

Building Encounters by XP Budget in *Saga Edition*

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special thanks to Rodney Thompson and the Star Wars Saga Edition message board posters

This system was inspired by Wulf Ratbane's "Encounter Budget" system for *Pathfinder*; however, it has been reverse-engineered to work with *Saga Edition* and *D&D/d20* numbers. Note that the two systems have somewhat different expectations as to how many encounters the party should expect to have between levels – *D&D* assumes roughly 13 moderately difficult encounters at each level, while *Saga Edition* uses a sliding scale so that each level takes slightly longer to achieve than the one before it. Feel free to use whichever one suits your campaign better.

Step One: Determine Baseline Encounter Budget

For each character (including NPCs) in the party, look up their target XP on the **XP Budget By Level Chart** and add that number to your encounter total.

Example: For a party of three 3rd-level characters and one 2nd-level character, your total XP Budget for a normal encounter would be (450 + 450 + 450 + 300 =) 1,650 XP in Saga Edition or (225 + 225 + 225 + 150 =) 825 XP in d20.

Step Two: Set the Final Budget by Desired Difficulty

Use the multipliers listed on the Difficulty/Multiplier chart to move the encounters up or down in difficulty. It's generally a good idea to include a mixture of encounters in a given adventure – easy encounters are quick and fun and give the players a sense of accomplishment, but get tiresome after two or three. Hard encounters make for good adventure climaxes, but too many and the players become frustrated and fearful.

Saga Edition XP Budget By Level		
Character Level	XP Budget	Party of 4
½	75	300
1	150	600
2	300	1,200
3	450	1,800
4	600	2,400
5	750	3,000
6	900	3,600
7	1,050	4,200
8	1,200	4,800
9	1,350	5,400
10	1,500	6,000
11	1,650	6,600
12	1,800	7,200
13	1,950	7,800
14	2,100	8,400
15	2,250	9,000
16	2,400	9,600
17	2,550	10,200
18	2,700	10,800
19	2,850	11,400
20	3,000	12,000
+1	+150	+600

D&D/d20 XP Budget By Level		
Character Level	XP Budget	Party of 4
½	37.5 (round down)	150
1	75	300
2	150	600
3	225	900
4	300	1,200
5	375	1,500
6	450	1,800
7	525	2,100
8	600	2,400
9	675	2,700
10	750	3,000
11	825	3,300
12	900	3,600
13	975	3,900
14	1,050	4,200
15	1,125	4,500
16	1,200	4,800
17	1,275	5,100
18	1,350	5,400
19	1,425	5,700
20	1,500	6,000
+1	+75	+300

Desired Difficulty	Budget Multiplier
Very Easy (EL-2)	x $\frac{1}{2}$
Easy (EL-1)	x $\frac{2}{3}$
Standard	x1
Challenging (EL+1)	x1 $\frac{1}{2}$
Hard (EL+2)	x2
Epic (EL+3)	x3

Modified Party CL

There may be conditions that modify a party's CL for better or worse. These are typically significant equipment upgrades or loss (a party armed with powered battlesuits and an autocannon is much more dangerous than a naked party armed with just their bare fists) or situational modifiers (a party that has ten encounters without a break to heal and recover their abilities is at a significant disadvantage compared to the same party fresh as a daisy), and so on. In these situations, you need to ask yourself, "Is the character really as powerful (or as weakened) as if they had changed a whole level?" If the answer is yes, adjust the budget multiplier for a desired difficulty up or down a row for the purposes of determining your budget.

Example: A party of fantasy heroes has ridden all night to catch up with slavers that have their companions and are fatigued, putting them -1 persistent step down the condition track. This effectively makes everyone in the party one level lower, so for a "Hard" encounter, the multiplier should only be x1 $\frac{1}{2}$ instead of x2.

Note that hazards (such as a toxic gas that weakens the party) should be purchased from the regular encounter budget, instead of being treated as a party CL modifier.

Step Three: Purchase Encounter Elements From the Final Budget

"Encounter elements" are creatures, traps, hazards, or skill challenges to overcome. "Overcoming" a creature doesn't necessarily mean killing it, just removing it as a threat. For instance, softening up a stubborn 5th level cop who wants to give you a traffic ticket still counts as "overcoming" a 5th level creature.

Starting with the highest CL element in the encounter, find the cost of the element on the Encounter Cost By CL chart and subtract its cost from your total encounter budget until you have no more to spend. If you have

points left over, either discard them or purchase one more creature of the next highest allowable CL. Generally, you should not buy more than 10 of any single encounter element into a single encounter, as many low-powered creatures or easy skill checks are not likely to add much to the overall challenge of the encounter.

Saga Edition Encounter Element Costs	
Encounter Element CL	XP/Encounter Budget Cost
-5 (or $\frac{1}{10}$)	20
-4 (or $\frac{1}{8}$)	25
-3 (or $\frac{1}{6}$)	35
-2 (or $\frac{1}{4}$)	50
-1 (or $\frac{1}{3}$)	65
0 (or $\frac{1}{2}$)	100
1	200
2	400
3	600
4	800
5	1,000
6	1,200
7	1,400
8	1,600
9	1,800
10	2,000
11	2,200
12	2,400
13	2,600
14	2,800
15	3,000
16	3,200
17	3,400
18	3,600
19	3,800
20	4,000
21	4,200
22	4,400
23	4,600
24	4,800
25	5,000
26	5,200
27	5,400
28	5,600
29	5,800
30	6,000

Regardless of the desired encounter difficulty, you should avoid including any single element that has a CL higher than the highest party member's level +2. For example, if you have a party of four 5th level characters in an epic encounter (budget of 3,000 XP), that doesn't mean you should send them up against a single CL 15 foe – your party will be slaughtered. A much more excit-

ing encounter would be a CL 6 boss (1,200 XP) backed up by two CL 3 minions (1,200 XP) and a CL 3 trap in the middle of the room (600 XP).

D&D/d20 Encounter Element Costs	
Encounter Element CL	XP/Encounter Budget Cost
-5 (or 1/10)	30
-4 (or 1/8)	37
-3 (or 1/6)	50
-2 (or 1/4)	75
-1 (or 1/3)	100
0 (or 1/2)	150
1	300
2	600
3	900
4	1,200
5	1,500
6	1,800
7	2,100
8	2,400
9	2,700
10	3,000
11	3,300
12	3,600
13	3,900
14	4,200
15	4,500
16	4,800
17	5,100
18	5,400
19	5,700
20	6,000
21	6,300
22	6,600
23	6,900
24	7,200
25	7,500
26	7,800
27	8,100
28	8,400
29	8,700
30	9,000

Vehicles (Particularly Spaceships) and CL

Vehicles, especially spaceships in *Star Wars*, can seriously alter the effective threat of an enemy. If you're on foot, a foe in a speeder is much more dangerous than the same foe out of that speeder. On the other hand, if you're in an X-Wing fighter, the same foe in the speeder is hardly any threat at all.

So, for determining the CL of foes in vehicle combat, the party's gets a vehicle difficulty modifier (or VDM) which is determined by the following formula:

(Ship's CL - crew quality modifier) / 2, rounded down

The crew quality should be listed in the vehicle stat block. If the party is in more than one vehicle, the VDM is based on the average CL of the vehicles (minus their crew quality).

Crew Quality	CL mod.
Untrained	-1
Normal	+0
Skilled	+1
Expert	+2
Ace	+4

Example: A party of smugglers are in a Theta-class shuttle, which has a CL of 11 and normally has a "skilled" crew (+1). The VDM for the party is $(11 - 1 = 10; 10 / 2 =) 5$.

Example: A party of rebel heroes are making an attack run on a Star Destroyer. They are flying a B-Wing fighter (CL 10, "skilled" crew +1) escorted by two A-Wings (CL 9, "skilled" crew +1) and an experimental E-Wing (CL 12, "expert" crew +2). The average ship quality for the party is $(9 + 8 + 8 + 10 = 35; 35 / 4 =) 9$. The VDM therefore is $(9 / 2, rounded down =) 4$.

Once you have determined the party VDM, this number is then subtracted from the CL of each opponent in the encounter. For example a TIE fighter usually has a CL of 7 and an encounter budget cost of 1,400. However, against the rebel party described above, the CL

of the TIE fighter is reduced by their VDM of 4, giving each TIE fighter a final CL of 3 and an encounter budget cost of 600 XP.

This sounds complicated, but it looks worse on paper than it actually is in practice. For example, if your party is always flying around in the same ship, and you determine that ship has a VDM of 5, then you know that all enemies in a ship combat always have an effective CL of -5 from what's listed in the stat block.

Determining Skill Challenge CL

A skill challenge, in the context of encounter design, is some kind of ability or skill check that must advance an important story goal and have a tangible penalty for failure. Thus, making a Persuasion check to haggle for equipment is not a "skill challenge," but making a Persuasion check to convince a hostile warlord not to attack you may very well be. Skill challenges should be built into the scenario just like any other challenge, and can be part of a larger encounter. For example, a fight against zombies taking in a rapidly-flooding cave might

require that somebody make a DC 18 Climb check to get to the lever that shuts off the water before everyone is submerged and drowning while also fighting zombies. A DC 18 Climb check is a CL 4 skill challenge, and while being flooded and fighting is certainly bad, it's not certain death, so there are no modifiers for consequences. Therefore, the skill challenge costs 800 XP from your encounter budget, just as a CL 4 creature would. If one of the members of your party is a champion climber, with high Str and Skill Focus (Climbing), this would modify the CL by -5, making it a CL -1 (or CL ½) skill challenge costing 65 XP.

In general, you should try to stick to skill challenges rather than straight ability score checks, in order to allow players to gain the benefits of their experience levels. Ability scores do improve over time, but at a much slower rate. So if the situation requires an ability check, use the "Ability Check" row to find the appropriate CL for a given DC.

Determining Trap/Hazard CL

Traps or hazards can easily be added to an encounter; you simply determine their CL and spend the appropriate amount from your XP budget. Of course, figuring the CL is usually the tricky part. Published sources can provide some CL values (such as the CL 10 trash compactor listed in *SWSE*, which costs 2,000 XP from your encounter budget). However, when creating your own hazards, all you'll have to go by is your best guess. I have created a rough chart to give you some guidelines. You use the "Normal Damage" for a hazard that can attack again and again, or that has an area effect. You only use the "High Damage" column for a hazard that attacks one character once and is done. Note that the High Damage column may kill more fragile characters outright, so be wary of using this option. If the trap or hazard allows a skill check to bypass it (such as a lock that prevents a pit trap from opening), the DC is usually 15 + the CL of the trap.

Example 1: An Imperial outpost is guarded by turrets that drop down out of the ceiling and attack any creatures not carrying a valid ID transponder. The GM wants the turrets to be a CL 3 hazard, so the turrets have an attack of +3 and do 2d6+2 damage. If the GM wanted to allow a Security check to bypass the turret, the DC would be 18. This costs 600 XP from the encounter budget.

CL	Ability Check DC	Skill Check DC
¼	8	10
½	10	13
1	11	16
2	12	17
4	13	18
6	14	19
8	15	20
10	16	21
12	17	22
14	18	23
16	19	24
18	20	25
20	21	26
Circumstances	CL Modifier	
No party member has expertise on topic, or rarely-used skill	+2	
One or more party members specialize on topic	-5	
Alternate Skill Can Be Used	-1	
Light Consequences for Failure (combat penalties, failed minor quest)	-2	
Severe Penalty for Failure (death, disaster)	+2	
Requires two successes	+1	
Requires three successes	+2	

CL	Attack	Norm	High
¼	+0	1d4	1d8
½	+1	1d6	2d6
1	+2	1d10	2d12
2	+3	2d6+1	4d6+2
3	+3	2d6+2	4d6+4
4	+4	2d6+3	3d12+2
5	+5	4d4+2	6d6+2
6	+6	4d4+3	4d10+4
7	+6	2d10+3	4d12+3
8	+7	2d10+5	4d12+4
9	+8	2d12+4	5d10+6
10	+9	2d12+5	7d8+5
11	+9	4d6+6	5d12+5
12	+10	4d6+7	8d8+6
13	+11	4d6+8	3d12+8
14	+12	4d6+9	9d8+7
15	+12	5d6+7	12d6+7
16	+13	5d6+8	8d10+8
17	+14	3d12+8	8d10+10
18	+15	3d12+9	8d10+13
19	+15	6d6+9	9d10+10
20	+16	6d6+10	8d12+10
+1	Attack targets Fort or Will instead of Ref		
+1	Each additional +2 to attack		
+0	Forgoes damage to impede movement, cause target to lose turn, etc.		
+1	Does damage <i>and</i> impedes movement, causes target to lose turn, etc.		
+1	Traps/isolates target (such as down in a pit)		
+0	Forgoes damage to automatically move target on condition track		
+1	Does damage <i>and</i> automatically moves target on condition track		

Example 2: A treasure chest is guarded by a cunning trap that sprays incredibly corrosive acid at any person who attempts to open the chest without engaging a secret lock first. The GM wants this to be a CL 5 hazard, and since it only fires once at the single person opening the chest, the GM uses the “High Damage” column. However, the acid attacks the Fort defense of the target instead of the Ref defense, giving it a CL adjustment of +1. The final trap has an attack at +4 against the target’s Fort defense, which does 3d12+2 damage. The trap has a disabling DC of

20 and costs 1,000 XP from the encounter budget.

Putting It All Together: Some Sample Encounters

Dungeons and Dragons 3.5 (Non-SAGA): The Necromancer

The GM is designing the “big finish” encounter for the first adventure of a fledgling party of four 1st level heroes. The theme of the adventure is a low-level cleric of Vecna has been raising skeletons and zombies in the local graveyard on the orders of his superiors, in order to test the town’s defenses. The PCs have found the crypt the cleric is using as his headquarters and made their way through its horrid catacombs and finally burst into the chamber to find ... what?

The party’s encounter budget for this scenario starts at 300 for a standard party of four 1st level characters. However, the GM wants this to be a tough fight and so sets the XP budget for double that, or 600.

The evil cleric has to be at least 1st level for the scenario to make any sense, so he would normally take 300 XP from the budget right off the bat, but that doesn’t leave much for the horde of skeletons (CL ½ or 100 XP) and zombies (CL ½ or 150 XP) the GM pictures making up this finale. So the GM decides that the cleric is using a unique artifact to raise the dead, which was given to him by the church elders (who see this dupe as expendable). The artifact (a magic black diamond called “Vecna’s Laughter”) creates a sphere of magical force that completely protects the user from all harm and calls forth undead creatures at the user’s command – but is powered by the user’s own life force (usually without the user’s knowledge). Once the stone is activated, the user is doomed. Thus, the cleric himself is actually not part of the fight, but more of a plot device. All the players have to do is destroy his undead minions, at which point the cleric will suddenly and horribly shrivel up and crumble to dust, with a last plaintive cry of “What’s happening to meeeeeeee...?”

Since the cleric doesn’t have to be part of the XP budget, the GM is free to spend it all on skeletons and zombies. A good mix might be:

Two zombies (CL ½ each)	(150 x 2 =) 300
Three skeletons (CL 1/3 each)	(100 x 3 =) 300
Total Encounter Cost	600 XP exactly

This is an EL 2 encounter, “Very Hard” by standard D&D 3.5 encounter calculations, which is exactly what

the GM is looking for. The players, assuming they all survive, will get $(600 / 4 =) 150$ XP each.

Star Wars Saga Edition: Starship Rescue

A key Imperial defector escaped into hyperspace after a pitched battle, but his personal transport ship was badly damaged and is now dead in space in a backwater system. A band of Alliance heroes (the party) have been dispatched to affect rescue before the Empire closes in. The party consists of three 6th level heroes accompanied by a 4th level droid hero NPC (an R2 unit); they've been given a *Lambda*-class shuttle (CL 12) and two X-Wing fighters (CL 10 each). The plan is for one character to fly the shuttle and dock with the defector's transport, sending the R2 unit to reroute enough power on the defector's ship to enable him to get out and into the *Lambda*, while the other characters fly defense in the X-Wings.

The party's encounter budget for this scenario is:

One 6th level hero in a CL 12 ship that usually has a Skilled crew (+1)	900
Two 6th level heroes (Lvl 6) in CL 10 ships that usually have a Skilled crew (+1)	$(900 \times 2 =) 3,230$
One 4th level droid hero NPC (Lvl 4)	600
Total Encounter Budget	3,300 XP
Average Vehicle CL	$(11 + 9 + 9 = 29;$ $29 / 3 =) 10$
Party VDM	$(10 / 2 =) 5$

The GM knows that she wants to have a contingent of TIE interceptors (CL 8 each, reduced by the party VDM to effectively CL 3) escorting a TIE bomber (CL 9, reduced by the party VDM to CL 4). She also wants the droid hero to make two Mechanics checks to get the defector out of his ship and into the *Lambda* shuttle. A 4th level R2 unit has a Mechanics skill bonus somewhere around +15, so the GM decides the skill challenge is DC 20 and requires two successes. This would normally be a whopping CL 9, except that R2 units specialize in Mechanics, which brings the CL down by -5 for a total of CL 4. Since this seems a little humdrum, the GM also decides to throw in some space mines, dropped by an Imperial scout ship that skeddaddles when the heroes show up, calling for the TIE fighters as backup. These are not intended to be a real threat, just a little spice to the encounter, so the GM decides to wait until he's figured the rest of the encounter and then buy "cheap" hazards with the points left over.

She decides on:

One TIE bomber (CL 4)	800
One skill challenge (CL 4)	800
Three TIE interceptors (CL 3 each)	$(3 \times 600 =) 900$
Five CL 1 mines	$(5 \times 200 =) 1,000$
Total Encounter Cost	3,500 XP

The party's VDM cuts both ways – to determine the stats of her CL 1 mines, the GM adds the VDM back to the effective CL of the mines to determine their actual CL, which turns out to be 6.

Since the characters are in ships, which usually take damage in the 8d10x2 range and up, the GM decides to use double the "high" damage for a CL 6 hazard, and gives each mine an area effect of 2 squares x 2 squares (starship scale), for a total of +6 to hit, 8d10+8 damage, half damage on a miss. Probably not enough to knock anyone out of the fight, but certainly enough to weaken shields (and possibly cripple a TIE fighter, if the heroes can lure one in close enough). The mines, being size medium in the blank vastness of space, require a DC 20 Perception check to spot before you fly into the area of effect. Once a mine is detonated, it is gone.

This actually puts her 200 XP over, but that's nowhere near enough to bump the encounter up from Standard to Challenging. The *Lambda* is hampered by the fact that it can't move or defend itself (making it a very tempting target for the TIEs), but the TIEs are outgunned and in as much danger from the mines as the heroes are, if not more. Overall, this should be a good fight, but not a deadly one.

Sword and Sorcery SAGA: The Man-Apes' Trap

A party of irresolute dogs (four 5th level PCs with ten 1st level nonheroic lackeys) have anchored their sloop, *Outrageous Fortune*, on the shores of a forbidding jungle island and are following their treasure map to an ancient temple to a lost god. What they don't know is that the temple is now populated by a cunning and vicious tribe of proto-human man-apes. Among other things, the man-apes have set up a trap of falling rocks, designed to crush anyone in its area of effect as well as blocking off the only viable trail. The GM wants this mainly to whet the players' appetites for the challenges to come, as well as possibly pruning away some of the "redshirts."

The party's encounter budget for this scenario is:

Four 5th level PCs	$(4 \times 1,150 =) 3,000$
Ten 1st level nonheroic NPCs (effectively ½ level each)	$(10 \times 75 =) 750$
Total Encounter Budget	3,750 XP

Since this should be an Easy encounter, the final budget is $(3,750 \times \frac{2}{3}) = 2,500$ XP. This would buy a CL 12 trap – but that would hardly be an “easy” encounter! The highest single CL in the encounter should be $(5 + 2) = 7$, which has an encounter budget of 1,400 XP. That leaves the GM with 1,100 XP unaccounted for, but the GM decides simply to discard that and use the single CL 7 trap.

The GM finally determines that the rockfall trap covers an area 3 squares by 4 squares, attacks at +6 and does 4d4+3 damage to everyone in the area. Anyone in the front three squares is on one side of the rockfall afterwards, while anyone in the back three squares is on the other side. Anyone in the middle three squares has a 50/50 chance of being on one side of the other. If anyone is specifically looking for traps as they go, they can spot this one with a DC 22 Perception check.

4d4+3 isn’t going to incapacitate any 5th level PCs, but it could be bad for the spear-carriers. The survivors (PCs and NPCs alike) will split 1,400 XP among them.

Uncanny Midnight Tales: The Devil Went Down to Georgia (or “Erich Zann’s Revenge”)

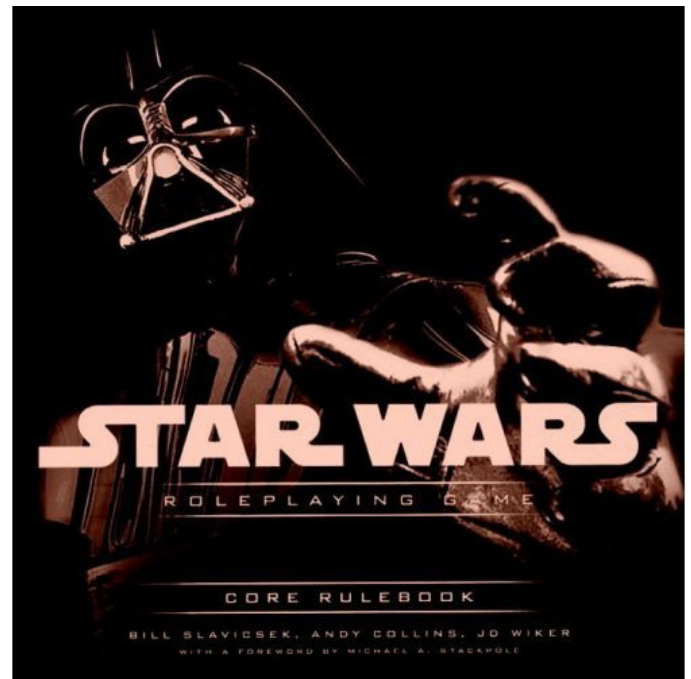
Normally *Uncanny Midnight Tales* uses its own experience system, but there’s no reason why it can’t use this one if desired. One of the players has found an eldritch tome entitled *Music of the Spheres*, but it seems to be mostly a collection of gibberish, except for one very clear 5-bar musical notation which starts out very complex, but gets progressively simpler with each bar. The character, a 7th level student who has been for some time investigating mathematical formulae hidden in the structure of certain music, knows that playing this music is probably a bad idea, but is overcome by curiosity and pulls out his violin and starts to play. Suddenly, from outside his window comes a horrible otherworldly flapping and the banging, scrabbling sound of something with claws trying to get in – it’s been called by the music! Knowledge of the book’s language instantly fills his mind and he reads hurriedly – to send the “Infernal Reaper” (as the book refers to the thing outside) back to wherever it came from, he must quickly play the song in reverse, which requires making a progressively more difficult Perform check for each bar. **Bang!** The thing is breaking through! Hurry!

As the party in this case consists of a single 7th level character, the encounter budget starts at 1,050. However, the GM wants this to be a harrowing challenge, and sets the encounter budget to three times that amount, or 3,150 XP. The character is trained in Perform, but

does not have a particularly high Cha, nor has he taken Skill Focus (Perform), so there’s no modifier for his skill ability. Instead of counting successes, since there’s a progressing difficulty, the GM treats each roll as a separate challenge. Fiddling around with the numbers until it adds up, the GM finally comes up with:

Two DC 18 checks, CL 4 each	(800 x 2 =) 1,600
One DC 17 checks (the middle), CL 2	400
Two DC 16 checks (the first two), CL 1	(200 x 2 =) 400
Total Encounter Cost	2,400 XP

The player looks at his +10 Perform check and takes a deep breath. Even beating a DC 18 is not that hard by itself, but rolling a six or better five times in a row on d20 is not gonna be any picnic. (And in case he blows it, the GM has a CL 8 monster outside breaking its way through, which costs 1,600 XP. The player’s gonna earn those XP one way or another! But if he makes the skill check, he gets more XP, but more importantly has a much better chance of making it through the encounter alive.)



Star Wars Saga Edition
www.wizards.com/starwars

Sword and Sorcery SAGA
www.gneech.com/swordandsorcery

Uncanny Midnight Tales
www.gneech.com/uncanny