Balanced Combat Resistance

INCLUDED IN THE SYMBAROUM CORE RULEBOOK is a simple template for designing suitable challenges for a group of newly created player characters. Here follows a more detailed model on what the GM should keep in mind when designing combat challenges, based on the player characters' Competence Level and the intended Difficulty of the fight.

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IT SHOULD BE clear that this text is not offering a mathematical formula, describing exactly how the GM must think when creating combat challenges. Things like your particular group's preferred style of gaming and how your players tend to spend their *Experience* must also be considered – groups that view combat as a joint tactical mind-game should be offered tougher challenges compared to groups who are playing for the drama; the same goes for groups who are looking to make optimum use of the rules rather than building their characters based on personality and... well, character.

This text ends with a list of pre-made challenges, built by considering three factors: Competence Level, Difficulty and Setting. These challenges can be taken and used during play or regarded as detailed examples of how this model for designing balanced combat resistance may be put into practice.

Competence Level

THE FIRST THING the GM should consider is the actual combat competence of the player characters as a group. Simply put, this can be estimated based on how much *Experience* they have gained, combined with the number of mystical artifacts they have acquired.

If the GM wants to be meticulous, he or she can choose to overlook any *Experience* spent on abilities, rituals, traits or boons which do not make the characters more effective in combat. But in doing so, remember that this model can never offer more than a rough estimate – in Symbaroum, combat is not only about which and how many abilities a character has, but also the combination of abilities/powers/traits and how the players actually choose to use them.

BEGINNERS – LIMITED ADVENTURES
Beginners spend their time adventuring in smaller or more limited settings than those who are more experienced. The adventures take place in locations that are neither vast nor well-populated, and often distanced from where the real power of the game world resides – for example, in free settlements, isolated outposts at the borders of Davokar or at one of the many solitary inns or estates throughout Ambria.

Table 1: Competence Level

COMPETENCE LEVEL	EXPERIENCE	# OF ADVENTURES	DESCRIPTION
Beginners (starting level)	50	0	Each character has abilities at the Novice level, some single ones at Adept.
Experienced	100	approx. 5	Each character has abilities at Adept level. The group has one or two artifacts, most have a weapon or armor with qualities.
Veterans	200	approx. 15	Each character has several abilities at Master level. All in the group have an artifact, and all their weapons and armor have qualities.
Heroes	300	approx. 25	Some group members have two or more artifacts, and all their weapons and armor have qualities.

If such an adventure is set in a town, it probably deals with gangs, important individuals or a certain district rather than the town as a whole. However, what this kind of adventure lacks in scope, it should compensate for by adding depth: problems do not affect anonymous groups, but named individuals, often ones already known by the player characters and deemed worthy of their sympathy and help.

The enemies of the player characters are also linked to the area, likely connected to the powerful factions of the world without being very powerful themselves.

Beginners preferably deal with...
... threats against a solitary inn, farm or village in the countryside, alternately against individuals or a group in a town.
... enemies posing Weak or Ordinary resistance, or single Challenging ones.

EXPERIENCED – LOCAL ADVENTURES
Experienced characters experience local adventures. A local adventure is set in a town, a smaller county or a limited part of the woods. The enemies are linked to the area and are often members of the game world's major factions.

Experienced character seldom encounter the high level representatives of the factions or other powers in the area, since these are acting on a regional or national arena beyond the characters' reach. However, the outcome of local adventures can alter the power balance between factions at the adventure location.

Experienced characters preferably deal with...
... threats against towns, counties, baronies or the domain of a local barbarian chieftain.
... enemies posing Ordinary and Challenging resistance, or single Strong ones. Weak enemies come in packs, led by a more competent enemy.

VETERANS – REGIONAL ADVENTURES
Veterans engage in regional adventures, placing the player characters at the center of politics, war and epic mysteries. The opposition encountered is bigger, tougher and harder to beat. Maybe it is even impossible to defeat the enemy in a conventional way, at least for the player characters alone?

Alliances, sometimes with what may have been local enemies, are what it takes to triumph! The characters encounter high ranking representatives of the involved factions, but never the true wielders of power.

Veterans preferably deal with...
... threats against duchies and whole barbarian clans.
... enemies posing Challenging and Strong resistance, or single Mighty ones. Weaker enemies come in hordes, twice as many as the player characters.

HEROES – GLOBAL ADVENTURES
Heroes deal with adventures on a global scale, traveling far and wide over continents in the hunt for allies, powerful weapons and an enemy which seems impossible to vanquish. At this level, high politics is inescapable, and the player characters socialize with, and plot against, the highest leaders of Ambria, the barbarian clans and the Elves of Davokar.

Heroes preferably deal with...
... threats against realms, people or races, or the very metaphysical order of existence.
... enemies posing Strong or Mighty resistance, or single Legendary ones. If lesser enemies are encountered, such as Ordinary or Challenging, they are numerous beyond count.

Competence & Opposition

BASED ON THE average competence of the player characters, suitable opponents for a certain kind of combat can be decided. In this text we distinguish between Easy and Hard combat situations, but the GM may of course design challenges positioned somewhere in-between these extremes.

Easy: An easy combat challenge is one in which the player characters are expected to win. Such fights are often found early in the adventure, to introduce the enemy without risking an abrupt end to the story. If circumstances are against the characters (they are surprised or the enemy is resilient against the characters' main powers), an easy combat challenge can prove difficult, especially if the players do not cooperate and use their strengths effectively.

Hard: A hard combat challenge is suitable as the final fight, and the outcome should be uncertain even if the odds favor the player characters. They must make use of their strengths and exploit the enemy's weaknesses to have any hope of prevailing. Failing this, they will likely perish.

Opposition and Experience

The level of resistance primarily states how much *Experience* the creature has spent on traits and abilities. As a GM, this is a good place to start when creating challenges, as a framework for the complexity and difficulty of the opposition.

Listed below are six levels of resistance. Aside from the ones mentioned in the Core Rulebook, the level Legendary is introduced – including special and unique monstrosities that are terribly tough to handle. Legendary creatures are always named, unique individuals; there are no whole races or families of creatures that in general pose such daunting resistance.

RESISTANCE	EXPERIENCE	QUICK DISTRIBUTION
Weak	None	No abilities; equipment worth 10 thaler.
Ordinary	50	Adept x 1, Novice x 2
Challenging	150	Master x 2, Adept x 1
Strong	300	Master x 5
Mighty	600	Master x 10
Legendary	1200	Master x 20

Table 2: Competence Level and Resistance

COMPETENCE LEVEL	EASY COMBAT	HARD COMBAT
Beginner	PC number of Weak enemies with an Ordinary leader	PC number of Ordinary enemies, or [PC+2] Weak ones, led by a Challenging enemy
Experienced	PC number of Ordinary enemies with a Challenging leader	PC number of Challenging enemies, or [PC+2] Ordinary ones, led by a Strong enemy
Veterans	PC number of Challenging enemies with a Strong leader	PC number of Strong enemies, or [PCx2] Weak ones, led by a Mighty enemy
Heroes	PC number of Strong enemies with a Mighty leader	PC number of Mighty enemies, or [PCx2] Ordinary ones, led by a Legendary enemy

Competence & Setting

THE WORLD OF Symbaroum is full of threats, and even seemingly safe environments can present horrors and challenges. However, as a principle of design, the GM may do well to regard the world as characterized by a gradual transition from the relative safety of Ambria to the brutal dangers lurking within the blight-stricken depths of Davokar.

Even if the challenges of a specific adventure (be they Easy or Hard) can be graded based on the competence level of the characters, the setting should also influence the design. Sure, the player characters may encounter really tough challenges while on Ambrian soil, but when having help and shelter nearby such single encounters are often manageable. The situation is very different inside the Forest of Davokar, where danger is always present and any characters that survive a challenge are more likely to encounter a new one than they are to find a cozy inn or an accomplished healer.

Table 3: Competence Level and Setting

COMPETENCE LEVEL	SETTING
Beginner	Mostly adventures in Ambria, with shorter excursions into Bright Davokar
Experienced	Longer journeys in Bright Davokar, with short trips into Dark Davokar
Veterans	Routine presence in Bright Davokar, with most challenges found in Dark Davokar
Heroes	Dark Davokar is still a challenge but a manageable one; the real tests are found in the thoroughly corrupt parts of the forest

Possible Encounters

BELOW IS A listing of possible encounters, designed on the basis of Competence Level and Setting as described in this text. These challenges can be used as they are, for quick access to suitable resistance, or regarded as examples meant to clarify how this model for balanced combat resistance is intended to work.

All creatures mentioned in the list are featured in the *Symbaroum Core Rulebook*. With the help of Table 2, the GM may of course swap these for other monsters and adversaries, taken from the *Core Rulebook* or other *Symbaroum* supplements.

BEGINNER
Mostly adventures in Ambria, with shorter excursions into Bright Davokar.
Easy combat in Ambria: PC number of Cult Follower + one Cult Leader
Easy combat in Bright Davokar: PC number of Robbers + one Robber Chief
Hard combat in Ambria: PC number of Village Warriors + one Guard Warrior
Hard combat in Bright Davokar: PC number of Spring Elves + one Late Summer Elf

EXPERIENCED
Longer journeys in Bright Davokar, with short trips into Dark Davokar.
Easy combat in Bright Davokar: PC number of Queen's Rangers + one Ranger Captain
Easy combat in Dark Davokar: PC number of Rage Trolls, Famished + one Rage Troll, Group-Living
Hard combat in Bright Davokar: PC number of Early Summer Elves + one Autumn Elf
Hard combat in Dark Davokar: PC number of Aboars + one Liege Troll

VETERANS
Routine presence in Bright Davokar, with most challenges found in Dark Davokar.
Easy combat in Bright Davokar: PC number of Rage Trolls, Group-Living + one Lindworm
Easy combat in Dark Davokar: PC number of Necromages + one Cryptwalker
Hard combat in Bright Davokar: [PCx2] Jakaars + one Arch Troll
Hard combat in Dark Davokar: PC number of Lindworms + one Arch Troll

HEROES
Dark Davokar is still a challenge but a manageable one; the real tests are found in the thoroughly corrupt parts of the forest.
Easy combat in Dark Davokar: PC number of Liege Trolls + one Arch Troll
Easy combat in Black Davokar: PC number of Blight Born Aboars + one Primal Blight Beast
Hard combat in Dark Davokar: [PCx2] Dragouls + one Legendary enemy
Hard combat in Black Davokar: PC number of Primal Blight Beasts + one Legendary enemy