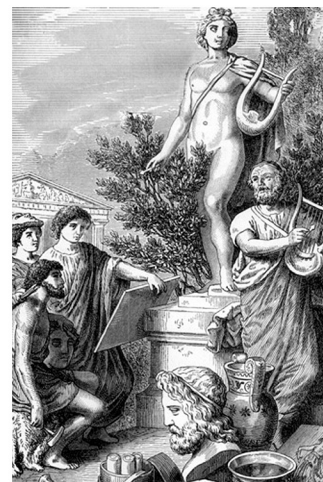# Ancient City Fight

Gridded Play, Reinforcements, and a Melee Template

[H]istory buffs will remember the short-lived era of the Qa'amic empire. It existed for some 400 years, circa 3000 B.C., and then rapidly disappeared, overrun by the invading Sayrens. The key victory in the Sayrenian invasion was their successful assault on the capital city of Qa'am. This was what we tried to re-create on the ping-pong table.

In setting up the battle, I noted that the army lists in the WRG and DBM wargaming booklets failed to contain either the Qa'amic or Sayren armies. This is a shocking and inexcusable display of sloppy historical research, and I know that all PW Review readers will mail their complaints directly to Phil Barker.

The City of Qa'am

For the battle itself, the city of Qa'am consisted of about a dozen square blocks (termed town blocks) plus the illustrious pleasure palace of the Emir of Qa'am. This was laid out on a large, gridded field of 2-inch squares, filling the entire ping-pong table.

Each town block occupied a 2x2 area, with the palace situated in a 3x3 area. The attacker's objective: assault the city and occupy the palace grounds.

We used an assortment of 15mm ancients figures. One stand of troops, regardless of type, was permitted in a 2-inch square. The single exception centered on a couple of elite heavy infantry stands possessed by both sides. These could double-up with another stand in the same square.

The troop types on the field, both infantry and cavalry, were graded into three classes: heavy, medium, and light. Of interest is the fact that there were no specific missile units. During the fire phases, a side could designate any stand as a source of missiles and fire accordingly. In other words, any type of troop could be said to contain an intrinsic missile capability.

For example, if a town block was occupied, the player would toss percentile dice for the number of stands able to provide defensive fire, which was a function of the commander's Military Capability (MC):
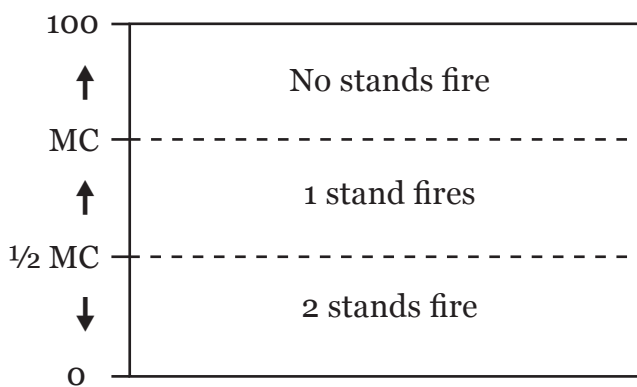
Thus with an MC of 60, and a dice toss of 37, one stand could provide defensive fire from the town block. A toss of 30 or less and 2 stands could fire. A toss of 61+ and no stands could fire.

The part of the Emir of Qa'am, praise be he, was taken by Farhad El Ji'im Butters, who, assisted by me, tried to stem the flow of invading Sayrens. After about two or three turns, our beloved Emir, Farhad

El Ji'im, blessings upon him, made the comment: "Why, this is nothing but a big board game!"

I had no response, other than to say that I had to agree, It was, indeed, a board game, but it was a BIG board game -- a ping-pong-table-size board game.

When setting out the forces on the field, I had no idea of how many units the sides should be allocated. After all, with the WRG army lists silent, I was completely at sea regarding the makeup of both the Qa'amic and the Sayren armies. What I did was to give the attackers more troops than the defenders. How much more? Well, sufficient to guarantee them victory.

Qa'am City Glories

The sketch shows how the city of Qa'am was laid out. To reach the Qa'amic palace, wherein El Ji'im, may he wallow in greatness, sported with his harem beauties, the Sayrens had to get through two layers of town blocks.
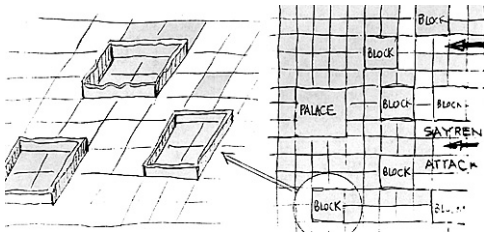
The attackers couldn't afford to bypass any blocks because the defenders were permitted to assign any as-yet uncommitted troops to any unconquered blocks on the field. Thus, if the Sayrens decided to avoid a town block and proceed up the city street, they could suddenly be attacked by defending Qa'amic troops suddenly emerging fom the bypassed block.

It should be noted that there were no fixed 'units' on the field: in essence, each stand was, itself, a unit of unspecified size.

When we set up our Qa'amic defenses, El Ji'im, may his girth be ever increasing, decided to have very few troops in the front line of town blocks. He wanted to hold a group in reserve and place the main line of defense in the second line of blocks.

While it's true that we Qa'amics didn't have that many troops to spare, it appears, in retrospect, that the failure to defend the first line was not the way to go.

We should have fought fiercely for those first town blocks. As the Emir's advisor, it was my duty to ensure that El Ji'im, glory to his savings account, placed his troops wisely. I failed miserably, and accordingly, threw myself at the Emir's feet. El Ji'im, may he be wafted on high, spared my life.

Sayren Onslaught

Cliff Sayre and Fred Haub jointly commanded the Sayren forces. Cliff, as the mighty Sayren Pasha, had charge of the attacking cavalry contingent. I had furnished the Sayrens with a large number of heavy cavalry stands, and the all-wise Pasha immediately took his heavy horse and proceeded to use them in surrounding and attacking the town blocks to his front.

Hindsight has it that we should have restricted the use of the cavalry to the open spaces between the town blocks. Each block was defined, in effect, as a small fort, and cavalry should have played no part in attacking them.

Alas! This gap in the rules was exploited heavily by the attackers, and block after block fell to the Sayrens. The heavy cavalry, although emerging as victor, suffered its share of the losses, too, and after some five or six turns, very few heavy Sayren horse remained.

Rally Zone

When a stand was hit by missile fire or lost in melee, it immediately went to that limbo-land termed the Rally Zone, an off-board area where its true fate could be determined. Twice each bound, both sides tried to rally the stands placed in the zone.

The stands in the zone were grouped in fours, and the result of the dicing procedures could vary from all four stands recovering, to all destroyed, to half-and-half.

Whenever the Qa'amic rally phase occurred, our beloved Emir, El Ji'im, may many goats fill his tents, took the percentage dice and tossed them, trying for a low number. I noted that El Ji'im, protector of his people, was not too successful in rallying his men. His high tosses eventually resulted in so many Qa'amic losses tht the city fell before the Sayren onslaught.

This did not deter El Ji'im, high honors to him, in the slightest.

The sequence we used was a simple alternate one; for the half bound, it was:

> Side A moves
>
> Side B fires its missile weapons
>
> Side A fires its missile weapons
>
> Side A declares melees
>
> Rally phase; both sides rally troops

The rally phase was defined to be a long term 'strategic' affair, in contrast to the short term tactical phases. Not only did troops rally from or die in the Rally Zone, but each side was permitted an across-the-field march to transfer stands from one wing or flank to another.

The regular movement for infantry was three boxes, while cavalry was assigned five. Alas, to move stands from one flank to another in regular fashion across the entire length of the ping-pong table took prohibitively long.

Stands could be placed at the side of the army commander on one rally phase, and on the next one, they could mysteriously be wafted across the entire field, appearing at whatever wing their destination was defined to be.

This proved to be very useful to the Qa'amic defenders, continually moving troops around and plugging the gaps in their ever-thinning line. The Sayren attackers didn't use this ploy as often as the defenders.

The rules employed no provisions of any type for morale tests. A stand was hit, it was placed in the Rally Zone, it diced for recovery, and it either went back to the field, or died. That was that.

Host Of Problems With Gridded Play

In ginning up a set of rules for use on a gridded table, I came across a host of problems that one doesn't normally see on a 'free flow' terrain set up -- movement, for example.

At first, I mandated that troops could pivot before movement, and then, having faced as desired, could only move in the direction of facing.

This proved too restrictive. The end result was to give stands the following movement allowance:

> * The first action could be a pivot
>
> * Second, the stand could move either straight ahead or diagonally (but not to the side)
>
> * Third, it could pivot again when it finally stopped.

More problems. Since we were, in essence, playing a board game on a table with specifically defined areas, the question of 'zones of control' (ZOCs) came into question.

Here, the effect of a ZOC was to limit an attacking stand's ability to pivot if the moving stand entered a defender's ZOC. The second and final pivot noted above in the movement listings was not 'free' if the

stand entered an enemy ZOC. It had to dice for the privilege, and the chance of successfully pivoting was around 70%.

Then missile fire entered into the equation. Normally, one defines the arc of fire coverage of a firing stand as 22 degrees or 45 degrees off the front corner. Here, with a field of squares, the fire zone was defined to be along the three columns directly to the front of the firing stand.

This limitation on firing zones was not used for stands firing from a town block. Stands within the block could fire out along any row of squares leaving the town block. In a sense, one might say that each defending stand in the block that fired was mounted on a pivoting turret, able to focus its fire as desired.

We didn't think this gave the defenders too much of an edge. It was thought that, within a block, this reflected the fact that the defenders would spread out and shift fire as needed against oncoming aggressors, whatever the direction.

Additionally, when a stand fired, the basic chance of a hit was 30%. From this we deducted 5% for a target in cover, and another 5% if the target was in heavy armor. This meant that fire really wasn't that effective, hence, giving the defenders of a town block a slight advantage in pivoting didn't give them anything.

Melee Problem

Another problem area concerned the scope of a melee. On the gridded table, it was possible, as forces advanced across the field, to have a front line of contact perhaps a dozen stands wide. This is a situation that 'popped' up all the time in DBA, where long lines of stands close with one another.

I didn't want to take the DBA/DBM approach, which is to dice for every opposing pair of stands in contact, and see which one falls back, and which one stays in place. This type of time consuming combat resolution represents, to me, the pits of wargaming, and is exceedingly boring ... it's one of the reasons I stay away from these rules sets. I'd rather use some sort of group resolution to speed things up.

DBA/DBM has to address the issue the way it does because each element in the game is independent of every other element; there are no grouped units as such.

Unfortunately, I was faced with the same configuration, and so, in desperation, in order to use some type of group (rather than single stand) resolution of combat, I turned to the dreaded Melee Template. Way back in the mid-seventies, Tom Elsworth and I had used an MT in our ancients gaming.

Melee Template

A template of, say, 6 x 2 inches was plopped over your troops. If your unit was in column, you'd place the MT with the short side up front so that it covered most of your unit. If your unit was in line, you'd place the MT with the long side up front.

The objective was to place the MT to include as many of your troops as possible under the template; all stands falling under the MT would be factored into the melee calculations.

Then you'd dice to see the actual orientation, as opposed to the desired orientation. A good commander would, more often than not, end up
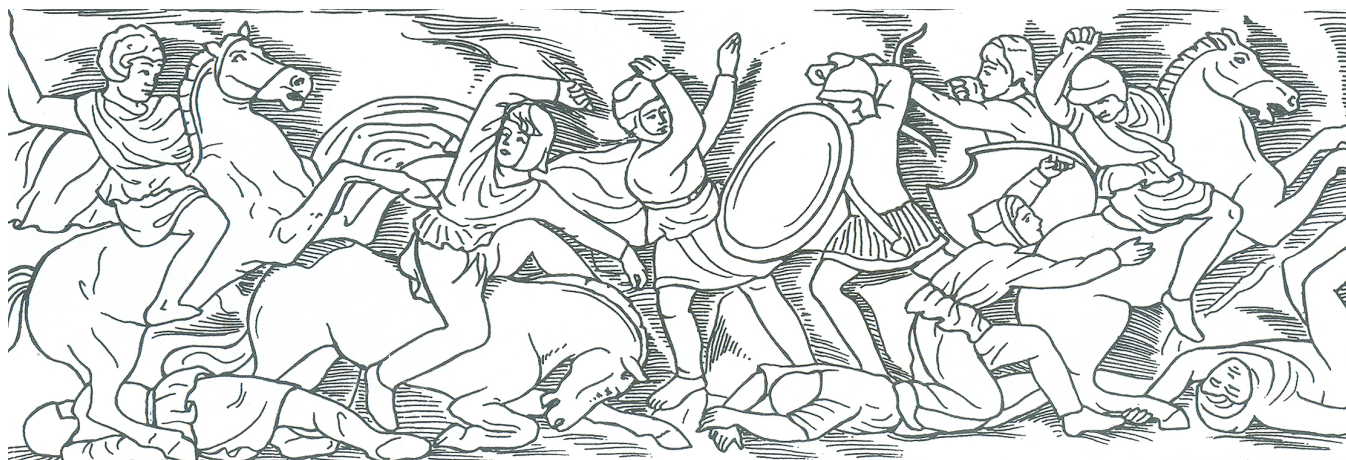
with the configuration he wanted; all of his troops fell under the template. A rotten commander, failing his dice throw would end up with the template oriented so as to include few of his troops.

And so I resurrected the MT. Given the gridded 2-inch square field, the MT fit quite nicely into the configuration. Each side was given several MT's: one measuring 4x4, one measuring 4x3, another at 4x2, and so on.

The attacking commander selected an MT and placed it with the template front situated to include his front rank. The defending commanding then chose a template and placed it accordingly. Both commanders hoped to include the maximum number of troops in the combat.

Then both commanders diced ... each had been graded on his 'Military Capability,' which ranged from 60% to 70% ... if the dice toss was under the number, the template remained where it was.

If the toss exceeded the required number, then the opponent got to adjust it, moving it by one row of squares. In this manner, he could exclude from the melee calculation several enemy stands.

Several times in the battle, when the Sayrens attacked and placed their template with its front edge aligned with, and including, their front line stands, they failed the dice toss. We Qa'amic commanders quickly slid the template back one row, which meant that there was no longer a line of contact. In effect, the attack had fizzled, and the troops assigned to charge in had declined to do so.

As I said at the outset, I had assigned the Sayrens more than enough troop stands to guarantee victory. After some 10 full bounds, both sides agreed that Qa'am had fallen to the invaders, and that this historically accurate result proved the efficacy and validity of the rules.

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