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Overview

Hero Battle is a forum-based game of cutthroat strategy for eight or more players. The rules are deceptively simple—however game play is anything but.

Each player is assigned a Hero for the Battle, and as the game starts, all Heroes have an equal number of hit points (HP). Every turn, each player chooses two Heroes to hit and one Hero to heal. Any Hero reduced to zero is dead, and the last one left alive wins.

To complicate things further, Heroes can gain bonuses when their nemeses are killed or suffer penalties if their secret identity is revealed. Every Battle brings new twists and possibilities, from prison gangs to celebrity plastic surgery. So the players always have to remain on their toes.

The Rules

Hero Battle rarely has the same rules twice. Each individual Battle has its own theme (Superhero Battle, Prison Battle, Celebrity Battle, etc), and the rules of that Battle will always be tailored to the theme. Therefore, all sorts of basic variables (starting HP, nemesis bonuses and penalties, etc) may vary from Battle to Battle, and extra rules may be added or removed to fit the theme, but all Battles work within the same basic structure.

At the start of each Battle, the Moderator will determine which rules are in play for that Battle. Listed below are the default rules. No rule in Hero Battle is set in stone, and everything is subject to change, but default rules are those which are assumed to be in use, *unless the Moderator specifically states otherwise*. The optional rules scattered about this document are some commonly used (and fun) add-ons that are only used if the Moderator specifically selects them.

A Brief History of Hero Battle

Hero Battle's basic structure was copied from a game called *Uni Hurt/Heal* on the now-defunct HeroScapeHQ forums. When asked, the originator of that game said he had copied the game himself from yet another forum.

Currently, Hero Battle is played on an ongoing basis on the Animalball Forums at www.animalball.com. New Battles start approximately every three or four weeks, and Animalball welcomes all comers.

Setting Up

There is one Moderator and a minimum of eight players, however there is no upper limit to how many can participate. Hero Battles take place on an Internet bulletin board that offers private messaging capabilities.

Theme: The Moderator will decide on the Battle's theme, which will determine not only the rules, but what types of "heroes" will be used. For example Superhero Battle uses superheroes, Celebrity Battle uses only famous people, Wizard Battle uses only magic-using characters from books and TV and movies.

Signing Up: After the Moderator posts the theme and Hero restrictions, players enter the game by posting the name of a suitable Hero for that Battle.

Each player is assigned a Hero from the available pool by the Moderator. The player is the Hero's secret identity. Secret identities will remain hidden as play starts. Each player will also be assigned two Nemeses from the Heroes assigned to other players. Players will not be assigned the Hero that they submitted to the pool.

Starting HP: All Heroes begin with 12 hit points (12HP). This value can actually vary widely (see Adjusting HP), but the default is 12.

Game Play

Hits & Heals: Every round, each player gets to assign 2 hits and 1 heal. All three must be on different Heroes, but may be on the player's own Hero or others as desired. At the end of the round, the Moderator compiles all player moves. A Hero loses 1HP for every hit assigned to it and gains 1HP for every heal.

Players may post up their moves in any order, because all moves are compiled at the same time and considered to be simultaneous. Players may choose to abstain and make no move, but no partial moves are allowed. As Hero Battle is forum-based, players may edit their posts and change their moves at any point up until the round closes. Any moves that are edited after a round closes are forfeit and that player will be considered to have abstained.

Closing the Round: Each round lasts until the Moderator compiles it, and then the new round begins immediately. The Moderator may close the round after all participating players have made their moves, or 24 hours after the round started. A player who has not made a valid move by the time the round closes abstains.

Abstentions: Any time a player abstains, whether by choice or not, the Moderator will randomly assign a single hit that will come from that player but will not hit his or her own Hero.

Secret Identities: If someone guesses a Hero's secret identity (which player has that Hero), the Hero is outed and suffers a 4HP outing penalty, while the Hero of the guessing player gains a 3HP guessing bonus. An incorrect secret identity guess costs the Hero of the guesser a 2HP bad call penalty.

Each player may make only one guess per round. Guesses must be sent to the Moderator by private message (PM). All guesses are considered to be simultaneous, regardless of the order in which they were sent to the Moderator.

Random Player

Optional Rule

With this rule, the Moderator nominates an extra name for the pool, and then a Random Player is assigned to one of the Heroes. The Hero of Random Player has no nemeses is not the nemesis of any other player. At the start of each round, Random Player will assign one hit at random. Random Player will never hit his own Hero.

If any player correctly guesses Random Player's Hero, that player's Hero is awarded 3HP, and Random Player's Hero dies immediately. Incorrect guesses cost 2HP.

These HP totals may vary from game to game (see Adjusting HP, below).

Adjusting HP

The first way to vary up any Hero Battle is by adjusting the HP totals.

Starting HP: Default is 12HP, which prevents most first and second round deaths, and allows everyone a fair shot. However, low point totals (5 or 8HP) can make for some very fun but very bloody Battles. Typically, in a low HP game, one or more Heroes will die in the first round. 15 or even more HP can be used for Battles that involve more strategy, but these can also tend to drag out a bit.

Nemesis Bonus: Default is 3HP. This should be adjusted up or down for games with very high or very low starting HP totals. Greater nemesis bonuses make players more aggressive in targeting specific opponents.

Secret Identity Totals: There are three factors involved in guessing secret identities—the outing penalty (default 4HP), the correct guess bonus (default 2HP), and the bad guess penalty (2HP). These can and should be varied according to the needs of the theme. The only recommendation is that the outing penalty should always be greater than the correct guess bonus. Otherwise, players quickly figure out that they can form alliances and out each other without penalty.

If multiple players make the same correct guess simultaneously, then the HP award is reduced by 1HP for each extra correct guess. No matter how many players guess, the outed Hero will be penalized only once.

(IMPORTANT: Players must remember to always make guesses in private or else risking revealing their own secret identity.)

As the round starts, the Moderator will say something to the effect of “Hero X calls out Hero Y,” and then whether the attempt was successful or not. Thus if the guess is wrong, other players know that it happened but not with enough detail to learn anything.

Nemeses: When a player's nemesis dies, his Hero gains 3HP. Dead heroes are already out of the game and cannot receive nemesis bonuses.

The Double-Up Rule: After half of the Heroes (including Random Player's) are dead, players no longer need to apply their hits and heals all to separate Heroes, and may now choose to double up their hits. Although they still may not hit and heal the same Hero in a single round.

Last Man(s) Standing Rule: If at any point, there are only one or two Heroes remaining who have not been outed, then their secret identities will be immediately revealed by the Moderator and no bonuses or penalties will be awarded for it.

Order of Damage: When compiling a round, all hits and heals along with all bonuses and penalties from guessing are compiled at once and considered to be simultaneous. Once compiled, any resulting deaths are final, and then nemesis bonuses are applied.

Dying: Any Hero reduced to zero HP or less is dead. That Hero's secret identity is revealed, and that player may no longer participate.

Winning: The last Hero left alive is the winner.

Strategy

Now we enter into a realm of mystery. Mastering Hero Battle requires the strategic planning of chess, and the psychology of poker. Because on the one hand, Hero Battle is almost entirely deterministic—players all begin with a level playing field, and winners and losers are determined solely by player action. Yet at the same time, each individual player only has a tiny portion of control over the outcome. The aggregate of all of one's opponents can seem like a random and whimsical force or a kind of overwhelming mob mentality at times.

And as a fair warning, take all of these hints with a grain of salt. Hero Battle competitors are notoriously close-mouthed about their game plan. Even discussion of past games is taboo, as one would hate to reveal tips that might help an opponent in the future. This is advice drawn from my own observation.

Luck: Keep in mind that luck plays a large role in Hero Battle. Being the first one to die is never indicative of a bad player. It's usually just the person who drew the worst name. Anyone can have a bad game, and despite apparent patterns in wins and losses, most players can be up for a while and then down for a while with no apparent rhyme or reason. Even a randomly played Hero can occasionally place in the top 5. Where skill shows is in the long term averages. A player wins one or two games, and it might just be luck, but when a player consistently places in the top 3... that's the true

Anonymous Play

Optional Rule

For a variety of reasons, the Moderator may wish to establish certain anonymous rounds during a game. Maybe these occur every third round, or after each death, or as a result of a Hand of God result (see Hand of God optional rule).

During anonymous rounds, players still post their heals in public, but their hits are submitted to the Moderator by private message.

Resurrection

Optional Rule

At specified points in the game, one or more dead Heroes may be brought back into the game. It may be a regular event (every 3rd round), or it could be a special event (as in Hand of God). Typically, the Hero to be resurrected is selected randomly from all dead Heroes.

A resurrected Hero re-enters the game with a number of HP equal to the current average HP of all living Heroes (round to the nearest whole number). No Hero may be revived more than once in a single Battle.

Team Affiliation

Optional Rule

This works best for Battles with 12 or more players. The Moderator comes up with enough teams that each team will have four or five Heroes in it. The teams should fit the theme (gangs for Prison Battle, networks for TV Pundit Battle, etc). Heroes are randomly assigned to one of the teams. Random Player (if used) is never on a team.

At the start of the game, players are told of their team affiliation and the names of the other Heroes on their team—but NOT player names.

The last team left with all of their Heroes still alive gains a teamwork bonus of 3HP each. If two teams tie, then each surviving team member gains only 1HP. If three or more teams tie, then there is no bonus.

Hero Battle talent.

Keep a chart: keep track of where the hits and heals are going and try to look for patterns that will key you in to identities or alliances. Of course, some players expect others to do this and intentionally try to throw off the numbers.

Hide your identity: this seems simple enough, and most people will studiously avoid healing themselves most of the time to keep their identity a secret. Some will even place an occasional hit on themselves to further allay suspicions. However, players often reveal themselves by placing one too many hits on their nemeses (which reveals something about them when a nemesis dies).

This most common rookie mistake that reveals one's identity is the new player who avoids healing his own hero for many turns, and then suddenly begins healing himself once his hero is near death.

Make alliances: Very few players make the top 3 without teaming up with other players along the way. And no one ever wins without cutting a deal or two here and there. Alliances require trust and make you potentially vulnerable, but there is also strength in numbers. Honesty is generally better than the alternative, because the Hero you cross in this game may be your last best hope in the next one.

There is always the temptation with alliances to promise to "take each other to the end." Such loyalty is touching, but is often to the players' detriment. An alliance that lasts too long can reveal too much, and so smart players often make deals that last only a turn or three and then expire. Similarly, players who consistently team up with each other in game after game can become predictable and easy to spot.

Don't abstain: Sometimes abstention is unavoidable, but every time a player fails to make a move, another piece of that hero is revealed. It may not seem like much at the time, but when it comes down to the second half, when HP is low and the field has narrowed, that abstention hit you made may be the last piece of info an opponent needs to out you and polish you off.

Move order: There's certain advantages to going first or to going last or to hiding somewhere in between. The player who pays attention and gets the first move can often set a trend for later players to follow. Also going first allows a player to submit a false or deceptive move which can be changed later. The player who waits until the last minute to move has the advantage of knowing everyone else's moves before committing. Of course the first and last players also tend to draw attention to themselves, whereas those in the middle are far more inconspicuous under casual observation.

Deception: Lying and deceiving are always great ways to get ahead in Hero Battle, and there's so many ways to do it:

- "Accidentally" revealing a fake identity to another player.
- Misdirection—players discussing strategy often intentionally lead others on a wild goose chase of possible motivations.
- Changing moves—most forums allow users to edit their posts, so players can post up one move, and then edit it later before the round closes.

Hand of God

Optional Rule

Prior to the Battle, the Moderator and players must agree on a list of Hand of God effects (at least 10 or 12). Some possible suggestions are:

- Anonymous round
- Double heals
- Extra hit
- 2 players forced to abstain
- Grant 3HP to one Hero
- Resurrection

Then, at designated time during the game—usually at the start of every 2nd or 3rd round—the Moderator rolls on the Hand of God table, and the chosen effect is in play for one round.

ZOMBIES!

Optional Rule

A way for players to have a little life after death. A Hero reduced to 0HP or less becomes a Zombie. The Zombie may never gain HP again for any reason (although Zombies may be hit).

Zombies may continue to deal one hit per round. A Zombie who abstains for any reason deals one random hit and MAY hit him or herself.

Living players who choose to hit Zombies may choose to double up both hits on a single round, regardless of whether or not the Double-Up rule is in effect (see below).

A Zombie reduced to -5HP or less is dead-dead and out of the game entirely.

Other Optional Rules

There's so many possibilities that we can't list them all. Here's just a sample:

- Allow double hits at all times.
- Allow players to make multiple guesses of secret identities in a single round.
- Players who abstain get no move.
- The moderator makes guesses public information, so that if a guess is wrong, everyone knows the results and learns from them.
- Successful call-outs kill the player who is revealed.
- Assign two heroes to each player