

COMBAT: TRANSCRIBED EXAMPLE

THE SITUATION

A Level 1 party consisting of a Phantom, Priest, Mystic, Judge and Dreadnought.

The five of them are making their way through a treacherous path known as the Pale Pass deep in the Windemere mountains. When the party ignores certain warning signs, they stumble directly into an ambush by Skulkers.

Skulkers are one of the wild and feral remnants of a monstrous race that was created by the Ivory Queen in a misguided attempt to bring together the people of Unity against a common enemy. Skulkers are rat-like humanoids who live to pillage, plunder and occasionally smoke a pipe of good Dreamweed.

2 Skulker Brutes (one being the leader and heavily armored from head to toe) and 5 smaller Skulker Skirmishers armed with crossbows emerge from the brush to assault our heroes. The Phantom having had some history (Core Path) about having to survive in the wilds and evade monsters like these, recognizes what they are immediately and alerts her party members.

NOTE:

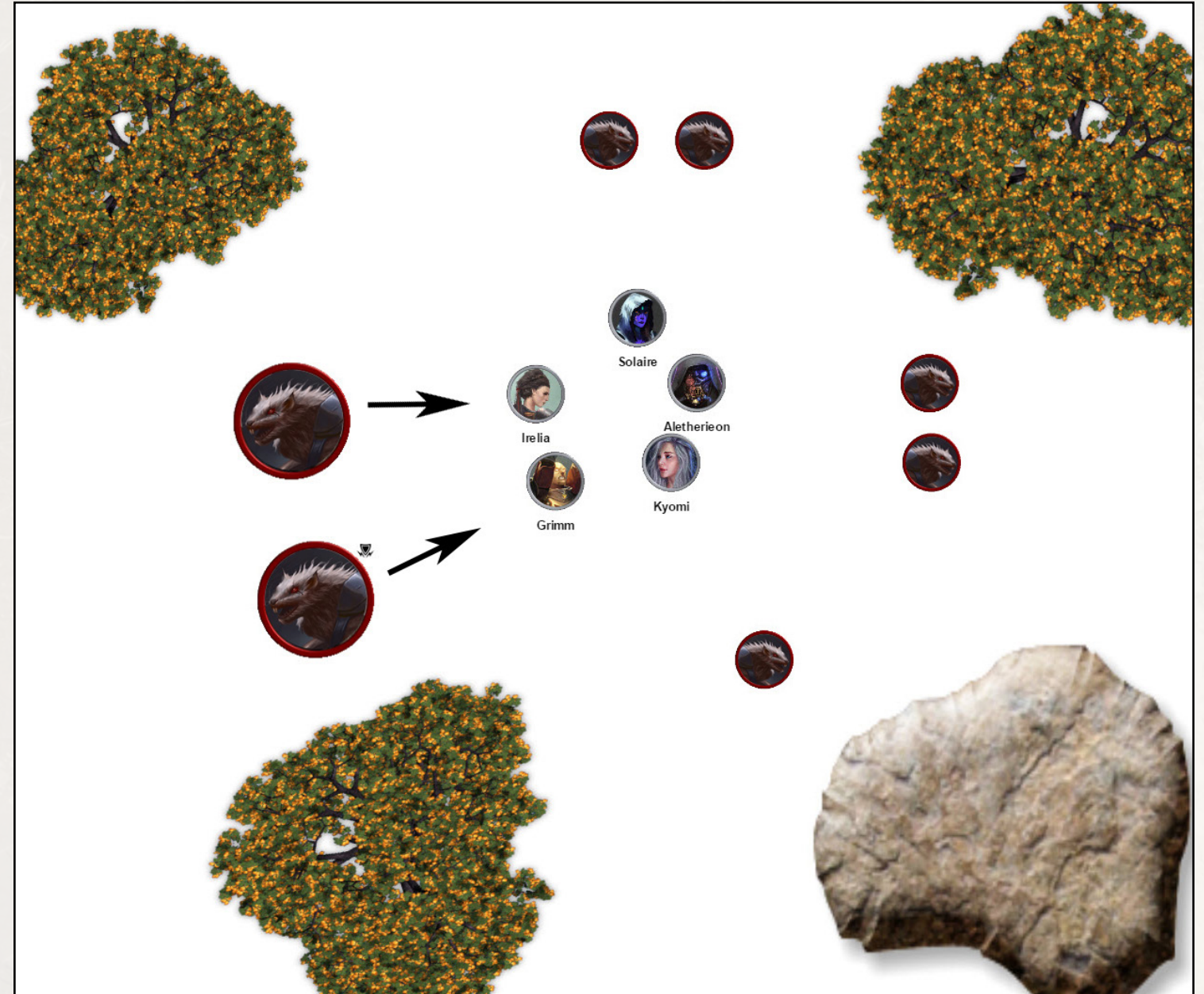
*Please keep in mind the following 6 rounds of combat were transcribed from a session based off a very early version of Unity. Names, numbers and certain powers have changed but the core mechanics, flow of the fighting and cinematic spirit of the combat engine remains the same. Look for my voice in **this colour** as I provide commentary and talk about design intentions.*

Due to the fact that it is a testing session, the players speak out of character quite a bit and keep things fairly lighthearted.

Tactical Depth: As you move through the combat dialogue, you'll notice Unity shifts the tactical depth that usually comes in the form of measured movement across squares and meticulous positioning to one of thoughtful utilization of your tool kit, simple resource management, and coordination with your teammates.

Cinematic Combat: While any combat can be vividly described, some of the features and mechanics in Unity facilitate these descriptions and encourage them. It's a little way of adding some narrative and immersive magic to what can sometimes be a very "game-y" part of an RPG.

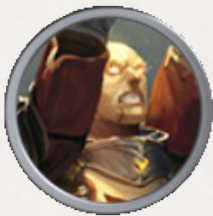
THE BATTLEFIELD



THE PARTY



Alatherieon
Afflicted
Mystic



Grimm
Human
Judge



Solaire
Valla
Phantom



Irelia
Human
Dreadnought



Kyomi
Human
Priest

HP: 12
Armour: 0
Defense Rating: -1
Attack Rating: +3

HP: 18
Armour: 4
Defense Rating: 0
Attack Rating: +2

HP: 14
Armour: 0
Defense Rating: +3
Attack Rating: +3

HP: 18
Armour: 3
Defense Rating: 0
Attack Rating: +3

HP: 12
Armour: 2
Defense Rating: -1
Attack Rating: +3

ROUND 1

GM: Seven humanoid figures emerge from the brush. There are 2 large Skulker Brutes. One of them seemingly the leader and heavily armored from head to toe in black ill-fitting metal plates. He begins barking orders at 5 smaller Skulker Skirmishers armed with crossbows. You are surrounded.

Priest: What are their positions?

GM: The two large Brutes are directly in front of you where you were heading – west. There is one Skulker Skirmisher setting its sights on you with a crossbow in the south **nearby**. To the east and north there are two other skirmishers doing the same, also **nearby**.

As you manage to survey that information, the Brutes close in on you and are now **adjacent** to the group. Tell me who was running point as you guys were headed west?

Dreadnought and Judge: *At the same time* Me.

GM: Very well, Dreadnought and Judge roll Defense as a black halberd comes crashing down on each of you.

Dreadnought: *Rolls Defense* I got a 15.

Judge: *Rolls Defense* 14.

GM: As the halberd from the heavily armoured Skulker comes down at you Dreadnought, you manage to parry the blow aside using your massive broadsword with a bit of effort. The clang of metal is deafening.

BASIC COMBAT RULES

Attack Roll to determine if your attack lands: 2d10 + AR (Attack Rating)
When an Attack Roll is equal to or higher than the target's Defense Rating - the attack hits.

Defense Roll to determine if enemy attack lands: 2d10 + DR (Defense Rating)
When a Defense Roll is equal to or higher than the target's Attack Rating - the attack is dodged

Recharge Resources: Rolling doubles while attacking or defending allows you to use a die (class/path dependent for size) to recharge your primary resource.

There are no individual turns in Unity. This allows players to discuss and execute their strategies in tandem without being hamstrung by the many things that could go change or go wrong during Player 1's turn and Player 2's turn. It also increases engagement by decreasing the amount of "dead time" between different players' actions. Either players or monsters will go as a group then it will "turn" over to the next group. The narrative is the first place we look to dictate which side goes first. In the case of this combat encounter, the players were ambushed so the Skulkers get to go first. If the narrative is not clear on who goes first, the monsters will always be given priority but the players will be allowed a Speed check for a bonus first strike.

GM: Judge, you barely get your shield up just in time to deflect the force of the blow.

The 5 **nearby** Skulker Skirmishers take their cue from the Brutes and unleash their crossbows at the rest of you. Mystic, Priest, Phantom and Judge roll Defense. Priest you can roll twice as two of the Skulkers decided to shoot at you.

Rolling Defense Mystic – 5 / Priest – 13 and 10 / Phantom 17 / Judge 10

Mystic, one of the bolts digs into your ass cheek as you seemed completely oblivious to the fact that you were being attacked, roll damage. Priest, you manage to side step the first shot but were so focused on dodging that the second bolt finds its mark and drills underneath your shoulder pauldron and into flesh, roll damage. Phantom you easily bat the crossbow bolt aside with your rapier. Judge the crossbow bolt hits you solidly in the chest, roll damage. All the bolts do 1d6+2 damage.

*Let's talk a bit about what just happened. The design intent behind Diceless GMing is highlighted with the scene above. What we have is a GM that doesn't need to split focus and go resolve each of the attacks one by one by having to roll dice for each attack made. We leverage **concurrency** of actions by having all 4 affected players roll simultaneously. They then each do the quick math and tell you their total Defense rolls. In this example, all the Skirmishers have the exact same AR (attack rating), so as a GM you know instantly which players are hit. You can then conjure the scene in your head and paint it out for your players as one cohesive description.*

By using alternate GM rolling rules, we don't break the game but we do give up a bit of the cinematic flow, engagement, and time savings (it adds up quickly over the course of a game). If that's an easy trade for you as a GM with regards to appreciating the visceral joy of tossing dice or feeling 'active' then go ahead and toss those dice!

Mystic: *Rolls damage* -- 7 damage. My ass.

Priest: *Rolls damage* – 6 damage. I’m wearing medium armour so it’s reduced to 4.

Judge: *Rolls damage* – 4 damage. Ha! I’m wearing heavy armour and using a shield (Armour Value = 4), the bolt breaks off my mighty chestplate like a twig.

Phantom: *Rolls her eyes* Oh by the way, I smirked slyly as I bat the bolt coming at me away.

ROUND 2

GM: Alright the floor is yours, let’s see what you got

Mystic: I don’t know about you guys but I’m getting the hell away from these two giant rats.

Priest: *Looks at the Phantom and Mystic players* Yeah I don’t think some of us belong anywhere close to these bad boys. But if we retreat, they are gonna smash us.

Phantom: There’s a good chance one of them won’t. I’m going to attack the not so heavily armoured Skulker Brute. I’ve got a trick up my sleeve to make sure he won’t be swinging at us if we bounce.

Priest: What about the heavily armoured Skulker? I’m pretty sure he’s going to chop Mystic in half still.

Judge: Don’t worry I got your back. Just take care of that punctured ass cheek of yours will ya?

Priest: Well Mystic, if he’s going to cover you why don’t you atta...

Mystic: (Cutting Priest off) I cast Volatile Bulwark on myself.

VOLATILE BULWARK		
STANDARD - MAINTAIN - EFFECTS		
You craft an energy shield around you that absorbs 20 + MIND damage. It absorbs all types of damage unless otherwise specified.		
Upon absorbing its damage limit, the Volatile Bulwark explodes dealing its absorb amount as Arcane damage to anyone Adjacent to you. Lasts 5 minutes or 1 encounter.		
COST	TARGET	RANGE
3 Mana	Self	Self

Priest: ?!?!

Mystic: Gotta take care of number one first.

GM: Mystic, you place your hands together horizontally at chest level and pull them apart, one hand upwards the other downwards and a crackling field of blue energy envelops your body.

Dreadnought: Less talking more fighting, the three of you go take care of the puny skulkers behind us and stay back and let the real warriors handle these fools.

Phantom: I attack the unarmoured Brute before we disengage towards the east. *Rolls Attack*. I got 14.

GM: Solid hit. Your rapier digs deep into its armpit and it lets out a painful screech. Before it can finish reacting to that thrust, you spin your body around pivoting on one foot and drive your parrying dagger into its back. Roll your normal damage + backstab damage because it was adjacent to allies when you attacked it.

Phantom: I’m going to roll my Blade Twisting damage as well. As my dagger digs into the small of its back I crank my arm to twist it sending a huge shockwave of pain straight to its tiny brain. It’s now momentarily stunned and cannot make any Provoked Attacks for this round. *Rolls damage(s) 1d6+3+1d4+1d6* Total damage 14.

BLADE TWISTING		
QUICK - EFFECTS		
When you land an attack, you can declare Blade Twisting. You twist your blade sending a massive shockwave of pain through your opponent crippling them momentarily.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Stuns enemy in place a quick moment, allowing any allies (including yourself) adjacent to the enemy to move away on their turn without taking a Provoked Attack for 1 round.Deals an extra +1d6 damage		
COST	TARGET	RANGE
2 Guile	Single	Adjacent

GM: Great play. Burn 2 Guile. *Turns to the Judge* Your friends are about to move away. You said you were going to do something to stop the armoured Brute from slicing their backs open as they reposition?

Judge: When the Brute attacks I’m going to use Stalwart Defender. I guess I have to use it 3 times, so that’s going to cost me 3 Fervor. *Stalwart Defender has since been changed and is now a Sentinel power called Intercept.*

STALWART DEFENDER		
REACTION - EFFECTS		
You have been trained to protect those around you. In particular, your reflexes have been honed to intercept even the mightiest of attacks. You may eat Provoked Attacks for your allies.		
COST	TARGET	RANGE
1 Fervor per Attack	Single Ally	Adjacent

GM: Good call. Judge, roll Defense 3 times please.

Judge: *Rolls Defense* 14, 11, 10

GM: As Mystic, Priest and Phantom turn to advance on the 2 **nearby** smaller crossbow wielding Skulkers to the east, the armoured Brute begins to shift and he brings his weapon up to strike at them. Judge, without skipping a beat you slide your body in between the trajectory of the weapon and your allies. You bring your shield up to block the blow.

The first strike lands flush against the face of the shield. You feel the reverberations dissipate throughout your arm. Before you can react the Brute switches the direction of the attack and slices into you twice from the side. Roll 1d10+3 for damage twice.

Judge: *Rolls Damage* Bah, I take 7 damage after armour.

Mystic: Thanks old man.

Dreadnought: Seeing an opening, I'm going to attempt to Cleave both of these Brutes.

CLEAVE		
QUICK - EFFECTS		
You attempt to strike multiple enemies with one attack		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Roll 1d4+1 to determine how many enemies are struck, if there are only two enemies, no need to roll this. <i>This has been changed.</i>Your damage is lessened from spreading the force of the blow so do not add modifiers when calculating damage. Baseline weapon damage only.		
COST	TARGET	RANGE
1 Fury	Multiple	Adjacent

GM: There are only 2 enemies **adjacent** to you. Go ahead and roll attack once.

Dreadnought: *Rolls Attack* 16! That's definitely a hit. I'm *rolling damage (1d10 without modifiers)*. I got 6.

GM: You sweep your gigantic broadsword across in a wide arc, using the weight and momentum of your body to strengthen the blow. The sword cuts deep into the unarmoured Brute who is still reeling from Phantom's attack. As your sword continues slicing through Skulker flesh towards the armoured Brute, your first victim's entrails explode out of his stomach and he looks up at you with a blank stare as he drops to the ground dead.

Your broadsword makes contact with the armoured Brute but only manages to draw a little blood as the tip slides over a rusty crack in the armour, the Brute seems unphased. Burn 1 Fury.

Dreadnought: Huh... this is not gonna be fun.

Priest: As we rush up towards the Skulker Skirmishers to the east, I ready my hammer and call upon Lord Jaden to guide my strike. I use Holy Strike on one of the Skirmishers, attempting to bash its tiny head in. *Rolls Attack* - 13.

HOLY STRIKE		
STANDARD - EFFECTS		
Holy Strike: You unleash a mighty warcry and declare that you are smiting the foe in front of you in your god's name.		
SUCCESS: You strike true and deal your full damage, your god is pleased and grants you 1 Healing Charge. FAILURE: You miss but your god applauds your efforts and grants you 1 Healing Charge.		
COST	TARGET	RANGE
3 Faith	Single	Adjacent

GM: Lord Jaden hears your call and your hammer finds its mark. Burn 3 Faith and roll damage. You also gain a Healing Charge from your Holy Strike.

Priest: *Rolls 1d6+1 for damage* Max damage! 7 damage. I use my Healing Charge on Judge. Judge, you heal for 6 hp.

Judge: I give Priest a nod of thanks.

GM: As your hammer contacts the skull of the Skirmisher, you hear a sickening crunch. The Skirmishers face seems frozen in time as he topples over backwards, all four limbs rigid pointing towards the sky.

Alright, taking the action back to the frontlines. The armoured Brute's head turns slightly to the left and down as it stares at the corpse of its fallen brethren. It turns back to you Dreadnought with a glare of vengeance and swings its halberd at you. While this is happening several more crossbow bolts come sailing through the air at the three of you in the east. The Skirmishers saw what happened last time they shot at someone wearing heavy plate and have wised up. The remaining Skirmisher the three of you are **adjacent** to attempts to shoot point blank with his crossbow. It looks like he's having a hard time loading his crossbow and steady-ing his aim being in such close proximity to you. Everyone but Judge roll Defense, Phantom you roll Defense twice as the Skirmisher next to you is trying to shoot you at point blank as well.

Phantom: Before everyone rolls, I have Hands of Lightning (*Hands of Lightning has since been removed*) allow-ing me to get a free immediate attack once per round on anyone **adjacent** to me trying to use a ranged attack or cast a spell. *Rolls Attack* - 14

GM: That's a hit you can roll damage.

Phantom: *Rolls 1d6+3+1d4* Wow... crap rolls. I do 5 damage.

GM: As the Skirmisher is clumsily trying to reload his crossbow and shakily aiming at it at you, your rapier flashes out in a blink and slides easily through the poor thing’s gut. It clutches it’s stomach in pain but still manages to loose a bolt at you with its other hand. Ok, everybody but Judge can roll Defense now.

Rolling Defense: Mystic – 9 / Phantom – 15, 13 / Priest – 13 / Dreadnought 9

GM: Mystic a bolt comes careening directly at you but I guess you being in your safety bubble you don’t care and just turn to face it, roll 1d6+2 damage. Phantom, you lean back like Neo in the matrix and watch the bolt from the Skirmisher up north zoom past you before popping back upward. The Skirmisher at point blank range completely fumbles the shot and misses probably in no small part due to a gaping gut wound. Priest the arrow bounces harmlessly off your breastplate. Dreadnought, the halberd slicing through the air catches you in the ribs, roll 1d10+3 damage.

Mystic: My shield absorbs 3 damage, my ass will not be punctured again.

Dreadnought: Ouch, I just took 9 damage after armour. I’ll get you yet you bastard!

GM: Alright back to you guys.

ROUND 3

Dreadnought: I’m pretty pissed about having my ribs smashed. I turn to Judge and tell him “Ready to spill some blood friend?”

Judge: Justice is always ready.

Dreadnought: Um.. Ok I’ll take it. I’m going in full bore baby. Reckless Assault!

RECKLESS ASSAULT		
STANDARD - EFFECTS		
You forgo all defenses for a massive strike. Can be combined with other moves once upgraded.		
SUCCESS: You double your weapon die used to roll for damage. FAILURE: Caught completely off balance and wide open, you miss your blow. You effectively have ZERO ARMOUR as you suffer an IMMEDIATE retaliation that always hits.		
COST	TARGET	RANGE
1 Fury	Single	Adjacent

GM: Oooo risky... goodluck. Roll Attack.

Dreadnought: *Rolls Attack* Ugh... I got a 7. Yeah I know... roll damage 1d10+3. Ouch 7 damage after armour. Burning 1 Fury.

GM: Sorry buds... Dreadnought you clasp both hands on the handle of your massive broadsword and you

bend your knees a little dropping into a power stance. Shifting your weight quickly you forgo any notion of defense and throw everything you have into one gigantic swing at the Brute. Unfortunately, in your rage, you telegraphed your move too much and the Brute easily side stepped the swing. You overbalance and the Brute capitalizes on our folly, striking you hard with its halberd, you feel warm blood dripping down your leg.

Dreadnought: Things aren’t looking good for me.

Judge: As I watch this happen, I try to take advantage of the Brute being distracted with Dreadnought and I attack him. *Rolls Attack* gets a 17. Glorious! That’s gotta be a hit!

GM: Yes sir it is. Roll damage

Judge: *Rolls 1d8+2 for damage* I do 6 damage.

GM: So you think you do, you slash your sword across the Brute’s back as he finishes pulling his halberd out of the Dreadnought, sparks fly as your blade drags across the black metal and only nicks the Brute where the plates are a little exposed at the seams. You draw blood but not as much as you thought you would.

Judge: I yell out to the guys in the back “Could use a little help here, this bastard is armoured to the nines and back!”

Phantom: Give me a moment, I can fix that. I just need to take care of this bugger here.

Priest: Wait are you going up to that beast of a rat after this?

Phantom: Yeah, I can pry open one of those armour plates for our so called “real warriors”.

Priest: Good luck.

Phantom: Already on it. *Rolls Attack* Gets 14. *Rolls 1d6+3+1d4 for damage* 10 damage. Goodnight sweet prince. I jam my parrying dagger into the top of the little runt’s head and watch the light of life fade from his eyes. I yank out the dagger and I’ll begin moving towards the Brute on my next turn.

GM: Cool. You left out the part where his tongue lolly gags out like a cartoon caricature :P Mystic you’ve been awfully quiet what are you up to?

Mystic: Just wondering in what delightful way I can deal death to these pathetic creatures. Tell me friends, who needs to die right now?

Phantom: I’ve got the Brute covered, there’s still 3 Skirmishers trying to turn us into pin cushions can you do something useful.... Like kill them?

Mystic: Ask and ye shall receive. I draw my arm back and a tiny white sparks begin to flit about before forming a spear of brilliant lightning that even Zeus would be envious of. The two Skirmishers to the north, they are close to each other yes?

SPARK LANCE		
STANDARD - EFFECTS		
You draw your arm over your head and back as if to launch a javelin. A spear of pure electric energy materializes in your hand. With a snap of your arm you send the crackling energy hurtling at your foe.		
SUCCESS: The target takes 1d10+MIND electric damage. The target and anyone adjacent to it is afflicted with a static residue for 1 round. When targeted with an electric spell, simply roll damage – it's an automatic hit. FAILURE: Target takes no damage, but is now afflicted with static residue for 1 round. When targeted with an electric spell, simply roll damage – it's an automatic hit.		
<i>The latest version of Spark Lance still encourages you to roll just to see if you can recharge but the attack will always hit if they have Static Residue no matter the result.</i>		
COST	TARGET	RANGE
3 Mana	Multiple	Adjacent

GM: Yes they are adjacent.

Mystic: Excellent. I snap my arm forward and hurl the bolt at the first Skirmisher *rolls attack* gets a 15.

GM: The Spark Lance explodes in a thunderous flash as it contacts the Skirmisher square in the chest. Burn 3 mana and roll your damage.

Mystic: *Rolls 1d10+3 damage* 12 Kentucky fried points of damage.

GM: As the flash of light from the impact fades, you see a charred smoking corpse frozen in the pose it was last holding as it turned to face the bolt before it landed. A gentle breeze causes the smoky ashes to swirl into the wind and disappear. Somewhere you hear the Titanic theme song being played. The Skirmisher beside it looks visibly shaken and all of its fur is completely on end. It looks like Frankenstein's wife's hair.

Priest: Oooh static charge?? I don't even need to roll attack if I use an electric attack right? I follow up by thrusting my hammer towards the sky calling upon Lord Jaden's Wrath and direct it at the charged Skirmisher. Smite this rat yo. *rolls 1d8+3 damage* Sweet max damage again – 11! The Lord is with me today!

GM: Yeah no attack roll *(you are now encouraged to roll for recharge - still autohit)*. Golden light shoots from your hammer up to the sky and a golden thunder bolt returns downwards exploding on the top of the frazzled Skirmisher's head. He shakes violently for a few seconds and falls face first to the ground and twitches once or twice... to never twitch again. Remember to burn 1 Faith for that.

WRATH		
STANDARD - EFFECTS		
You call upon the wrath of your god to smite your foes. A golden bolt streaks down from the heavens.		
SUCCESS: Target is struck with 1d8+MIND electric damage FAILURE: The bolt grazes them causing half damage.		
COST	TARGET	RANGE
1 Faith	Single	Far

Priest: Praise Jaden. Some words of the Lord's wisdom for your journey to the afterlife rat: "Dying is Mainstream. #MONEY" *Our Priest player figured they'd worship Jaden Smith as this test character was going to die soon anyways.*

Phantom: Does backstab work on allies?

GM: With only the Brute and a single Skirmisher left, the two of them shift uneasily. They meet each others' gaze and as if they understood what you were saying as a group, you see the Skirmisher train its sights on Phantom as it loads a green looking bolt into its crossbow.

Phantom: Uhhh why is the bolt green?

GM: With a smirk it unleashes the bolt at you Phantom. Roll Defense.

Phantom: *Rolls Defense* HA! I'm a bloody blur – 16!

GM: The green bolt whistles harmlessly by you and clanks against the side of the big tree. Where it impacted the tree you see the bark bubble, sizzle and hiss as it melts away.

The Armoured Brute seems displeased, he barks something in Skulker tongue at the Skirmisher and you see the Skirmisher visibly shrink away from the Brute. The Brute then turns his attention to Dreadnought and moves in for the kill.

Dreadnought: Come get some.

GM: The Brute raises his halberd high in the air, it's black rusted metal blocking out the sun for a moment before it begins its descent down at your head Dreadnought. Roll defense.

Dreadnought: *Rolls Defense* Not today bucko. 17.

GM: That’s a solid roll especially when you have no modifiers to your defense roll, why don’t you describe what happens?

Dreadnought: I’m on one knee, trying to catch my breath and gather myself from the last series of heavy blows. I’m using my broadsword to prop myself up with one hand as it’s plunged into the ground. My other hand is clutching the wound on my side. But as he is about to deliver the death blow, I grit my teeth and channel my fury to bring my sword up just in the nick of time and block the blow – with one arm, because I’m a badass. I slowly begin to stand and stare defiantly into his beady little eyes and snarl as I push his blade off.

GM: I liked that. Did everyone enjoy that? *everyone nods* Cool. Give yourself a **Spark** Dreadnought.

*Sparks have been renamed to Glory. Glory Points are a meta-currency that encourages cinematic scene painting with vivid or emotional descriptions - anything to draw everyone at the table in a little closer. They go in a communal pool represented by a single die that sits off to the side. As Glory is gained, the die slowly goes up. 3 Glory Points can be used to confer **Benefit** to a single action (roll 3d10, drop the lowest). GMs can tweak the strength of this meta-currency for their campaign by choosing a smaller die (less capacity to store Glory) or increasing the amount of Glory points required to confer **Benefit**.*

ROUND 4

Phantom: Alright let’s finish this. Phantom’s coming to save the day. I turn to Mystic and Priest, I’ll let you fight over the last Skirmisher, he looks like he’s about to have an accident in his pants. I’ve got bigger fish to fry. I rush up to the Brute and Expose Weakness on him. *Rolls Attack* A 9... What?

EXPOSE WEAKNESS		
STANDARD - EFFECTS		
Having watched patiently from the shadows with the intent of studying your victim from every angle, you have ascertained the weak points in their armor and anatomy. Your strike might be to unlatch a plate of armor protecting a vital organ, or to draw your allies’ attention to a particularly vulnerable spot on the enemy’s body.		
SUCCESS: The target is made vulnerable for 1 round allowing all attacks to bypass armour. You land your full damage with Expose Weakness’ effects in play.		
FAILURE: You fumble your precision strike but still manage to dig into your target. Target suffers half your normal attack damage. No Backstab damage.		
COST	TARGET	RANGE
2 Guile	Single	Adjacent

Judge: You have failed me.

Phantom: Easy... I got more juice, I can try it again.

Dreadnought: Yeah, I’m not sure if I can last long enough to see that.

GM: You failed your Expose Weakness but on a failure, you still manage to land half your damage, no back-

stab on failures though. Go ahead and roll for it.

Phantom: *Rolls 1d6+3* 4 damage well 2 because of failure rules. Actually probably 0 because you are going to tell me it clanks against his thick armour right?

GM: 😊

Meanwhile Mystic and Priest are doing rock/paper/scissors to see who gets to smoke the last Skirmisher

Dreadnought: Actually Priest, got any healing love for me?

Priest: Sorry Mystic, looks like I need to be the one to deliver the deathblow. Lord Jaden only grants his divine grace to those that continue to smite evil in his name. I roll up to the Skirmisher chanting Lord Jaden’s words of wisdom before I Holy Strike it in the face. “How can mirrors be real if our eyes aren’t real?” *Rolls Attack* and burns 2 Faith. Gets 8. Oh no. *Priest made a mistake, Holy Strike costs 3 Faith not 2.*

GM: Perhaps you were too busy recalling the life changing words of Lord Jaden’s because your swing was wide and completely missed the Skirmisher. However, Lord Jaden is pleased by how devout and dedicated you are to the cause nonetheless. He grants you one Healing Charge.

Priest: Excellent. Dreadnought feel the warm glow of Jaden wash over your wounds. Heal for 6 hp.

Dreadnought: Many thanks you weirdo.

Mystic: Must I do everything? I Zeus it up again and hurl another Spark Lance at the Skirmisher. *rolls at-tack* 21. BAM. Also I rolled double 9s so I get to recharge too. *Rolls 1d10+3 damage* 9 damage. He dead right?

GM: Nice attack roll! The Skirmisher convulses and collapses forward. Dead yes. Burn 3 mana and roll 1d6 to recharge mana.

Mystic: *Rolls 1d6 to recharge mana* Ugh... 1 are you serious.... Alright boys and girls I’m running on fumes, got enough for one more spell.

Judge: Don’t worry it will be over very soon.

GM: 😊

Judge: Why are you smirking? I don’t like this.

Phantom: You know this Brute is gonna split me in two in a second right? Anything you can do to help?

Judge: Indeed. I pull my sword back to strike at the Brute. As I do, I draw upon my conviction to turn my blade into a torch of truth illuminating the darkness in this heathen’s soul. With a mighty battle cry I send him Into the Light. *rolls attack* 16. Ha! That’s a hit. *rolls 1d8+2 damage* 7 damage.

INTO THE LIGHT		
STANDARD - EFFECTS		
You empower your weapon to explode in a flash of divine light upon impact, disorienting your target.		
There are upgrades at later levels to allow you to disorient multiple enemies with one strike.		
SUCCESS: Lower target Attack Rating by your MIGHT+PRESENCE stat. Deal your full damage. FAILURE: Your timing is a little off. The target manages to close its eyes before the flash goes ignites. You deal half your normal damage.		
<i>Into The Light is now Radiant Strike and the +PRESENCE bonus has been removed.</i>		
COST	TARGET	RANGE
2 Fervor	Single	Adjacent

GM: Moments before you strike, your steel longsword glows. To all your allies and yourself it simply looks like a brilliant golden sword, but to those that walk the unjust path, it shines like the heart of the very Sun. The Brute lets out a gasp as the flash of light blinds him momentarily.

Judge: Retribution is at hand beast!

Dreadnought: Indeed. I attack this blind fool. *Rolls attack* 16 *Rolls 1d10+3 damage* 7 damage.

GM: Your blade crashes down on the Brute’s shoulder. The pauldron holds but you grunt and push down with all your might and the blade bites down into a bit of flesh.

Dreadnought: Damnit. Phantom.... This time, don’t miss.

GM: The Brute roars and begins to retaliate but its dark beady eyes now white from the Judge’s attack sees the world as a big blur. It begins to swing wildly in your direction Phantom, fearful of any tricks you might have up your sleeve. Roll defense.

Phantom: *Rolls defense* 11 ugh.

GM: The Brute’s wild swings narrowly miss you. If he could see properly, your head would probably be de-tached from your shoulders right now.

ROUND 5

Phantom: Time to finish this. Expose Weakness again on the Brute. *Rolls attack* There we go a 16. *Rolls 1d6+3+1d4* 8 damage right through armour baby.

GM: You approach the Brute light on your feet. You dance from left to right and send your rapier in, but it’s a feint. The Brute overcompensates and leaves himself off balance for but a moment. Your parrying dagger comes flashing in from your other hand and cuts the leather strap holding a plate of armour together. It flops off easily and dangles about exposing a window of fur and flesh ripe for some cold steel. With a quick spin, you jam your rapier through that window and the Brute howls in agony.

Phantom: Don’t ever say I didn’t do anything for you guys.

Dreadnought and Judge: I attack!

Judge: After you actually, this guy hasn’t really done anything to me.

Dreadnought: It’s time to end this. Reckless Assault again! Please god... *rolls attack* 17! I’m going to enjoy this. *Rolls 2d10+3 damage* 18 damage! He’s gotta be dead.

GM: Squinting your eyes you channel your fury. Your body becomes rigid, every muscle flexing in unison as your draw the end of your massive broadsword back, building distance for a powerful thrust that could split rock. Your legs explode you forward, kicking up a swirl of dust as the tip of your broadsword easily sinks through flesh and fur and comes ripping out the back of the Brute.

Dreadnought: I lift him off the ground as he lies skewered on my sword and hold him so his face is close to mine. Let him see the fire in my eyes and the smug knowledge that I am his better.

GM: As you do this he laughs in your face and spits. He lets out a horrifying screech – the likes you have never heard before.

Emerging from the brush ahead you see 3 more Brutes fully armored like him and they begin to charge at you from far away. *Hey, we’re playtesting, gotta take it to the limit.* When you turn back to the armoured Brute skewered on your sword you see that his soul has returned to the Drift.

Judge: Oh god.

Phantom: So... TPK?

Priest: I won’t quote Jaden Smith anymore if you plot armour us for this. But just in case you don’t I’m moving back towards Mystic and close to an escape route. I also cast Tower and Shield on hmmm Phantom. Yeah you stay there.... And do what you just did to that guy.

TOWER AND SHIELD		
STANDARD - EFFECTS		
You begin to chant a sincere prayer asking for divine protection. You feel the protective energies of your deity coalescing around the target of your choice.		
Increase the Defense Rating of your target for 1 round Level 1: +2 Level 5: +4 Level 10: +6		
COST	TARGET	RANGE
2 Faith	Single Ally or Self	Far

Old Version used for this playtest.

TOWER & SHIELD			
STANDARD			
You quietly ask your god for divine protection. Golden energies coalesce around your target and hardens into luminous armour.			
EFFECTS			
Roll your attack to determine how much +AV target receives. Lasts 1 round.			
2-8	9-15	15-21	21+
+1 AV	+2 AV	+3 AV	+4 AV
COST	TARGET	RANGE	
2 Faith	1 Ally or Self	Far	

Latest version. Streamlined rolling into buffing for recharge mechanics.

GM: Mystic you haven’t taken any actions yet, are you going to?

Mystic: Running on fumes chief... gonna see how this plays out.

GM: Very well, the three new Brutes move right up to Judge, Phantom and Dreadnought. Back to you guys.

ROUND 6

Phantom: Well I think I have enough juice left in me to Expose Weakness once more.

Dreadnought: Not sure that’s going to help at this point.

Mystic: Aren’t you just a ray of sunshine? If by some miracle the three of you can move away from those Brutes, we might be able to pull this off.

Judge: Yeah I don’t think that’s happening, we’re going to get flattened. What do you have in mind?

Mystic: Your small minds wouldn’t understand. Let’s just say it’s better to eat attacks from those Brutes then to eat what’s coming next.

Phantom: We’re screwed either way. At least we can try. I’m going for it. GM I’m going to attempt to move away.

GM: Roll defense 3 times.

Rolling Defense: Phantom 14, 7, 10 (with Tower and Shield buff)

GM: You manage to dodge one of the blows but the other two halberds were too much for you to dodge as well. They both strike you. Roll damage.

Phantom: *Rolls 1d10+3* twice. Oh wow, I’m done for. 16 damage. No wait! I’m expending the rest of my Guile (2) to Tumble away some of the damage. I take 10 damage. *Tumble is the Phantom’s Class Feature, it allows a Phantom to reactively mitigate physical damage at 1 Guile for every +AGILITY physical damage reduced. Without thick armour like the beefier classes, Phantoms are slippery yet very fragile. Tumble gives them a small safety net at the cost of Guile that could have otherwise been used to fulfill their role as damage dealer.*

GM: Good call. Who’s next?

Dreadnought: Guess we’ll just go.

GM: Judge and Dreadnought roll defense 3 times each.

Rolling Defense: Judge – 10,13,4 / Dreadnought 6,4,15

Rolling Damage: Judge – 4 damage after armour / Dreadnought 13 damage after armour

GM: Judge, your armour absorbs most of the punishment. Unfortunately for you Dreadnought, despite your armour and one of them missing you the blows that did land are fatal.

Dreadnought: But I am Relentless. I’ll have the last laugh. I’m going to turn on Reckless Assault for this one last hurrah. Go big or go home right?

RELENTLESS
PASSIVE - EFFECTS
When you drop below 0 HP, you are allowed to make an immediate basic melee attack on any target adjacent to you. You are healed for the amount of damage you incur. Cannot occur more than once a fight.

GM: Indeed. Roll attack.

Dreadnought: *Rolls attack* an 8? Garbage... looks I’m a goner.

Priest: NOT TODAY! LORD JADEN SMILES UPON YOU! I cast Divine Intervention on Dreadnought.... And now I’m out of Faith.

DIVINE INTERVENTION		
STANDARD - EFFECTS		
Your god smiles upon you and allows you to rewind the wheel of fate whether it be delivering or taking a blow in battle or a test of skill and chance in a non-combat situation.		
Allow yourself or any ally to re-roll their previous roll (applies to all rolls but damage rolls). Take the highest.		
COST	TARGET	RANGE
4 Faith	Single Ally or Self	Adjacent

GM: Dreadnought, a warm beam of sunlight breaks through the grey clouds above and illuminates you and only you. Jaden’s eyes are watching you and his will turns back the hands of time for just a brief moment. Re-roll your attack

Dreadnought: *Re-rolls attack* 17! I’m a believer! Praise Jaden! *Rolls 2d10+3 damage* 14 damage. I feel reinvigorated.

GM: What would have been your deathblow gives you a jolt of adrenaline and you revel in the frenzy of battle as you take one last crazy slash at the enemy before you retreat safely away.

Ok Mystic, you are up.

Mystic: So if I forgo any action, I can move a **far** distance right?

GM: Yep.

Mystic: And those Brutes are **nearby**?

GM: Yep.

Mystic: I casually walk up to the three Brutes. I turn around and wiggle my ass complete with puncture wound from earlier at them then I strut away slowly like a badass. Let me roll defense for you *rolls defense 3 times* 10,10,6. Who knew craptacular defense rating would come in handy? *Rolls damage 3x* 26 points of damage.

GM: As you walk away, the three halberds come crashing down on your back but unbeknownst to these Brutes, you have an empowered shield on you that after reaching its capacity for absorption explodes sending shimmering blue fragments of arcane energy to everything **adjacent** to you.

Mystic: Yeah that’s umm let’s see.. 23 points of arcane damage. I also take 6 points of damage from the spill over.

GM: The shards of arcane power burn easily through the black metal plates and find the vital organs of all three Brutes. They collapse to the ground twitching and breathing raggedly until both despairing actions cease completely. I think I have some tuning to do....

Mystic: Your welcome.

The Mystic did end up getting knocked out from the spillover damage. Volatile Bulwark has been toned down in the latest version of the game.

On Difficulty and Min-Maxing

One concern that crops up a lot is a worry that players need to min-max or optimize their characters to be able to enjoy combat in Unity. If players are new to the game or enjoy the roleplaying and character development aspects more, the GM can always tone down the difficulty of the encounters. There are no trap-builds in Unity, every power has been built to be compelling and useful. It should be difficult to pick which ones to acquire for your character not because there’s so much to learn and account for but because they all look good and enticing in one situation or another.

With regards to difficulty, finding a sweet spot results in a really nice amount of tension and encourages players to actively engage with each other so that they can overcome the challenge in front of them. The best and most exciting encounters have always been the ones that pushed the players just the right amount. This amount, is of course unique to each gaming group, but the flexibility is subtly built into the system to allow fine-tuning towards this sweet spot. In this instance, the group was pretty savvy so tossing in a heavily armoured Skulker would require them to get a bit more strategic - that made things exciting for them. A group that’s more inexperienced or doesn’t want to be too bothered with optimization might call for that same Skulker to just be a Brute, bigger and beefier, but armourless. To this particular group, this armourless Skulker Brute should provide an equally riveting challenge akin to the one experienced by the more hardened group of players fighting the armoured Skulker.

Multiple Approaches

Players are presented with various ways to approach problems in combat. The armoured Skulker Brute was a big problem and the group dealt with it utilizing the Phantom’s armour breaking abilities (Expose Weakness). They could have also funneled magic attacks into the Brute from the Mystic and Priest which bypass armour. But what would happen with the Skirmishers free-shooting at the softer members of the party? Could the frontline fighters have moved to engage them? Or would that mean the Brutes would have free reign of the battlefield? A lot of interesting situations can crop up depending on the approach a group takes. This variety of possibilities and viable approaches helps keep combat interesting and different each time.