
FAR, CLOSE & RUSHED PLAY

When playing out an adventure, you will narrate the unfolding events with different levels of detail.

CLOSE

Sometimes you'll play out adventurers feeling their way along cavern walls, or exchanging tense words and nervous glances across the negotiating table. This is close play.

FAR

At other times, time will breeze by: days spent waiting out storms while huddling in cliffside caves, a month at sea, a season spent practicing swordplay and drinking away painful memories—these events could might pass with just a mention.

Play will gloss over numerous events not important to describe, summarizing and hitting only the highlights. This is far play.

BACK AND FORTH

Often you will spend extended periods in close play, such as while exploring a dangerous cave. At other times, you will switch back and forth frequently, such as when you describe wildlife and foliage seen on a long walk through a forest, and players wish to interact with the things they describe.

Perhaps they notice footprints in soft mud and stop to investigate, but soon press on with their journey, their minds on the destination.

Except during downtime (see page 74), when the whole group shifts to far play, transitions between close and far play needn't be mentioned.

RUSHED PLAY

The third level of detail is rushed play. The GM imposes this whenever events are happening faster than the adventurers can integrate them.

When the floor falls away, when arrows start landing unexpectedly, when the screaming Ricalu scouts crash into the party's shield wall, this is rushed play.

RUSHED TURNS

Unlike close and far play, rushed play follows a strict turn sequence. Each turn has the same sequence:

1. The GM gives the adventurer a “lead-in”, telling them what situation confronts them.
2. The adventurer says what they try to do.
3. The action is resolved.

Play continues clockwise until the rushed situation ends.

WHO STARTS?

The GM nominates chooses who will be the active player first. This is often the player whose adventurer who noticed something urgent happening, but not necessarily.

The GM starts each adventurer’s turn by describing the most noticeable thing confronting them, then asking what they do. Once the action is resolved (with a test, or just with narration), the player to their left gets a turn. (Adventurers who are incapacitated or not present in the rushed situation are skipped.)

THE LEAD-IN

The most noticeable thing could be the ogre advancing on them. It may be a gravelly scrape from behind, or an sheet of orange flame curling across the ceiling. Perhaps it’s the shooting pain from their leg injury, or maybe it’s seeing Ganner lurch backwards and slump down, for reasons unknown. Sometimes it’s the actions of visible companions.

When choosing what to describe, the GM should consider three things:

- What’s happening around (or to) the adventurer?
- How aware are they of this situation? What has had their attention so far?
- How much time do they have to take things in before they must react?

Good lead-ins imply action—it should be apparent that the situation is evolving rapidly, and that something will happen if the adventurer doesn’t intervene. (If not, perhaps rush play is over!)

AWARENESS

Adventurers that have had time to observe the situation get clearer, more complete information. Adventurers that are overwhelmed

by pain or chaos, have been bumped around or surprised, only get general impressions.

LOOKING AROUND

Asking for more information about what's going on is often wise. But this takes time! During rushed play, adventurers should feel torn between understanding the situation better and acting on their partial information.

If a test is in order (e.g. because of chaotic action), consider Wits/2. Success means clear description. Extra successes earn details, or (at the GM's option) allow the adventurer to take a quick follow-up action.

Failure means partial information, vague impressions, or that the adventurer has left themselves open as they gawk dumbly.

RESOLVING THE ACTION

The GM decides how the situation gets resolved. This could be through simple narration, or perhaps a test will be involved.

Are the lead-in and the adventurer's action in direct conflict? Does it matter which happens first? If so, an opposed test is probably in order.

EXERTION

Unless the adventurers take pains to organize themselves for group action, or exert themselves, the events of rushed play will overtake them.

As the active adventurer performs their action, the rest are completing their own actions, or doing nothing other than desperately trying to integrate what is happening.

The exception is exertion. By accumulating points of exertion, adventurers can subvert the usual turn sequence by *Joining in* or *Interrupting*.

JOINING IN

By accumulating one point of exertion, any adventurer can perform the same action as the active adventurer.

For the purposes of the active player's test (if there is one), this counts as helping under pressure.

Adventurers can only join in if they're positioned to do so. If they're not in position but nearby, the GM may increase difficulty of helping by /+1 or /+2.

INTERRUPTING

After the GM has said their lead-in for the active adventurer, other adventurers may interrupt.

Interrupting actions must be brief - fast enough that they could theoretically complete or interfere in time. Interrupts can allow the interrupting player to try to shoot first, shove a fellow adventurer out of harm's way, dodge an area attack or volley of arrows, and so on.

The interrupting action is resolved immediately, without a lead-in. Depending on the situation, the GM might declare that the interruption happens before the lead-in, simultaneously with the lead-in, or the GM could call for a test to determine the order of what happens.

Other adventurers may Join In by spending exertion, but you can't interrupt an interruption.

After the interruption is resolved, the original acting player gets their turn.

COMMANDS

When an adventurer commands the party to act, they use their turn to bark a short order—just a few words. The would-be commander tests Command/1, with /+1 or more for intense chaos or deafening background sounds. (Shouting orders during a brutal melee at foot of a waterfall, /+2.)

If the commander succeeds, one adventurer plus one per extra success may join in the commander's action without exertion.

If the commander has a burden of leadership, double the number of adventurers that may join in. Orders from leaders are expected.

A command that initiates group action should be resolved immediately. If the commander is leading by example, everyone following counts as helping under pressure.

If the commander is only directing others, one of the adventurers following orders must lead whatever test follows.

ONE.. TWO.. THREE..

It's possible for adventurers to plan ahead to make coordinated action. This must happen before rushed play. Once the rush begins, there is no time for elaborate plan-making, and the party must rely on exertion and commands to act together.

More rarely, there is a brief lull in the action that's too short to count as the end of rush play, but allows adventurers a chance to coordinate.

THE TOLL OF EXERTION

As rush play ends, adrenaline subsides and the effects of exertion take their toll. Everyone involved in the rush must roll Grit/Burdens.

Test Result	Mandatory Rest
Fail by 2 or more	Unconscious. Take damage = exertion
Failure	Stumbling. Take damage = exertion
Success	Winded
1 Extra Success	Ready after a deep breath
2+ Extra Successes	Exhilarating. Restore d3 health

OVEREXERTION

The maximum exertion spend is 6. Any adventurer who spends this much resolves their action, then immediately pays the toll of exertion.

CATCHING YOUR BREATH

An adventurer can voluntarily pay the toll of exertion early by catching their breath. This takes a minute or two during which they're out of the action. If they're interrupted, their rest counts for nothing.

FIGHTING

Physical conflicts are part of adventuring in ALM. This section has rules for resolving individual actions during fights.

BOUNDS

When you fight an enemy with hand weapons, test Arms opposed. The winner out-duels the other and inflicts damage: one point per extra success.

WEAPONS

Weapons increase the damage caused by each success.

Weapon	Dmg	Special
Axe	-	Ignores 1 armor
Bow	-	30 paces
Dagger	+1	Short reach, Quick draw
Sling	-	15 paces
Spears	-	Long reach, Ignores 1 armor
Specialist Weapons		
Sword	-	Long reach, Quick draw
Pole axe	+1	Long reach
War sword	+1	Long reach
War axe	+1	Ignores 1 armor
Lance	+2	Long reach, Tricky (/+1) , Mounted
Great bow	+1	60 paces, Ignores 1 armor
Crossbow	+2	60 paces, Ignores 1 armor, Slow Reload

Some weapons are particularly good at penetrating armor; these ignore one point of armor protection. Short and Long weapons refer to weapon reach (see below). Quick weapons are easy to ready as they slip from sheaths; as long as you're aware of your attacker, you can have your quick weapon ready. Crossbows are so slow to reload that they are effectively one-shot weapons for chaotic skirmishes. In large-scale battles (where turns are a little longer) they can be reused as long as a turn is spent narrating re-winding them.

PRESSING THE ATTACK

The loser of a bout is disadvantaged; rocked back on their heels, scrambling backwards, or perhaps their weapon is out of position, or the winner has closed (or retreated) to a better distance for their weapon's reach.

When you press the attack against your disadvantaged opponent, you inflict double damage (after bonuses are considered).

HELPLESS FOES

When you attack a helpless enemy, test Arms/1 and do double damage. (Only do this if the outcome is uncertain for some reason. If you have time to kill someone helpless, they're dead.)

WEAPON REACH BONUS

Whoever has the weapon with the most appropriate weapon reach gets a +1 Rating bonus. In open terrain with combatants closing from range, this usually goes to the longer weapon.

In brawls, crowds, or close scuffles, knives have the advantage over longer weapons. If it's not obvious, neither combatant gets a reach advantage. Bare-handed opponents never get this bonus.

SHOOTING

When you shoot at a stationary, nearby target with a bow, sling or other missile weapon, test Bows/1.

Add /+1 if they are alert and moving. If they are doing nothing but dodging you, test Bows/Vigor opposed.

Add /+1 or /+2 for long distances.

Success means a hit that does one point of damage, and another for each extra success.

SPRINTING, EVADING AND FLEEING

When you rush to get there first, just in time, or to get away, test Vigor/gear burdens. When you're racing someone else's action, roll Vigor opposed to their skill. If they win, they get there first.

If you are riding a mount trained for war, roll Riding instead.

FIGHTING AGGRESSIVELY

If either combatant is fighting aggressively, foregoing a proper defense in order to land blows sooner and harder, add +2 to the damage done by either side.

FIGHTING DEFENSIVELY

If an adventurer fights defensively, they test Arms as normal, but with +1 Rating. If they win, they do no damage, and their opponent is not disadvantaged.

GRABBING, GRAPPLING AND SHOVING

Grabbing your opponent is handled like a bout, but you test Vigor. (If they're fighting you with a weapon, they will have reach bonus.) If you win, you do no damage, but they are disadvantaged as they would be after losing a bout.

If you're grappling, you're holding on to them. If you're shoving, you've made some space between you, or perhaps they've fallen over.

OUTNUMBERING

There are no special rules for outnumbering an opponent. Adventurers can take turns fighting bouts (one of them is sure to overcome the enemy), or they can exert themselves to join in and help under pressure.

GMs should limit the maximum number of helpers sharply, depending on the situation.

SCUFFLES, SKIRMISHES & BATTLES

Fights range from an ungainly scuffle over a knife to pitched battles with hundreds or thousands of combatants on a side.

THE FEEL OF BATTLE

In ALM, pitched battles between trained forces are rare. While brutes ready for violence are common, military training is rare, and few groups will fight with cohesion and discipline.

Most groups encountered, including starting adventuring parties, have neither skilled leaders nor training in unit tactics. Individuals hesitate from the panic and surprise at finding themselves in a potentially life and death situation, uncertain what course of action the group will commit to. In order to act cohesively, the instincts to either freeze or flee must be overcome.

Many groups will have a mix of personalities and inclinations to bloodshed - some hardened by acts of personal violence, others unused to combat. Some will think it best to show force, others that distance is the best form of safety.

Hostile situations are usually tense standoffs, sizing up the enemy, fighting down panic, looking for unspoken signals for what to do. Allies transfixed by the sight of steel don't return your side-long glances, making coordination difficult. Who will make the first move?

When untrained forces come up against decisive action - unexpected resistance, concerted charges, or ambushes by hidden foes - the most likely reaction is complete chaos.

Over time, the adventurers must acquire the skills essential to fighting effectively. Those that don't will most likely be routed and cut down by the first organized enemy they meet.

THE RUSH OF BATTLE

Whatever sort of fight it is, once maneuvering and attacking has begun in earnest, it is resolved using rush play.

PERCEPTUAL CONFLICT

ALM is intended to be played without miniatures, with an emphasis on personal action. The adventurers might be acting alone (or even individually), or they might be in command of a sizeable

force of followers and mercenaries, but either way, play focuses in on their choices, situation, and actions.

There is no shared map of the battlefield for players to look at, no convenient bird's eye view showing where everything is. Players may draw their own, of course, but the GM doesn't refer to it.

Instead, the battle progresses the same as other rush play: the GM describes what each adventurer perceives, then asks how they react.

Being forced to act on frustratingly incomplete information is part of the game.

THE START OF BATTLE

Each fight starts differently. In the case of armies forming for a pitched battle, the clash of swords will be obvious hours before it begins.

If the party is ambushed by hidden assailants, their friends may start falling around them before they even realize that enemies are near.

When the battle starts, the GM should answer three questions:

- Which side (if any) has the initiative?
- Which sides (if any) have situational awareness?
- Which have cohesion, and are positioned and ready to act together?

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

During battle, events are unfolding faster than adventurers can absorb. What the GM chooses as a lead-in depends a lot on the adventurer's situational awareness.

THE HIERARCHY OF STIMULUS

1. Urgent distractions form a rough hierarchy, with more pressing things pre-empting facts that can only be understood from absorbing the whole.
2. Personal chaos (being in a melee, tumbling down a slope)
3. Terrifying threats (e.g. newly spotted/approaching undead, enemies)
4. Injuries
5. The immediate tactical situation (the enemy line, 20 yards away)
6. The broader tactical situation (more distant enemies, allies,

the lay of the land, tactical opportunities)
7. Hard-to-notice details

THE FOG OF WAR ADVANCES

Unless the players fight to maintain an understanding of what's going on around them, the GM should drag it down. The positions of enemies, allies, and the progress of the battle are only available with good awareness.

Awareness gain be gained and lost as the battle progresses. Looking around from a good vantage point builds your awareness, as long as you don't catch an arrow for your troubles. Being slammed to the ground by a mounted warrior, on the other hand, ruins it.

In perceptual conflict, a side with poor awareness may have no idea what's going on other than what's happening directly in view. It may not even realize it's in a battle.

INITIATIVE

The initiative is an intangible, powerful advantage. Who is making the big moves, forcing the other side to react?

When the enemies have the initiative, the lead-ins may be very confronting - massed archers about to shooting, cavalry thundering toward them.

In the most dire situations, when the adventurers have neither the initiative nor awareness, the lead-ins may be the *effects* of enemy action—arrows landing, friends grunting and falling, Garren being dragged off into that pool of water..

When the adventurers have the initiative, the GM's lead-ins should leave them a little space to start something. If they have awareness *and* the initiative, lead-ins may present good information about opportunities on the battlefield.

RETAINING OR WINNING THE INITIATIVE

Retaining the initiative requires keeping up the momentum of the battle, not letting the enemy consolidate and respond. Note that big moves aren't necessarily *good* moves. A foolish leader can easily squander the battle by smashing their forces against a prepared enemy.

If your moves stall or are unsuccessful, the enemies will have time to take stock and take action of their own.

Winning the initiative in the face of enemy action requires halting or wasting the enemy's momentum. This can be done with determined resistance, rebuffing charges. Alternately, allow the enemy to waste its own energy by yielding the ground it wishes to seize, and melting away to strike elsewhere.

COHESION

Acting decisively and effectively requires that the party be positioned and ready to act in concert.

If the party has someone with the leader duty maintaining marching order, the party starts the battle with cohesion unless it has been established as currently disorganized or off doing separate tasks.

Even so, a party that is acting as a bunch of individuals will rapidly lose cohesion—Tolseter is rummaging through his pack instead of leading the porters. Sanven is nowhere to be seen (as usual). Garren is delivering savage blows, but he's gotten ahead of everyone else, and he's going to be outnumbered.

Like initiative and situational awareness, cohesion can be gained and lost during the battle. An effective leader will work hard to maintain the cohesion of their troops.

GOALS, DISCIPLINE & MORALE

Once blood is spilled and casualties start falling, it takes discipline to hold the line.

The GM should bear in mind the goal of troops, as well as their leaders. Bandits and predators want to come out ahead, but are willing to leave any battle where serious harm looks inevitable. Disadvantaged enemies will fight to reach safety. Fanatics are looking for glorious death, and those defending homes or loved ones are stubborn in battle.

Disiplined troops (those with Battle skill) will tend to follow their leader's orders much longer. They also know that holding the line is safer than a rout, when pursuers can.

On the other hand, those fleeing know they don't have to run faster than the pursuers, only faster than their friends. Holding the line on your own is a fool's game.

FIGHTING COORDINATED ENEMIES

The interaction of rush play, initiative and cohesive group actions means that disorganized parties will get utterly dismantled by disciplined enemies, regardless of individual heroics.

An effective commander on the enemy side will be directing their warriors to act in concert: while adventurers are acting alone (or exerting themselves to join in and interrupt), the enemies will be acting six or more at a time.

HEALTH AND CRITICAL INJURY

Characters have a Health score that represents a buffer of physical toughness, the ability to withstand bumps, bruises, scrapes, stress and fatigue.

FULL HEALTH

Characters start out with a maximum Health equal to their Grit plus 3. Under normal circumstances, Health never rises above this value.

TAKING DAMAGE

Whenever characters take damage, subtract it from their current Health.

ARMOR

Every time a character is physically harmed, subtract their armor points from the incoming damage.

Armor doesn't protect against damage from exertion, vertical falls, and the like.

RECOVERING HEALTH

A night's rest restores 1 Health. A full day of complete rest (with no duties) restores d6 Health.

CRITICAL INJURIES

Once adventurers run out of Health, they are beyond mere scrapes and bruises and start getting really hurt.

Health doesn't drop below zero, but any excess damage becomes a critical injury. The amount of excess damage indicates the severity of the injury.

The specific type of injury is determined by rolling d6 on the Critical Injury table (page "Critical Injury Table" on page 22), and looking that number up in the column for that severity.

Barset tumbles from a great height and suffers 6 points of damage. Unfortunately, he only has 2 Health left. He reduces his Health to zero, which leaves 4 excess damage from the sudden stop.

He now must roll a severity 4 ('maimed') critical injury. He rolls a 2, looks that up on the table and finds he breaks his knee.

CRITICAL INJURIES ARE CONDITIONS

For the most part, critical injuries are Conditions. This means that they can interfere with anything you try to do where the injury is relevant, either by restricting what you can do, or by increasing the difficulty of tests.

If you have broken your knee, you're in tremendous pain and probably can't walk much faster than a slow shuffle.

If you've got a crushed hand, you can't pick anything up or wield weapons with it.

TENDING INJURIES

Injuries that are left untended can get worse over time. Cleaning, dressing, applying poultices will protect a wound from infection or uncontrolled bleeding.

Test Tending/2 for injuries, /3 for maimed, /4 for crippled. Tending the dying will soothe them, but not save them.

HEALING FROM CRITICAL INJURY

Unless the specific critical result says otherwise, injuries heal after a week of full rest. Maimed results heal after a month. Crippled result heal after a season.

PERMANENT INJURIES

Many injuries have permanent effects. These never heal, and make adventuring harder forever. Eventually, retirement will start to look like a good option.

SIMPLIFIED CRITICALS FOR NPCs

Hirelings, minions, incidental monsters and the like use simplified criticals. Rather than rolling for a specific effect, the GM can simply narrate one based on the severity of the roll.

Only the most desperate will continue resisting once maimed or crippled.

CRITICAL INJURY TABLE

d6	1 / Stung	2 / Bloodied	3 / Injured
1	Winded. On your turn, pass Grit/3 before you can act. Destroy gear.	Brow wound bleeds into eyes. (C) Helm saves but is knocked off.	If your last sleep was by a fire, no harm, otherwise a nasty cut or laceration.
2	Whap! Arms/3 or drop your weapon or shield.	Destroy two gear. If unarmored, stunned for d3 minutes.	Lose d3 fingers on weapon hand; serving a temporal Power saves.
3	Wits/3 or you're turned around and disoriented.	Stunning blow to the head. For one hour, you see past the gray veil, into the world of the dead.	Laceration is bleeding (C) quickly. Take hourly burden of blood loss. Grit/4 or contract local sickness.
4	Chest blow knocks you back three paces. If you have never visited a shrine to the Power of this place, 4/Maimed instead.	Armor, helm or shield value reduced by 1. If you don't have these things, 3/Maimed instead.	Oddly painless injury bleeds all over d3 items of gear. You are marked by the Power of this place.
5	Thump! Flinch and lose bearings, unless you have the higher ground.	Whomp. Pass Vigor/3 or be knocked down. Destroy gear.	Painful thigh muscle tear. If you're on a ley line, enemy takes d6 electrical harm as well. Weird.
6	Fluke circumstance leaves you uninjured. Heart pounding, you get a second wind. Restore d3 health.	Heirloom shield or armor breaks enemy's weapon, otherwise you're stunned and disarmed.	Arm struck numb (C) for d6 hours. Heirloom weapon, shield or armor saves. Held gear destroyed on 3 in 6.

d6	4 / Maimed	5 / Crippled	6+ / Dying
1	Cheek strike splits helm, otherwise lose d8 teeth and gain horrible scar (C).	Head blow, out for d6 hours. If you are bound to a Power, you awaken somewhere else. Sway capped.	Mortal organ wound. Every action is at a cumulative /+1. At /+4, you die.
2	Knee strike. Vigor/4 or fall. Knee broken (C) and unusable; armor saves to Limping (C).	Head strike causes coma. Pass Grit/3 tomorrow, next week, and each new season to awaken. Wits capped.	Chest strike damages heart. Die in d6 hours unless bound to the Power of this place. +2D to your next attack.
3	Lung collapse (C); can't tolerate thin mountain air. Destroy gear.	Weapon hand crushed. Tend/2 with <i>bonewort</i> within 2 weeks or it's useless permanently.	Unless you carry <i>dark glass</i> , strike to the heart breaks you. Each week you adventure, roll d6: on a 6, you die.
4	Breastbone and collarbone broken. Lose use of d2 arms, unless people pray for your safe return.	Pelvis broken, legs paralyzed, one forever. Rest a season and Grit/2 to regain use of the other.	Internal bleeding adds hourly burden max Grit times, then death. <i>Clawleaf tea stops it for d3 days; Wiswort stops it.</i>
5	Lose an eye; face horribly scarred. If the moon is waxing, the eye may one day heal.	Spiral fracture (C) in arm holding shield or weapon. Arm is useless until <rare bone herb> is taken.	Throat destroyed, you expire. If you've buried a companion, Maimed-3 instead.
6	Ribs shattered. Vigor capped. Heirloom armor or shield breaks to save you.	Internal injury. Bloody urine (C); never again heal from rest on forays. Destroy gear. Grit capped.	Abdominal strike is fatal if unarmored. Destroy gear. Grit/4 or fall. Edged or piercing weapon stuck fast.

“DESTROY GEAR”

Many critical table entries cause the destruction of equipment. Use a random method to determine which piece of gear is destroyed. (The character sheet has numbered slots, or you can shuffle your gear cards and have someone pick one.)

Gear destruction should be as catastrophic as feasible: book bindings give way and the pages flutter everywhere, lanterns and bottles shatter completely; metal gear is dented to the point of uselessness, blades crack, armor straps tear and rivets burst, shields buckle or the handles fall off. Either way, the gear is useless.

CAPPED STATS

Some critical injuries permanently limit an adventurer’s potential. If this happens, write the adventurer’s current Rating in pen: it no longer advances. Ticks still accumulate: if the adventurer gains the requisite number of ticks to advance, they gain 1 xp instead.

RESISTANT GEAR

Gear made of *white metal* is only destroyed by mundane attacks and accidents on a 1 in 3. Gear made of *dark glass* is only destroyed on a 1 in 6.