1:1 combats is that there is less emphasis on individual performance, and more on group performance.

On the war field a variety of weapons not permitted in tournaments (such as missile, thrown and siege weapons) can be used. Some weapons are also more effective with combined arms tactics on the war field than they can be in individual tournament fighting.

### What kinds of decision-making take place in SCA war scenarios?

There are several levels of decision-making present in SCA war scenarios, and a player may be making decisions at all, some, or only one of those levels. For the individual fighter (or lance) it is their skill and honour, for a unit (or unit commander) it is the unit's discipline, teamwork, and tactical deployment<sup>3</sup>, and for the army (commander) it is the mixture of quantity and quality in the units under the command.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Theory stops here.

<sup>3</sup> The commander's job is to get the unit, intact, to the point where it can be most effective and/or where its members will have the most fun.

<sup>4</sup> This is not an exhaustive list of levels.

Decision-making requires information. A player will glean a large amount of information simply by keeping their eyes and ears open. If the marshals want to influence game play, then they need to communicate information to the players. If you do not tell the participants about something, then it will not affect their decision-making in the game.<sup>5</sup>

Trivial decisions, where there are no real alternatives to choose from, are not fun. Do not require players to make trivial decisions.

### Understanding the Nature of the SCA Army

In designing SCA war scenarios, it is useful to keep in mind the main characteristics of SCA armies:

- They are volunteers here to have fun.
- Their morale is high, but brittle (yes, they will charge forward and ‘die’, but if they keep getting beaten they will retreat to the showers early in the day).
- Discipline tends to be poor (fighters tend to advance towards maximum game fun).
- There is a wide range of skill and physical fitness levels.
- Standing around waiting is *boring*, moving around while not fighting is both exhausting *and* boring
- Once people put their helmets on, communicating new information to them becomes very difficult.

In much the same way that no plan survives contact with the enemy, no war scenario will survive contact with its players. You will often have to make things up as you go along, and discard previous plans for new ones.

## **Checklists: a process of design for SCA war scenarios**

Creating a set of SCA war scenarios for use at an event is a project in its own right. I will cover the following topics:

- First priorities
- Plagiarism
- Idea sources
- Development time
- Work required
- The importance of writing it down
- Tradeoffs.

### First things first

At the beginning you must establish what expectations the event steward has for the war scenarios. If the steward is having a 1066 theme for the entire event, and you deliver a set

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<sup>5</sup> Imperfect information can be used to help construct fun scenarios, a topic that will be covered later.

of crusading scenarios, mutual disappointment will follow. Vital information that you must seek from the steward includes:

- Budget (or other resources) for war related expenses
- Timeslots free for war scenarios
- Venues available for war scenarios
- Who has the final say on what scenarios will be used
- Any deadlines that must be met
- Anything else the steward thinks is important!

Depending on the event, you may also have to work with royalty, territorial leaders, army commanders, water bearers, medical services and other marshals. Be prepared for a last-minute Royal whim.

If you are the event steward, then you will have a greater degree of control over the war scenarios for the event, but you will also have to meet all of the other requirements for running a successful event.

### Plagiarise, Plagiarise, Plagiarise!

A quick approach to scenario design is to use what other people have done in the past. Some war events have traditional scenarios that people expect to play. Not providing a traditional favourite will disappoint people, so if you do this, be prepared to explain how much fun people will have with the new scenario. Do not reinvent the wheel if there is no good reason to do so.

### Sources of Inspiration

I find the following sources of inspiration to be useful when designing new SCA war scenarios:

- Read history books, especially medieval military history
- Read books about children's games.
- Playing computer games, and strategy board games
- Game design books
- Published interviews with game designers
- Scenarios used at previous events
- SCA War treaties
- Talk with people about your ideas, especially people with expertise that you lack, e.g. if you know nothing about what siege engines require, go chat with a siege enthusiast
- Ask people what their favourite war scenario is.

### Good things take time

If you are creating a batch of new scenarios, allow sufficient time for the design process. As with many other human endeavours, this process is one part inspiration to nine parts perspiration. Ideas that seemed like good ones on one day, can on later reflection be not-

so-good. Do not be afraid to discard bad ideas. For 'little wars', I try and finish design work two months prior to the event. This helps the steward make sure that as few of the other event activities will clash with my war scenarios.

### How many scenarios do I need?

I find that if I design 12 scenarios, with each scenario to be run up to three times each, that is a sufficient number for a day of fighting, with one three hour session in the morning, and another three hour session in the afternoon. Designing more than you think you will need, will give you greater flexibility at the event, adjusting the pace of play, or discarding scenarios that will not work on the day.

### Write it Down

Putting your scenarios into a format where other people can understand them will take time. Writing the scenario down is important for several reasons:

- It facilitates peer review
- It helps you communicate it to other people
- It helps you analyse the rules you have created
- It allows your drop-dead deputy to take over when you drop dead.

If storing your scenarios in electronic media remember the importance of off-site backups (I almost lost a draft of this article three days before leaving for Pennsic, but found I had posted a copy in my livejournal account).

### Peer Review

You should also allow time for peer review of your scenarios by other people; because someone else will always find flaws that you missed. If possible, find a couple of hardcore wargamers, and ask them to try and figure out the easiest way to 'break' your scenarios, i.e. can they figure out any avenue by which one side might gain an unfair advantage? A standard process in game design is 'play-testing'. Given the number of players required for war scenarios, play-testing prior to the event may be difficult.

### Tradeoffs

When I am designing a scenario I find that I must try and balance the following considerations:

- Safety for the players and audience
- Fun for the players and audience
- KISS principle ('keep it simple')
- Recreating history and educating participants
- Sticking to an event theme
- Providing variety and innovation
- Staying under budget for expenses
- How much site preparation is required?
- How much volunteer labour can I recruit?
- Did we mention safety?

Be aware of the constraints on design. Know what you can control, and what you cannot control. A scenario cannot be all things to all people; a key part of the scenario designer's skill is to know what to leave out of the scenario. The final test of a good scenario is in the playing. If people want to play it again, then it is good. If people would rather walk off the fields early than play it again, then it is bad.

## Design tools for SCA war scenarios

One way of looking at SCA war scenario design is that you have a range of levers that can be adjusted to different settings for individual war scenarios. The different settings allow similar set ups in terms of the terrain and forces involved to have different incentives that channel decision-making in different ways. The menu of options allows a variety of settings to make encounters different. These levers include:

- Goals
- Time and space (boundaries)
- Resurrections
- Asymmetry (balance)
- Colour and pageantry
- Diplomacy
- Audience participation
- Changing the rules
- Feedback systems.

From these few tools you can create an infinite variety of SCA war scenarios. In the following sections I will cover a few of these possibilities.

### Goals

Goals can provide flavour to the scenario, but most importantly, they allow the scenario designer to influence player behaviour by providing in-game incentives for players to consider when making choices and carrying out actions in the game. Goals are the game element that is easiest to change between different scenarios (changing terrain or force composition is more time consuming).

Players can invent their own goals during a game. Types of goals the scenario designer might use include:

- Race
- Chase
- Attack
- Capture
- Harass
- Search
- Rescue

If a scenario has a completely predetermined outcome, the player's actions will not have an impact on the outcome of the scenario, and meaningful play will be difficult. A good scenario will have an uncertain outcome. So are scenarios that recreate particular historical battles games? If you are fighting a Tewkesbury scenario and the Lancastrians can win, then you are playing a game. If you are fighting the same scenario and only the Yorkists can win, then you are doing a re-enactment.

- Seduction<sup>6</sup>
- Survival.

A scenario can have multiple goals, requiring trade-offs between the different goals. Different sides can also be given different goals.

### Time and Space

There are several ways in which the boundaries of time and space can be adjusted for individual scenarios. These boundaries help create the area in which the games will be played. As a rough guideline, the more participants that you have, or the larger the space you are playing in, the more time will be required to complete each scenario.

- No time limit
- Fixed time limit
- Variable time limit
- Fixed boundaries
- Variable boundaries.

The initial distance between opposing forces is a boundary in time and space. The closer opposing forces start, the less time there is for commanders to make decisions, and the fewer tactical options there are. Physical distance also affects weapon effectiveness which can also affect the tactical options.

#### *No time limit*

A scenario without a time limit will be fought until an objective is reached, commonly one where only one side has fighters left. In some situations, the lack of a time limit may encourage a standoff situation where it is not in the interests of either side to engage immediately.

#### *Fixed time limit*

A scenario with a fixed time limit is fought until that time limit is reached. This can result in automatic victory for one side in the scenario, if they have prevented the other side from achieving their goal. If this is not the case, then a method will be needed for adjudicating victory when the time limit is reached. On an open field, a scenario without resurrections will usually take less than two minutes to play.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Variable time limits*

A variable time limit is another way of ending or modifying a scenario. This makes it harder for commanders to predict the optimum moment to commit to a course of action.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Fixed boundaries*

A scenario with fixed boundaries is one where the initial boundaries will not change during the course of the scenario. This is pretty much a default setting, as it is how people

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<sup>6</sup> This might be more appropriate for 'Quest' style scenarios.

<sup>7</sup> At Pennsic War, with 2,000 combatants on the field, this kind of scenario is usually over in about ten minutes.

<sup>8</sup> Another use for variable time limits is to change other rules or objectives in the scenario. For example, halfway through a scenario you may change from scoring for blue banners to scoring for red banners, or you might suddenly require people to change sides when they resurrect, or it might be the cue to change a battlefield boundary.

will assume the boundaries will be treated. If you want to do something else, you need to tell people to prevent confusion.

Fixed boundaries will usually result in one of two situations, open flanks or continuous fronts. If the field is wider than an army can form a line across, then one or both flanks will be open. Open flanks incentivise play towards a dynamic situation, with more potential for daring manoeuvres. A continuous front will occur where one or both sides are numerous enough to form a solid line from one boundary to another boundary. This will tend to lead play towards static battles, which will be resolved by attrition.<sup>9</sup>

Boundaries can be used within a field, not just on the edges of it. This has the effect of channelling the combat towards some parts of the field and away from other parts. Common internal boundaries on the war field include:

- a ‘river’ running across the field, forcing fighters to engage at designated bridges or fords, but allowing ranged weapon combat across the boundary
- a ‘wall’, which can have designated gates, is functionally similar to a river, but the wall provides partial cover against ranged weapons
- a ‘mountain pass’, which is similar to a bridge, but where ranged weapons are prohibited across the sides.

Where possible, provide a physical representation of terrain. Asking combatants to remember imaginary terrain is an imposition.

### *Variable Boundaries*

A boundary determines which areas form part of the space in which the scenario can be played. A point in space is either *open* or *closed* to play. It is possible for a space to be open to one side and not the other side, e.g. a side’s resurrection point is often prohibited to entry by players belonging to the enemy side. A boundary can also be changed during the course of play, whether at a pre-set time, or when some scenario specific condition is fulfilled, e.g. if a tower is captured, a ‘flank’ may be opened to play.

### Resurrections

Resurrection, the ability of a fighter ‘slain’ in a scenario to return to play (‘come back to life’) during that same scenario, is a flexible tool that can be used to represent superior numbers, position, or morale. Resurrection also gives fighters as much playtime as they feel ready for.

In order for a resurrection to take place, the scenario must establish under what conditions a fighter can resurrect. These conditions will usually specify a fixed point, person, or area in which the resurrection must take place. For example, resurrections could be specified as taking place at a banner, by touching a ‘relic’ held by a marshal, or along any boundary on the edge of the war field.

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<sup>9</sup> As a rough guide, 20 fighters will occupy a front of 10m if in a formation of mixed shield and spears. A more open formation that is only one rank deep could expand up to 30-40m for 20 fighters for skirmishing.

A ‘field’ resurrection may be possible in some scenarios, so that a specific point of resurrection is not required. This requires a slain fighter to rise, exit the area in which they were slain, and to then re-enter combat at their leisure. Under these conditions it will be hard to tell at a glance who is ‘alive’ and who is ‘dead’, so fighters must take care to make the appropriate signals while dead – usually by raising their weapons up high in a non-threatening position.

Because it is possible for a resurrection battle to run all day, participants will need to be encouraged to take breaks for water, food, and rest at appropriate intervals. Placing the resurrection point in a ‘safe zone’ outside the area of play, allowing people to remove their helmets if needed can facilitate this.

#### *No resurrections*

A scenario does not need resurrections. When the participants only have one life, the stakes are higher, as there will be no opportunity to correct a ‘fatal’ mistake.

#### *Infinite resurrections*

A scenario can allow for infinite resurrections. This has the advantage of not requiring anybody to keep count of anything.

#### *Finite resurrections*

The number of available resurrections can be limited in time or number. These limits can get complicated, and will need to be carefully explained so that fighters are aware of the point at which they must stay dead rather than returning to play. There are many ways of doing finite resurrections, including:

- having a time period during which resurrections are allowed, followed by an endgame period in which no resurrections are allowed
- allowing a fixed number of resurrections per side
- allowing a fixed number of resurrections per fighter.

#### *Delayed resurrections*

In some cases imposing a time delay between resurrections may be useful. Here are some ways this might be done:

- get each fighter to count out loud to five before they can resurrect
- get each fighter to count out loud to the number of ‘deaths’ they have suffered so far in the battle before they are allowed to resurrect
- resurrect people in groups (e.g. require a group of five) or in waves (e.g. resurrect all of the dead once every sixty seconds)
- require a command decision to resurrect the slain, and give each commander a limited number of resurrection waves per battle.

#### Asymmetrical Scenarios

A symmetrical scenario is one that tries to make the situation as fair as possible for all sides. An asymmetrical scenario can be one that deliberately incorporates an element of

unfairness for at least one of the sides involved, or that creates a situation that may be 'fair' but not equal.

If tactics is making the best use of the resources you have available, strategy is often making sure that you have the most resources. It can be fun to play scenarios where one or both sides have different advantages and disadvantages, and if you are running a set of scenarios as part of a campaign (see below) then asymmetrical scenarios may be more common than balanced scenarios.

One advantage of SCA war scenarios is that we can take turns at holding the advantageous position in a scenario. When the scenario is replayed, changing the side with the advantage restores fairness. Timing how long it takes a side to achieve its goals when it has the 'wind blowing in its direction' provides a point of comparison for when the other side has their go. Note: a second play of a scenario can provide a learning advantage that favours one side, so over the course of the day, each side should take turns at going first for asymmetrical scenarios.

I should also point out, that a perception that sides are unbalanced can make participants unhappy. If you are deliberately skewing balance to be unbalanced you should always tell the participants about this ahead of time, and explain to them how this will be fun.

#### *Starting Positions*

Traditionally, everyone lines up in neat formations at a reasonable distance away from each other. There is no reason, however, why you cannot let one side start with a 'forlorn hope' deployed mid-field, or with a force deployed on one of the flanks, or with a "reinforcement" detachment that is not allowed to enter the field of play at the start. A common asymmetrical scenario is for one side to start with possession of a defensive position, such as a hill or fort, and for the other side to try and take control of it off them.

#### *Weighted Resurrections*

In the medieval period, commanders tended to be risk averse for major battles, and it was rare for battle to be sought when you were greatly outnumbered. In the SCA, the problem lies not so much that the smaller side feels it will be beaten, but that many on the more numerous side will not have the opportunity to exchange blows with their opponents. One partial solution to this is to weight the number of resurrections available to each side. For example, if you have 30 fighters per side, and the scenario asks for one side to be outnumbered 3:1, rather than asking 20 people to sit out on the sidelines, you can give the superior side 60 resurrections (total) or two resurrections per fighter.

#### *The other side of the hill*

Many scenarios are based on giving all participants the same amount of information about the scenario. Information can be manipulated, acquired, hidden and revealed during play. Information can be perfect – shared between all players – or imperfect – shared with only some players. Information can also be created or discovered during a scenario.

Scenarios where commanders have imperfect information about their enemy's forces and goals increases the importance of scouting, and the decisions made by the commanders based on new information.

Here are a few simple suggestions for asymmetric information:

- Start sides so they cannot see each other
- Hide the objectives on the field
- Have coloured banners on the field, and not know which colour your opponents are after.
- Have a courier pouch on the field, listing the objective – the side which captures the post will find out what the objective is, the other side will have to guess based on observing the enemy actions.

There are risks to concealing information from participants. It is possible for one side to start thinking that their opponents are being less than honourable, and being surprised by things that eliminate you from play is frustrating to say the least. A “no surprises” policy for scenarios is one way of handling this – by making it very explicit exactly which bits of information are being concealed and could be changed. It would also be useful to employ signal devices in the game if rules are being changed.

### Diplomacy

In a one-off scenario between two sides there is little scope for diplomacy. If you have a scenario with more than two sides, consideration should be given for any rules about making and breaking temporary alliances. In a campaign, there may be considerable room for diplomacy to help determine the initial sides before play begins. My advice is that where you are creating sides for a scenario, limit it to 5-7 factions. Less than this number may lead to imbalanced fights, more than this too complex for the players to keep track of.

### Colour and Pageantry

Ritual elements of SCA warfare can be a lot of fun. Whether it's a ceremonial march past with banners and musicians, or a speech to inspire the troops, there are a lot of fun things you can do for SCA war scenarios that involve no fighting at all. In building your timetable, it is useful to allow a bit of slack time for this type of activity. For some scenarios, it may be worth the effort to create items that will help improve positional identification. For example, if the event has a 'war of the roses' theme, then making Yorkist and Lancastrian banners will help people identify with the different sides in the scenarios.

### Involving the audience

The audience is usually a passive participant in SCA war scenarios, but as the consort so inspires the tournament fighter, so the audience can encourage the war fighters. The audience's enjoyment of the spectacle will be improved if someone takes the time to

explain the scenario to them. For safety, it is useful to remind the audience where the boundaries are. Ways of more actively involving the audience include:

- Heraldic negotiations
- Medical support
- Letting them throw missile weapons at fighters (such as water balloons or paper mache ‘boulders’)
- Scoring the scenario
- Water bearing
- Boundary marshalling
- Taking photos.

### Changing the Rules

SCA combat is not a simulation of medieval combat. All forms of historic re-enactment combat have to make compromises between historic authenticity and safety. As a ‘broad church’ and inclusive group, the SCA features weapons, armour, and tactics from a wide range of geographical settings and time periods. At the core of the rules, however, is an assumption of 12th century armour, and an allowance for most 15th century weapons.

For some scenarios, it may be fun to encourage (but not require) fighters to adopt weapon and armour styles from a particular period. It may also be fun to include a rule that reflects our view of the fighting from that period. For example, for a Viking scenario you could allow each side to choose a Berzerker, who will die only after receiving three blows to the chest or head.

In making changes to the rules, it is best to make no more than one change at a time, otherwise the fighters are likely to find it too hard to absorb the change.

### Feedback Systems

Feedback is an adjustment to the state of a scenario. Feedback can occur within and between scenarios. Feedback is important for any ‘campaign’ set of linked scenarios. There are two types of feedback:

- Negative feedback gives the losing side a bonus
- Positive feedback gives the winning side a bonus

Negative feedback stabilises a scenario (makes it fairer) while positive feedback destabilises a scenario (makes it less fair). Negative feedback prolongs a game, positive feedback can end it sooner. Probably the most common feedback used in SCA war scenarios is the “resurrection” of “dead” combatants. An example of positive feedback is where resurrecting fighters must swap sides.

Feedback systems can emerge from scenarios by accident. For example, in scenarios with more than two sides, alliances can act as negative feedback against a dominant side. Because feedback can take control away from players, its effects need to be anticipated by the designer.

## Campaign Structures

### What is a campaign?

A campaign is a connected series of battles that either forms a major part of a war, or concludes with the final battle of the war. In the real world, campaign can also be used in the sense of a series of operations confined to a geographical area, such as ‘the North African campaign’.

For designing war scenarios, a campaign is a series of war scenarios that are linked together in some way. A narrative, or story, can be embedded into the scenarios.

The simplest form of campaign is one where over a series of individual scenarios, the make-up of the forces on each side remains the same. Note that there is a tendency in SCA wars for people to desert to the weaker side (or the side that is losing) so as to make the engagement more ‘fair’ and increase the chances of everyone getting a share of the fighting.

A common campaign form is for all the war scenarios at one event to be linked together. A less common form of campaign is to link together war scenarios at different events. For example, if you have two events, one in the northern part of the kingdom, and a second in the southern part of the kingdom, then a ‘north versus south’ campaign gives each side a turn at having the advantage of home terrain. Note that coordinating such an event will often require a lot of communications between groups to pull it off successfully.

### The importance of feedback

Without feedback, scoring loses much of its meaning. Feedback helps inform people whether they did well or poorly in a scenario. It is hard for people to keep track of who won or lost each scenario through the course of a long day of fighting. It is important to make sure results are recorded after each scenario. If doing a multi-day event, then you can inform people of the current scores between each day. If running a shorter one-day campaign, then you need to inform the commanders what the current score is between each battle. Feedback is also helpful for telling the audience who won/lost the last the scenario, as it may not be obvious from where they are observing the fray.

### What is a war point?

A war point is an abstract way of keeping score. The number of ways in which points can be scored is infinite. What is important is that the conditions under which a point can be scored are made as explicit and unambiguous as possible. War points can be used in several ways in constructing individual scenarios and in determining the side that wins the overall campaign.

A simple approach is to award a war point to the side that wins a scenario. After the last scenario has been played, the side with the most points wins. A more complex approach is to make scenarios worth a variable number of points. You could make the first battle of

the day a double score battle to encourage people to turn up on time. You could make scenarios played later in the event worth more than those played early in the event, so that a side that loses more scenarios early on knows that they can make up for lost ground later on.

Another approach is to have less of a winner take all result for individual scenarios. This requires a scenario that is ended by something other than 'last man standing', and for each side to be able to score some points, even if they do not score all of the points. For example, a scenario could specify that it will end after five minutes of play and that for each banner a side has possession of, it scores one point.

Having an odd number of points available to be won in a scenario will help reduce the number of tied scenarios. Making individual scenarios worth at least two points can also cut down on having to work out fractional points from ties.

You can score for non-war activities, such as live archery shooting, shopping, equestrian, or arts and science activities. Too much of this can, however, distract from the actual warfighting.

#### Non-war point rewards

Something that can be used in place of (or in combination with) war points is to have some other kind of 'reward' for performance in a battle. This means that when you win one battle, you will be slightly more likely to win the next battle as well. This might not be much fun for a side that keeps losing battles, so try not to make the rewards overwhelming in nature.

Here are some suggestions for non-war point rewards:

- Allow a side to start closer to the objectives or good defensive terrain
- Allow one side to start moving a few seconds before the other (closer in time rather than closer in space)
- Require a fighter or unit to switch sides
- In a finite resurrection battle allow a side more time to resurrect in, or a greater number of overall resurrections.

#### Using a campaign to generate scenarios

A campaign can also be a system that is used to generate the scenarios that will be used on the day of battle. These types of campaign have the potential to become more complex and unwieldy than intended, so be wary of 'idea creep'.

Essentially, a small group of participants will be involved in making decisions about what scenario will be played next. The information from this decision-making process then needs to be communicated to all the participants as quickly and as accurately as possible. While this can be a lot of fun for the decision-makers, they need to make their decisions quickly, as everyone else may be standing around waiting for them.

One disadvantage of scenario generation on the day is that doing preparation work, such as terrain set up, is difficult due to time constraints. Where possible, generate several scenarios at once, to allow uninterrupted play to continue until a break is needed for water/rest. Time delays between scenarios lead to boredom!

### Linear Campaigns

The simplest campaign structure is a linear structure. That is to say, the scenarios are fought out in a fixed order. This has the advantage in that you can publish it in advance, and everyone knows what they are getting into when they decide to come to the event.

### Branching Campaigns

A campaign can also have a branching structure, where the next scenario depends on the outcome of the last scenario. For example, if side A won scenario 1, then play scenario 2. If side B won scenario 1 then play scenario 3. This has the disadvantage that you may spend time developing scenarios that are not used at the event. On the other hand, that unpredictability may encourage an army to be flexible in its force composition and training.

Here is another branching campaign scenario structure that allows multiple scenarios to be played over one terrain set up.

Fort <-> Field <-> Bridge <-> Field <-> Fort

Start with a bridge battle. Then fight a battle on the defeated force's side of the river. If the defenders win, then go back and fight another bridge battle (followed by a field battle, etc). If the defenders lose, then fight a fort battle at the defender's fort. If the defender wins, then go and fight another field battle on their side of the river. When a side is defeated while defending their fort, they lose the campaign.

### Flexible Campaigns

A simple approach for a flexible scenario structure is to present the commanders of each side with a menu of scenarios. The commanders take turns at selecting which scenario will be played next. You may wish to specify that scenarios cannot be repeated, or that a commander cannot choose a scenario their side has already triumphed at. A more complicated approach is to develop a map, and a system for the commanders to move forces around the map so as to generate scenarios.

## **War Marshalling**

This is an advice section. It in no way replaces, modifies, amends, or otherwise changes any actual rules on war marshalling that may be in use in your preferred SCA Kingdom.

### Safety First

The most important consideration of the marshal has to be the safety of everyone playing the game.

Make sure the area of play is free of hazards such as glass, rocks, venomous flora or fauna, and holes or sharp changes in elevation. Do what is required to eliminate hazards. If a hazard cannot be eliminated, do what you can to minimise it. Signpost it, and tell the combatants about it before the scenario begins.

Be prepared for injury. Try to ensure that someone with medical knowledge/equipment is present. The obvious thing to do in case of an injury is to call a hold. Then deal with the injury. Scenarios can resume once the injury is dealt with, or if the fighting is moved to a place where it will not affect injury treatment.

Communicate to participants about how, when, and where authorisation card, armour and weapon inspections will be conducted.

### Water

If you are responsible for water being present on the war field, make sure it turns up. If you are not going to providing water, communicate to the participants that it is their responsibility to provide their own water. If there is supposed to be a water source available at the war field, check that it really exists.

### How many Marshals?

How many marshals do you need to help you run a scenario for 30-40 combatants? My rough guide is that you need:

- One marshal in charge who knows everything there is to know about the scenarios
- At least one marshal per side
- Up to one marshal per 12 combatants<sup>10</sup>
- One marshal to hold a stopwatch (if required)
- One marshal to keep score for campaigns (if required)
- One marshal for each area of hazardous terrain (cliffs, pits, real rivers, etc).

### Constructed terrain

I find it helps to build terrain at least one day before it used. This way you have time to fix any mistakes, such as situating the archer tower so that its main arc of fire is straight at the audience. Measuring tape and a can of spray paint can be useful in determining where start lines and terrain should be set up. When building terrain, try to imagine the ‘crash test’, what is going to happen if a fully armoured combatant runs into it at speed.

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<sup>10</sup> Pennsic War aims for one marshal for every 40 combatants.

For Lochac, imagine where the light combatants will be, and how they will interact with Heavy combatants. Placing light combatants where heavy combatants can be throwing blind attacks (around corners, over walls, etc) is risky.

### Safety Briefing at the start of the scenarios

Always start with a safety reminder before explaining the scenarios – just like the airlines do at the start of every flight.

- Test response to “hold”, remind people to repeat the call, stop fighting, and drop to their knees, holding weapons aloft
- Remind people how hold ends.
- Remind people about the engagement rules for melee fighting and any non-heavy combat weapon systems (archers, siege weapons)
- Encourage people to drink water and take breaks
- Point out any inter-Kingdom conventions in operation
- Point out areas where spectators are not allowed, and zones where helmets must be kept on.
- Every player is their own referee with regard to safety, anyone can call a hold.

### Explaining the Scenarios

The more fighters you have, the more organization pre-war you will need to do, and there is a point at which all scenarios will need to be written before the event so that marshals and participants can organise effectively. When writing the scenario up for publication, try to use maps and images. Some people can ‘read’ visual displays more easily than they can do with text.

- Web sites
- Event booklets
- Flyers, heralds
- Briefings for marshals and commanders
- Oral at start of day, between breaks, or at start of scenarios.

Ask everyone to take their helms off at the start of an oral briefing. Expect to explain each new scenario rule twice – different people will grasp a rule more quickly when it is expressed in different ways – but keep the explanations consistent. Never expect more than 80% of the combatants to understand what is going. Be prepared for questions.

You will use your voice a lot. Look after it. Speak up so the person at the back can hear you. If you can bring a whistle or megaphone, that can reduce the need for you to yell.

### Complaints

Complaints are feedback about the game. It is important to identify exactly what the complaint is about:

- Behaviour problems – follow your Kingdom’s grievance procedures,

- Safety – resolve immediately,
- Scenario balance – consider the issue, but change is probably best left for the next scenario due to the difficulty of adjusting a scenario in mid-game.

### If all else fails

Boredom kills fun. If your idea for a scenario is not going to work, do not waste time thinking about what you will do next, just divide the combatants present into two teams, and call lay on.

### Team Selection

Teams for different sides can be self-selecting (players choose their sides), command-selection (commanders choose players or units to be on their side), or can be done by a quick sort mechanism:

- Odd/even numbered birthdays.
- Even/odd numbered ages.
- Letters in the name. (real/personae)
- Knights & Squires (+/- Royal peers, landed Barons) versus the Rest.
- North versus South, or East versus West.
- Old versus Young.
- Giants versus Dwarfs.
- By weapons.
- By armour/personae.
- By years of SCA experience/time since authorization/number of times attending this event.

Different team selection methods can be the basis of a fun scenario.

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This article was originally drafted in July 2007 and presented on 3 August at Pennsic XXXVI. This version has minor revisions and dates to 26 January 2011 for presentation at Canterbury Faire.

Feedback on this article is most welcome. I can be contacted at the email address given below.

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