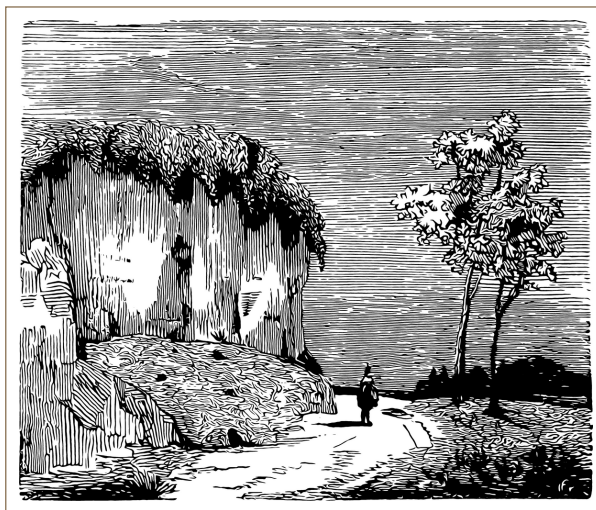


WIZARDS & LIZARDS

ABSTRACT COMBAT

A WIZARDS & LIZARDS SUPPLEMENT



B E T A

Version 0.10 · not yet playtested

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The core runs combat as a **skirmish**: Speed is a distance, and the GM eyeballs who charges, who flanks, who has cover. That wants a sketch, some tokens, and a little measuring. **Abstract combat** is the lighter, **theater-of-the-mind** alternative for when you have none of that, a chaotic scene with a dozen bodies, or a table playing online. It trades the skirmish's fine control of space for speed.

This **changes how you track position, not the combat system**. Every other rule stands unchanged: the 3d6 ladder, three actions an activation, the Multiple Attack Penalty, damage and armor, Defend and Steady, the condition list (but **Slowed** is a movement effect, so it has a zone reading, below), stress, death saves. The only thing that changes is how you track *where* people are. If a rule is not mentioned below, it works exactly as the core book says.

ZONES

Carve the scene into a handful of **zones**, two to five named regions: *the gatehouse, the muddy ford, the rafters, the open yard*. A zone holds any number of combatants. Say which zones are **adjacent** (you can step from one to the next) and which are not, usually a simple line or a loop. That little map of named regions and their links is the entire battlefield. Sketch it on a scrap or just hold it in your head.

Each combatant is **in** one zone, and that is the only position you track. To be in the same zone as an enemy is to be **engaged** with it.

REACH AND RANGE

You want to	You can reach
Strike or melee Maneuver	a foe in your zone
Shoot or hurl a bolt	a foe within the weapon's range band , below
An area effect (a blast, a breath)	everyone in one zone

A ranged weapon's **range band** (see Gear) sets how far it carries across the zones:

- **Short** (a thrown rock or axe, the handgonne up close): your zone or one **adjacent** zone.
- **Medium** (a sling, a javelin): up to **two zones** away.
- **Long** (a bow, a crossbow): **any zone you can see**.

A shot **one band past** that reach is a **long shot, -1**; two bands past is out of reach. Sight is the GM's call: a wall, a door, smoke, or a sharp bend blocks a shot. A melee attacker who shares the zone ignores any cover the zone offers.

MOVING AND CLOSING THE DISTANCE

Two kinds of movement happen in a fight, and abstract play prices them apart.

Closing or opening range. The gap between the two sides is measured in the same three bands as a bowshot, **short / medium / long**, and most fights open with the lines well apart. Crossing one band toward the enemy (or falling back one) costs **two Move actions**, and it costs the **same for everyone**, fleet scout and armored knight alike. Speed buys no faster charge across open ground. So a fight that opens at long range is the better part of two activations spent running before the slow folk trade blows, and a line of archers gets those volleys off while you come. A single leftover Move banks toward your next band, so you are never moving for nothing. **This is the one rule that keeps abstract play honest:** without it everyone reaches everyone at once on the first activation, and a bow loses its bite.

Shifting within the fray. Once the lines have met, sliding sideways, off one foe and onto another, around to a flank, back to guard a friend, costs a single **Move**. This is where **Speed** earns its keep: a Speed 2 skirmisher makes one such shift and still has the action to spend, threading the melee while heavy infantry can only trudge. Speed also decides who reaches the enemy's back line first and who breaks away clean.

Slowed, and snares, in zones. A condition that hampers movement has to be read onto the band track, since Speed is otherwise flat here and halving it must bite somewhere. A **Slowed** combatant pays **double to close or open range, four Move actions to cross a band instead of two**, and a within-fray shift costs it two Moves, not one. That is the abstract echo of moving at half Speed: a bola or a frost-touched foe still fights, but it crawls across the field and cannot run a kiter down. **Caltrops** and the like, a hazard a footed creature would have to step around, cost the body that hits them **one Move action on its next activation** to pick clear. **Entangled** needs no translation: it cannot move at all, neither crossing bands nor shifting in the fray, until it makes its save and tears free.

Leaving a zone works exactly like leaving melee in the core: free, **unless a foe in the zone is holding its ground** (the Defend action), in which case breaking away draws a free Strike, **one for each action the holder spent holding, no foe struck twice**; slip it by spending a Maneuver to **Disengage** first. Read "your reach" as "your zone" and the core rule needs no change here. Even when no one is holding ground, you do not escape for nothing: a foe of equal or greater Speed spends its own activation closing the same band and re-engages. Outrunning a pursuer means being **faster** than it, or putting a blocked zone between you. This is why Speed and a second ranged option matter so in abstract play.

FRONTAGE: HOW MANY CAN PILE ON

A zone has no walls to pin a fight, but bodies still get in one another's way. **No more than two attackers can press the same target in melee in a round.** A third who wants that foe must wait for an opening next round, turn on a different enemy, or strike from range. A grid enforces this for free, only so many bodies fit shoulder to shoulder, and without it a mob would drown your weakest hero under a dozen blades at once. The cap is **per target**, so a swarm has to spread across your whole line rather than gang one, and a held chokepoint (a zone the GM rules only one or two can fight in) is the abstract echo of holding a door.

A **Large** creature, an ogre or a troll, presents more frontage: up to **four** can ring it at once. Size cuts both ways, the big thing is easier to surround, and the rule that protects your line also lets a Dire foe be swarmed in turn.

POSITION, IN ZONES

The core's five flat position modifiers all still apply; you just read them off the zone map instead of a tabletop.

Situation	Modifier	In zones
Charging into melee	+1	close the last band into the foe's zone, then Strike
Outnumbering (flanking)	+1	more of your side than the foe's, engaged in the zone
Higher ground	+1	the GM has tagged a zone as commanding
Target behind cover	−1 to hit	the GM has tagged the zone as cover (shots only)
A long shot	−1	a band past the weapon's reach

Abstract adds one modifier of its own. A grid lets a defender's dodging step tell, as broken line of sight or a scrap of cover; zones are too coarse to track that, so abstract play compensates with a flat rule: a target that spent a **Move** this activation is **harder to shoot**, −1 to hit it with ranged until its next activation. So closing the gap under fire, rather than standing in the open, is often safer than it looks, the lesson every skirmisher learns, and it is why a charge can be the right answer to a line of archers. (This one is abstract's alone; the skirmish grid has no such rule, a moving body there is handled by cover and line of sight.)

Two bands of open ground separate the party from two archers across a ford. The mage Shoots a bolt the whole way, a long shot at −1, and still scorches one archer. Bram (Speed 1) puts his whole activation into closing: three Move actions carry him one full band (two Moves) with the third banked, so he ends the activation still a band short and eats a volley. Next activation one more Move spends the banked progress to finish the second band, arriving engaged with two actions left to Strike. The lesson is the cost of crossing open ground at a bow line, two activations under fire, which is exactly why a second archer of your own, or a flank that shortens the approach, is worth so much.

A ROUND AT THE TABLE

To see zone play in motion, here is one fight run through. Three zones sit in a line: **the approach** (open ground), **the gate** where the party forms up, and **the keep-yard** behind it where the caster **Sela** shelters. **Doran**, **Wick**, and the archer **Toma** hold the gate; the approach and the keep-yard are each **adjacent** to it. Two raider **skirmishers** start a **medium** band out.

keep-yard [Sela] – gate [Doran Wick Toma] · · · ← raiders
(approach)

First activation, closing under fire. The raiders must cross the open ground, and the band track makes them pay: one band is **two Move actions, the same for everyone**. Three actions carry each raider two Moves (one band closer, medium to short) with the **third Move banked**. They spend the whole turn running and still end a **short** band out, while Toma shoots. A raider that **Moved** this activation is **−1 to hit** with ranged, so one arrow bites and one goes wide. This is the rule that keeps abstract honest: open ground in front of a bow costs the attacker real activations.

Second activation, contact. Each raider spends its **banked Move plus one more** to cross the last band and step onto the gate, now **engaged** with the party. Doran and Wick were braced: each spent an action to **hold his ground** (Defend). In zones “your reach” reads as “your zone”, so a foe breaking from the gate draws a free Strike.

Frontage decides the pile-up. Both raiders want Sela, but she is a zone away in the keep-yard, and **no more than two attackers can press one target** in any case. To follow her a raider must **leave the gate for the keep-yard**, drawing Doran’s held-ground Strike unless it first spends a **Maneuver** to **Disengage** (no roll), the whole zone being one reach with no gap to thread. That is a Move and a Maneuver gone to shift a single zone, and the second raider, capped out of Sela’s fight, is left trading with Wick at the gate.

The dice are the core’s. Wick **Strikes** the raider at the gate: $3d6 + \text{ Might } - \text{ its Defense}$, and a 13 lands a clean **Success**, full sword damage past armor; his second swing takes the **Multiple Attack Penalty** (–2) and manages only a **Partial**.

The assault breaks. The gate-raider, bloodied and outmatched two to one, falls the next round. The one that chased Sela into the keep-yard finds no prize: spent from the crossing and the Disengage, it eats a spell at close range as Wick follows it in, and goes down between them. The band never had the bodies to force the yard, which is exactly what frontage promised.

Nothing changed but the map: the ladder, the three actions, the penalty, and the armor are all exactly the core’s. Only *where everyone stands* was tracked in zones instead of inches.

SKIRMISH OR ABSTRACT?

Neither is more correct; they are two **play styles**. Use the **skirmish** core when your table wants **tactical combat** and the fight’s interest is its terrain, a choke point to hold, a flank to turn, a gap to close under fire, and you have a minute to push tokens around. Reach for **abstract combat** when you’d rather run **theater of the mind**: to move fast, when there are too many bodies to place, or when there is nothing to place them on. A table can switch between the two from fight to fight; the numbers do not change, only the bookkeeping.

Tested in the simulator. The project’s combat simulator (`tools/sim/`, run with `--zones`) models the zone rules against the precise skirmish core (`--skirmish`): a range track, melee in-zone only, ranged across the field at a long-shot penalty, two Moves to close a band, and the frontage cap above. Tuned this way the two modes land within a point or two of each other across the test encounters. What the numbers say, and what to expect at the table: **ranged foes are properly dangerous**, since crossing the open ground to a bow line takes real activations under fire; **Speed stays load-bearing**, earning its keep in the melee shuffle and the race to your back line rather than in a faster charge; and a **melee swarm cannot dogpile one hero**, because frontage forces it to spread across your whole line, just as a grid would.