

# A.T.T.A.C.K. - Combat 101

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A.T.T.A.C.K.! Assaulting Thoughtfully: Tactical Advice for Charging with Knights.

These articles are an attempt to give beginners and intermediate players some tools with which they can improve their playing skills, in the form of basic principles and maneuvers you can use with your cavalry. There is a ton of advice on the net about how to write army lists, and on which units to use against which opponents, but very little of it shows you how to do that, so I decided to make some diagrams.

Some of it is more for competitive games, some of it is more general. If there are longer bits of theory, I will put the conclusions in big text so you can just skim over the text and still get the basic point.

Parental advisory: this next bit contains a bit of theory and even &ndash;gasp!- some numbers. Casual gamers (those who like to just charge anything and see what happens) are advised to go to the next article, which will have more pictures.

Step 1a: What kind of combats do I need stay out of?

Well, this should be simple! A big knight unit should break anything it charges, the nice sales bloke at GW told me so!

He lied!

The boys can win the combat against almost anything, but actually breaking something is not as easy. Many units have good Ld, and Battle Standard Bearers are quite popular nowadays. That means you have to hit them hard before they break. Real hard!

But I do hit them hard, I have strong units!

An example: a standard Skaven Clanrat block is 30 strong for 165 points inc musician and standard. A block of 8 KotR, full command with a basic paladin is about 300 points.

This should be a pushover...

You roll 5 wounds, fairly average. the Combat Resolution is:

Skaven 3 ranks, standard, outnumber (US 24)= 5

Bret 2 ranks, standard, 5 wounds caused = 8

Ha! Won by 3, that'll teach them! Okay, now for the break test...

With the general nearby, the rats have a Ld of 10. This will allow them to test on a 7.

Okay, that's not spectacular but still a good chance of breaking.

The rats actually have a 58% chance of holding! And you were lucky the BSB wasn't around...

Oh no, they passed their break test! But I can still win this, can't I?

Unfortunately, the chance of breaking them in subsequent turns is negligible, since only 3 of your models can attack, most of which is at S3 and won't do much to them. And if an unlucky combat round doesn't see you off, sooner or later one of the many other Skaven units will charge your flank and send you running.

Well, I'm faster! I'll just outrun them and try again

The risk of getting caught is very real, especially if there are 2 units pursuing. You also lose your banner and your blessing. Even worse, if you rally you can't move, so you'll be a sitting duck for the follow-up charge by the pursuers, who will probably be in charge range. And without a banner you stand even less chances of winning!

Well, it's only one unit lost. I have more.

Firstly, it is a hammer unit, which are essential to victory and of which you will only have a few. Secondly, let's look at the balance on the table (assuming nothing else has been killed yet):

If you destroyed the Skaven unit:

.....Bret.....Skaven

VP.....265.....0

Models left.....2000 pts.....1865 pts

If they destroyed your unit:

.....Bret.....Skaven

VP.....0.....400

Models left.....1700 pts.....2000 pts

Whoah! A 465 point swing in models! And a 665 point swing in VP!!

Even worse, not only are you now 400 points behind in VP, your army is now 15% smaller than his, making it more difficult to still pull off a win.

But maybe I had a unit in support! Or maybe my other hammer unit did break its target! Or...

That is correct, this was an isolated example, and we have made some assumptions. But it is a very typical situation, and even if circumstances are different the conclusion remains:

Throwing expensive units into uncertain combats and hoping for luck will often lose you the game!

Step 1b: What kind of combats do I want to aim for?

So I should always make sure I reduce them to an insane courage roll?

Not necessarily. The best thing to do is try to find a balance between the points you are investing in the units you send to do a job and the reliability with which they will achieve it. If you can get a flank, then reducing them to testing on a 2 is often possible. But from the front, the necessary effort will often be huge, more than the target is worth.

How huge?

We all suffer from "rubber lance syndrome"; every now and then, a unit doing much less damage than average. To make the Skaven unit in the above example to test on Insane courage, you need outnumbering and 8 wounds. But because the amount of damage you do varies, if you want to make sure you get 8 wounds you have to throw in enough troops to cause 10 or 11 on average!

That would require 2 of those 300 point lances...that is a lot!

Even worse, the more points you invest in breaking a unit, the smaller the extra benefit of adding more knights. Obviously, a lot of that combat potential is often wasted, just producing kills beyond 8 which have no effect on the break test. But even before you reach that point, the rewards are getting less. This is because of the 2D6 roll: there is a one in 6 chance that a break test will produce a 7, but the odds of a 3 are only 1 in 18.

So the more combat power I have, the less effect it has to increase it?

Exactly! If you increase the size and amount of the units that charge the Skaven, you get 1 wound more for roughly every 2 KotR you add (apart from the outnumber bonus, we'll talk about that later). So it takes the same amount of extra models to go from winning by 3 to winning by 4 as it does to go from 7 to 8. But since the move from Ld 7 to Ld 6 has 3 times more effect than the move from 3 to 2, the points you paid for those last 2 extra knights have a much smaller payoff. Remember, a battle is about more than one combat, so the more points you invest in this combat, the less you have for all the things the rest of your army needs to achieve. So that smaller payoff is important, you need to find a balance between winning this combat reliably and leaving enough points for the rest.

So what is the best thing to do?

There are no hard and fast rules, but my general rule of thumb in Warhammer is that any important action needs at least an 80% chance of success. If we translate that to a battle plan where you have the initiative, and you are setting up a charge that needs to break its target immediately, then:

If you need to break them on the charge, the average damage you do should at least reduce their break test to a 4. (3 if they have a BSB reroll).

Keeping in mind what we discussed before, I feel this is probably the optimal number. Adding more CR is not so effective because of the overkill effect and low odds of rolling a 4 or 3, having less CR becomes very dangerous very quickly.

So it should always be exactly 4?

A bit better than 4 is fine, but only go below 2.5 if you have troops to spare, or when you cannot afford to lose. Examples of having troops to spare is if you have fastcav on a flank already, or when you are just cleaning up their missile units. An instance of when you cannot afford to lose is when a pursuit roll by the enemy would give them an immediate charge on your other units. In this case you should hit them very hard.

In the picture below, if you do not break the central dwarf unit, the rightmost unit will charge your flank, probably breaking your units. This will give both dwarfs units a pursuit to the left. Unfortunately the left lance will run into the missile unit behind the dwarf infantry if he breaks and pursues. That means it'll be stuck in the pursuit path of the dwarfs if the center combat goes badly. In this case you should throw in enough troops to force an insane courage roll on the central dwarf unit.

Also, if you are in a tight spot, then of course you should go with whatever is your best option, so often it is not possible to win by enough points to reach 4. The choice between charging with 50/50 odds of winning and getting charged and wiped out is of course an easy one.

Can't I just go on my gut feeling? I'm not so good with numbers to figure out things like average damage.

Of course you can! But keep in mind that if you don't have a bit of understanding of what you can expect in damage, know the static CR and what the Ld test is likely to be, then it will take a LOT of time before your gut feeling becomes reliable. Fortunately, it doesn't have to be hard.

Figuring out static CR is easy if you practice, and if you follow the Ld 4 rule then you don't need to think about that too much either! Damage takes a little more work, but in a later article I'll try to give some simple and quick methods, as well as thorough ones. It really does help, since for Bretons (unlike Skaven for instance), causing wounds is essential to our strategy.

Continuing combats: Expanding frontage



When you win the combat but the enemy doesn't break, you have the option of performing a turn or expanding frontage.

When to turn should be pretty obvious, but expanding frontage is a trickier question, since it might cost you rank bonus.

It really depends on which type of Knights, how many ranks you will lose and how tough the enemy unit is. My usual guideline is that Errants and Realms should only do if they have no rank bonus left and no hardhitting enemy models will be pulled in BTB (so a wide Swordmaster unit is a no-no!). Questers should only give up one rank if they get 3 or more guys in and also not against hard enemy units (Questers are not very good in combat, actually). Grails should only give up one rank if they get 2 or more guys in.

There is one other thing to keep in mind about expanding: because of the width of the Lance formation and of a 20mm infantry formation, you can only fit two extra knights when expanding!

since we have to maximize the number of enemy fighting, when charging we cannot put the edge of the knights aligned with the edge of the Skaven like this:

it only happens against 20mm bases 5-wide, but those are very common.

Useful tips for combats

No 1: Always try to outnumber!

But it's only 1 point of CR...big deal!

Wrong! It's 2 points, since if you don't get it, the opponent will. Remember the Skaven combat:

Skaven 3 ranks, standard, outnumber (US 24) = 5

Bret 2 ranks, standard, 5 wounds caused = 8

Let's see what would happen if there were only 20 Skaven to start with:

Skaven 3 ranks, standard = 4

Bret 2 ranks, standard, outnumber (US 18), 5 wounds caused = 9

Won by 5! That's 2 extra points of CR!

And the best thing is: you don't need any magic toys, or lucky dice rolls. All you need is to concentrate your forces on a few of his units. Which is what Brets do best, anyways.

No 2: Do NOT fight fair!

This is war, not football!

If you can improve your chances by fleeing with a unit, do so.

If you are challenged by a combat character and you could accept with your BSB or your champion, choose the champ.

If you are charged by a lord on a dragon, challenge with the champ.

If an Ogre Tyrant challenges you, refuse.

If you can allocate attacks on a wizard, don't hesitate.

No 3: Do NOT get broken on your own charge!

If you want to hold up a unit, don't charge them with a light unit that might lose combat on the charge. If your unit breaks, he will get a free pursuit move AND will be moving next, so he can immediately exploit his breakthrough. It is better to park your unit in front of his for a flee trap, more about those in the next article.

Alright, That's it for now. Next time: Outmaneuvering enemy cavalry!

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