RPG ACTION MAP

As designed by
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Carousing Bear Studio

Center of Conflic

Close Quarters

The Fantasy Tabletop Role Playing & Combat Simulation Game Fictional Positioning Action Map

*But better known as the RPG **Action Map** to most others*

Streamlined Combat in a Complex Game

There you are, sitting in front of your GM screen, looking at a bunch of puzzled and confused faces as discussion starts to run rampant and profanities are being thrown around... well maybe not that bad but we've all been there. We sometimes think to ourselves *"Well this is a simple encounter, no need to bust out the battlemat."* after which everything proceeds to fall into utter chaos: The cleric gets knocked by an ogre moving through a door she forgot was there; the rogue has been mostly useless due to never figuring out where flanking positions were, and the wizard's spells all missed because he forgot he wasn't in range for any of them...
I'm sure you can add a few of your own experiences to the mix.

Case in point, building detailed fictional positioning is hard. Everyone sees it in a different way, which is partially the fault of you having to improvise the whole encounter to begin with. And you know what, that is entirely fine. Our collective imagination is what makes these games as much fun as they are but that doesn't mean that we can't use some tools to guide us along the way!

The **Action Map** is a tool to clarify relative (fictional) positioning for generally smaller encounters. Breaking out an entire battle map for a simple random encounter can take more effort to set up than to play out, so this is a perfect moment to use the Action Map! Save that effort for the important boss battles and campaign altering encounters!

Without further ado... theAction Map!!
Don't worry! There's a larger version at the end.
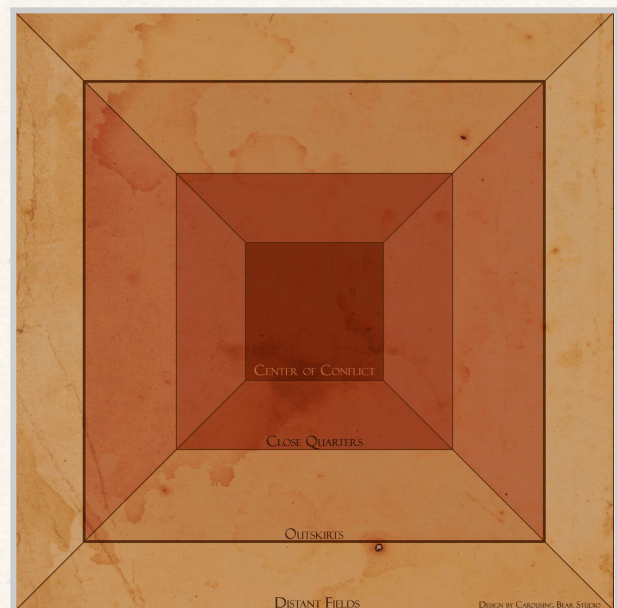
The Basics

Normally you'd use a battlemap based on a 1 inch grid system. Each square of the grid would represent 5 feet of space, and you'd split a creature's total movement across however many squares they can move. The Action Map proposes to use 13 segments that solidify a character's fictional positioning without getting stuck in the details. The centre most segment is named the Centre of Conflict (CoC) where most of the action will take place. Surrounding the Centre of Conflict are 3 regions to indicate their distance from the CoC, split into 4 quadrants each to indicate direction from the CoC. Any mobility on the Action Map gets simplified to a move Instead of focussing on the specific feet of movement a creature has. For example, to move a player character from the Centre of Conflict to one of the connected regions will simply cost a "move action", mostly ignoring the specific speed of that creature. Any specific movement, like attempting to flank around a creature, or vaulting over an obstacle will be left to the theatre of the mind.

You'll often find the bold barbarian to be in the middle of the Centre of Conflitc while the wise wizards and cautious clerics might find themselves in Close Quarters, casting spells at a slight distance.

Fictional Positioning

The idea of using the Action Map is to let the story take precedence. The moment we pick it up we make the statement *"These complex rules are not needed in the current scenario; we base our encounter more upon the fictional than the mechanical."*.

By using this we gain a lot more freedom building our encounters. We don't need to take into account the one square that the campfire is in so that we don't get burnt. We bring up the campfire in the fiction whenever its use is needed: as a result for a bad roll, clever tactics, or just for the fun of it. As such, while the mechanics of using the Action Map are laid out below, it takes precedence to look at the fiction to consider what might happen. A dwarf might not make it to the next region while keeping the ability to attack since, according to the fiction, they are slower than other races. This is a straight contradiction to how my mechanics are set up but something that could be applicable in the situation.

Always keep the narrative that you are building in mind and build upon it with the use of the map. *Keep the Freedom, Lose the Chaos!*

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Centre of Conflict (CoC)

This is where most of the action happens; often in a veritable lump of writhing adventurers wrestling in a totally not intimate fashion…

However, the important question is: **how do we determine the CoC?**
In terms of mechanics this is often where most characters and monsters can be found, the centre of melee, and the location most spells are cast at. At the start of an encounter, figure out where most of the action is going to take place and place the tokens accordingly. I'll give a few examples later on in this section.

During the encounter **the CoC is fluid and ever-changing**!. A wizard that is on Close Quarters might very well be targeted by a whole group of goblins, after which the barbarian runs after them to protect the wizard. In this case you **don't move the entire cohort** into the segment that the wizard is in, **you drag the wizard back into the CoC!** Make any other adjustments that are applicable: ex. the ranger that was in the Close Quarters of the opposite quadrant might be moved towards the Outskirts due to this change.

Observe the state of battle at the top of any round to see if any adjustments should be made to the placement of creatures on the Action Map.

A Centre of Conflict on the Move

The Action Map also lends itself well to encounters like chases, naval battles, dog fights and more. The CoC always lies at the point of interest in an encounter; it matters little if that point of interest is in constant motion or if it is relatively static. In the case of a chase you may expect that all participants automatically take their free move action at the end of their turn, letting you adjust all needed positions based on the relative speed of all participants and the actions they've chosen to take.

Examples of Setup

The party manages to sneak upon a group of bandits sitting around a campfire.
At the start of an encounter place the bandits in the CoC and the party in Close Quarters in the appropriate quadrant as to their approach.

The boisterous Barbarian starts a bar fight to distract from the Rogue's pick pocketing.
Place the barbarian and the Rogue plus any bar patrons part of the encounter in the CoC, anyone else in the bar is in Close Quarters while anyone in another room or just outside of the bar is in the Outskirts.

The party has finally found their way to the Jewel of Unattainable Hope however there's a bunch of tomb raiders vying for the same price.
In this case the CoC will always be wherever the Jewel of Unattainable Hope is located since both parties' interests lie within procuring the treasure. Place everyone else accordingly.

The segments of the Action Map

12 segments, created from combining the 3 regions with the 4 quadrants, surround the Centre of Conflict, creating 13 segments in total. During use these segments will keep track of the relative positioning of creatures, objects and anything else that might be important to your encounter. You might even block off some segments, indicating a towering wall or a rushing river impeding the battlefield. There's room for anything your group can imagine happening within these segments: from the most standard attack to summoning gargantuan creatures of war astride a celestial turtle.

The Regions

The Action Map consists of 3 different regions surrounding the Centre of Conflict. Each region's name indicates its relative distance away from the CoC: **Close Quarters**, the **Outskirts** and the **Distant Fields**. Moving from one adjacent region to another takes a single movement action except for movement within the Distant Fields, where the movement costs for entering, leaving and switching quadrants are doubled.
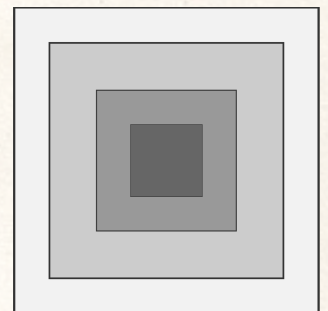
The Quadrants

All regions, save for the CoC, are divided into 4 different quadrants: namely **North**, **East**, **South** and **West**. The quadrants are used to indicate in which relative direction creatures are from each other on the map based on the Centre of Conflict. Moving to an adjacent quadrant requires you to first use one action to move towards the edge and then another action to properly move into the adjacent quadrant, taking 2 movement actions in total. Being on the edge of a quadrant is a risky position as you're easily within range from attackers of both quadrants if they wish to pursue or block you.
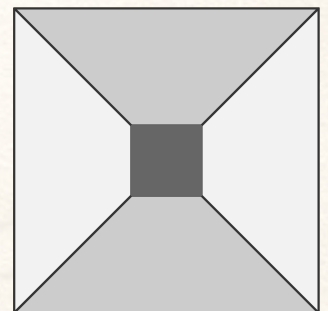
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The Relativity of Speed and Range

So far I've opted to use vague terms like *"a movement action"* to indicate distance and movement. The main reason for this coincides with my continual use of the word *"relative"* in this guide so far. The Action Map aims to be flexible and to let itself be applicable to all scenarios that could come up within the theatre of the mind. As such it might just as well simulate a bout between a group of snails as a mighty maritime battle where multiple galleons aim to tear the others apart. Both the speed of your subjects as the range of their attacks can change from battle to battle but you can always keep the following constants in mind.

Finding the Average Speed of Movement

All things flow from finding the encounter's average speed of movement. Once set it can help you figure out the scope of the encounter, the ranges of actions you can expect and more. Generally you'll base the average movement speed on the most common one found amongst the player characters. Most commonly in games like *Dungeons and Dragons 5th edition* this will be 25 or 30 feet per move action. This can drastically change depending on the context of the encounter however. Perhaps all the player characters are mounted on horses, changing their average speed to 50 feet, or they might be overburdened from carrying heavy cargo dropping their average speed to a mere 15 feet instead.

Once you've set your average speed you can adjudicate far more easily the extent to which outliers in the encounter can move. A pack of wolves fighting a party of dwarves can far more easily move around the battlefield, allowing them 2 free move actions as opposed to 1, for example.

Judging the Ranges

The range of attacks depends strongly on the scope of an encounter and the abilities or weapons used. Generally you can get a decent idea for the scope based on the average speed of the combatants or the size of them. You can always dive deeper into the books of your game of choice and properly calculate the exact range some of your abilities would have, but for the sake of simplicity I've set up the following ranges: **Personal** (0), **Short** (1), **Medium** (2) and **Long** (4) range. The number behind each indicates the amount of segments they can travel.

Most games that you may play with theAction Map will already have a system in place to help you judge which action might have a shorter or longer range, but context matters here as well. A long bow's range might be impressive in standard combat but fails to make an impact between magical war machines shooting meteors across continents. Let your own reasoning be the judge of the ranges of attacks during combat but above all: **Keep it Simple**.

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Playing Quick and Dirty

The goal of the Action Map is to simplify running an encounter on the fly. As such it wouldn't do if you were required to have the Action Map with you at all times. Whenever you don't have access to the physical Action Map you can use the following common tools to represent the relative position.
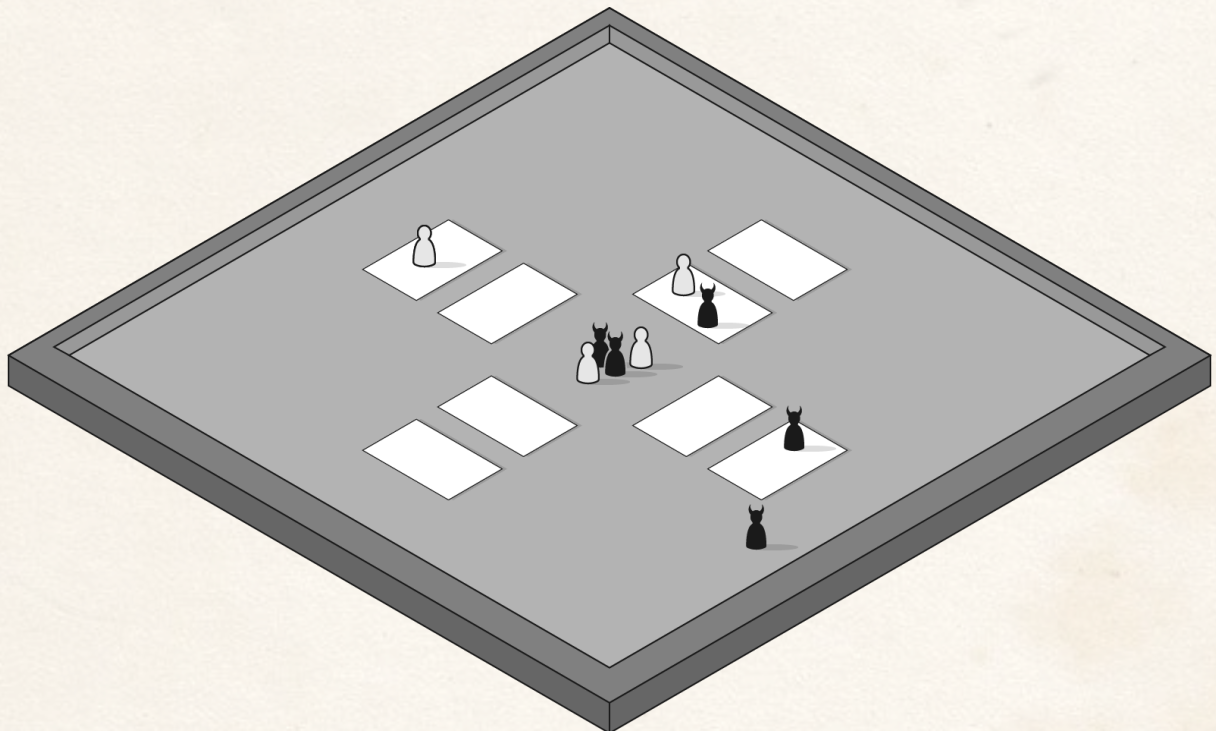
Using Dice Marking

For this method you indicate the distance in moves that a character is away from the CoC by putting a dice besides their miniature. The centre of the table here acts as the CoC, while any character away from the CoC gets placed in the relative direction that they are from the CoC with a die besides it: marking a 1 if they're in Close Quarters; 2 if they're on the Outskirts; and 4+ if they're in the Distant Fields. Unless you have an abundance of dice I suggest you only mark the fields that the actual creatures are in.
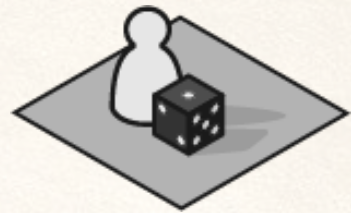
Using Card Marking

Whether they are index cards, post-it notes or cut pieces of papers, it doesn't matter. Anything small you can find around the house will do as long as it marks an area. Place them on the table in two rows per quadrant. You keep the centre clear to mark the CoC, while the outer fields are represented by the space beyond your second row of cards.

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Getting your own Action Map

If you've come this far in this manual then there's a decent chance you'd like to get your hands on your very own RPG Action Map. This is where I'd love to offer you a high quality 15 by 15 inch battle map that you can buy at your nearest gaming store but sadly I'm a small independent creator with no money. I can however offer you the next best thing: files ready to download that you can print onto paper or upload straight into your digital games.

Place 'n Print Version

This is the full RPG Action Map in a single file. This will be your best choice in case you're playing on a Virtual Tabletop (VTT) or if you wish to make a fancy printed version through a print shop. I suggest printing it at A2 format and cutting away the white space or ordering it customised. The original size of the PDF file is 36 by 36 inches so you can print it at any size you would like but I suggest sticking with 15 by 15 inch up to 20 by 20 inch.

Full Colour:	JPG	PDF
Printer Friendly:	JPG	PDF

Build Your Own Version

This is the version for those only with access to a regular printer. These 3 pages at A4 size contain all the parts needed to make your very own Action Map of 11 by 11 inches. Simply cut out the pieces and use the glue strips to put them together, starting from the centre piece. I've also included an A3 version for those (who know someone) lucky enough to own an A3 printer.

Full Colour:	A4	A3
Printer Friendly:	A4	A3

P.S. I've only included universal standard print sizes due to the amount of work this project has already taken. Feel free to send requests for American paper standards to my email address, if enough people ask for them I'll make sure to add them in the future.

Afterword

I'd like to thank anyone who has taken the time to check this product out and especially everyone who has helped me turn it into what it is now. I can have incredible difficulty finishing these personal projects, as many close to me will know, so getting this out and ready is a bigger step than some may think it is. I hope this silly little idea can help make your games even better, and I'd love to hear some of the shenanigans that you and your party have made happen with the help of this map.

Happy gaming!

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Changelog

*/// v 0.1 [Alpha] *

- Added in the base features
- Created the Action Map 0.1

*/// v 1.0 *

- Switched from diagonal quadrants to N, E, S, W quadrants
- Changed quadrant move cost from 1.5 to 2
- Added in Quick and Dirty modes

*/// v 1.2 *

- Changed the names on the actual map to CoC, inner, middle & outer circle
  [Credit: Dearel]

*/// v 1.3 *

- Spelling and Grammar alterations *[Credit: MisterWorst]*
- Alter the move currency to put clarity on its use *[Credit: MisterWorst]*
- Rewrite the "Quick Allocation Table" to "Centre of Table" to optimise clarity *[Credit: MisterWorst]*

*/// v 1.4 *

- Complete overhaul of the document's writing style and explanations
- Renaming the different regions to conform better to style and function
- Streamlining the rules around range and speed
- Adding supplementary images
- Adding a printer friendly version
- Adding a handicrafts printable version
- Spelling, style and grammar checking *[Credit: Cage2201 & MintTeaBreath]*

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