

WHISPERS FROM THE PIT

They're Following Us!

Salutations from the pit to all the Savages!

In this issue of *Whispers* I'll be looking at how the chase rules work, or at least how I interpret them.

The first thing you should do, as the rules say, is put out some sort of token for each vehicle in the chase. They help visualize what's going on, which can be important for abstract chases. Next decide who is being chased and who is doing the chasing. In most adventures that'll be fairly obvious.

Chase, Not Race

Remember, the chase rules are for chases, not races. A chase is about catching the guy in front, not beating him to some destination. If you get in front of the guy you're chasing, you then have to keep an eye on what's going on behind you.

If you want to know who gets somewhere first, just make opposed rolls of a suitable trait, slap on some modifiers for differences in Top Speed (or Pace), and see who gets 10 successes first. Every success puts the contestants a certain distance apart. For instance, in a 1000 yard race, every success might represent 100 yards. You can still throw in combat if you want during a race. The number of successes, not the cards, determines the distance. Cards merely determine order.

Sure, it's not totally realistic, but I've watched plenty of races (especially foot races) where the guy in third or fourth for most of the race surges forward to win. Good initiative card, good die roll.

Ahead, Behind, Ahead...

Okay, so as we all know, during a chase you deal each vehicle an action card each round. This not only gives the initiative order, it also gives relative position. Hang on, you say, if I start a chase ahead of my foe, isn't it possible that on the very next round he can suddenly be ahead of me because of the cards? Well, that depends on interpretation. To me, the keyword here is *relative*.

The lead vehicle in a chase usually always stays in front, regardless of the cards (at least in ground chases). Think of the cards as determining distance more than actual position.

In the rulebook, the example states that if one car has a Five and the other a Ten, the vehicles are 25" apart (difference of 5 in the cards x 5" increment, just in case you're new to *Savage Worlds*). We'll assume the car with the Five is being chased for convenience. Next round the cards might be a Jack (11) and an 8 respectively. So has the chaser somehow got in front because his card is lower? Not at all—the order of the vehicles is totally unchanged, the chaser remains the chaser,

but the difference (and therefore the gap) has closed to three increments (or 15").

It's up to the GM, and the players, to explain the shortening or lengthening of the gap. Why does a car suddenly go from being 10 increments ahead to just two, for instance? Well, that naturally depends on the scenery flashing by. Maybe in a town a truck pulls out in front of the lead car, forcing him to break and swerve. The second car, further back, sees this happen and can make allowances. (You could rule that the truck is an Obstacle, but this is flavor text we're talking about).

Maybe going cross country the lead car breaks hard, coming almost to a halt, then turns down a dirt road, while the chaser again sees this happen and takes the corner faster (because he knows he going to take the corner). At the end of the day it is just description, and neither players nor GM should get too involved in the hows and whys.

One easy tool to help visualize distance, at least in a two vehicle chase, is to use a strip of paper marked into 14 increments. Put the lead car on position 1 (as determined by you) and just move the chaser forward or backward as the distance changes. So, if the lead card lengthens the gap by three increments, move the chaser back three steps. If the distance is shortened, move the chaser toward the lead vehicle.

The Open Plains or Skies

If you're using the chase rules to simulate a battle in the skies or on an open plain, the vehicles probably aren't chasing in the way described above. Planes dive and weave about each other, tanks circle round behind each other, and so on. In this instance, unless someone is Trailing, the cards really only indicate distance to the nearest target. It's easier to rule vehicles can fire their main guns during the position swapping.

Maneuvers

Next, let's take a quick look at maneuvers.

Change Position allows you to shorten, or lengthen, the gap between the vehicles but doesn't actually change their true position, just the distance. In the example from the rules, let's assume the car on an Ace wants to get nearer a vehicle on a Six. The current distance is 40" (eight increments). If the Change Position maneuver results in a draw of a Two, the car hasn't suddenly taken the lead, as we described above. All he's done is close the gap to four increments (or 20").

Since you only draw one card on a success and must take one of the new cards, it's fairly obvious that you can end up worse off than before. Usually a success gets you some

benefit, but Change Position is about risk, not guarantees. Few chases take place over wide, open ground, so there are always obstacles. Maybe the chase vehicle tried to close the gap by overtaking a vehicle in front (one not involved with the chase), but sees a truck heading toward him in the opposite lane. The chaser has to pull back in, during which time the lead car has managed to pull away.

Flee is a very abstract maneuver, since until the third successive roll nothing actually changes. Again, it's a descriptive thing. Maybe the first two rolls represent the lead car looking for a way out and then pulling a hard turn down a side alley. The chaser overshoots, reverses, but finds the lead car has vanished (probably down another side street).

Force is actually a tricky maneuver to handle, especially when the trailing vehicle does it. How does a car 35" away manage to force the vehicle in front to "make a Driving roll or go Out of Control," for example? Personally, I wouldn't allow a chaser do it for anything other than bringing side guns to bear unless the vehicles were within one range increment.

In a two-dimensional chase, I'd only allow Trail to be performed by the chase vehicle, not the lead vehicle. It's a common sense interpretation of the rules, not one keeping to the letter. In three dimensions things are slightly different as you can perform all manner of maneuvers designed to get you behind a foe. The High-G Yoyo, for instance, is designed to let a lead plane get behind his chaser.

Shake a Tail is only getting a mention because of one thing—you cannot use the Flee maneuver to escape. Once someone is on your six, you have to shake them off with a different maneuver. This means that any previous Flee successes are automatically negated (the rules state Flee requires three *successive* rounds) unless you take a multi action penalty and try two maneuvers. If you fail to Shake the Tail, you can't try the Flee, so you have to start Fleeing again once you've shaken them off.

Okay, some of these suggestions will penalize the characters at times. However, sometimes the heroes will chase, sometimes they'll be chased. It all balances out over the course of a campaign.

Changing Position, Not Distance

So how does the lead vehicle get to become the chaser, assuming he wants to turn the tables on his foe?

The only time I'd allow ground vehicles to actually change position (not just distance) is either with the Change Position or Force maneuvers (probably the latter as it mentions putting a foe at a serious disadvantage) and only if the lead car specifically wanted to reverse the situation. Take the example of a hero being chased by a bunch of thugs. Said hero, slams on the brakes (Force), thugs drive past (failed opposed roll), hero then accelerates to become the chaser.

In this instance, the cards stay the same but the actual physical position of the vehicles changes. So, if the lead car was on a Six and the chaser a 10, he would have been 20" ahead. By using the Force maneuver, he is now 20" behind.

In aerial combat (and mass tank combat), I'd say that unless you do a Trail, you're not actually chasing someone. The intro to the Chase rules states that the rules can be used for chases or aerial dogfights, implying (though not stating) that a different interpretation of the mechanics is required.

Time and Distance

You shouldn't worry about the time a round of chase combat takes either, or the distance covered. If that's a concern, use the tabletop rules. Each round might only be a few seconds, but that just shows the important stuff, the action on screen if you like. Between rounds, the chase may cover a mile or more.

Example Car Chase

Here's an example. Virginia Dare (driver) and Buck Savage (passenger) have just left Doctor Strange's house with his secret blueprints. They get in their car, pull away, and Virginia sees a gangster-mobile in her rearview mirror. The chase is on! Note that this can easily be converted to a starship chase through an asteroid belt, a sailing ship chase, or whatever you need.

Round One: Our heroes draw a Six and the gangsters get a Ten. Virginia is still in the lead, and the distance is 20" (four increments). Virginia isn't interested in anything but escaping with the plans so the thugs don't get hold of them.

The thugs go first (highest card), and attempt to close the gap so they can shoot out the tires of Virginia's car. They make a Change Position maneuver and get a success. The new card is a Queen! The gangsters try to get closer, but end up caught in traffic and actually lose ground. The distance is now 30". However, the goons open up with their Tommy guns using the Ten for initiative but the Queen for distance. This is long range (more than 24", less than 48") and they miss.

Ginny tries a Flee maneuver and is successful. Buck shoots at the gangsters, but their failed maneuver pushes the range to long range for his pistol and his misses. Note that Buck uses their new card to determine the range because his action takes place after theirs.

Round Two: Our heroes draw an Ace and the thugs get a Six. After some jostling for position (covered by the drawing of cards), the distance is 40". Although Ginny has the higher card, she is still in the lead. She's just reacting first this round.

Ginny makes another Flee roll and is successful. She's twisting and turning down side alleys. The thugs decide to try and Trail. They get a success but so does Ginny, and the positions remain unchanged. A few more bullets fly, but none hit their mark.

Round 3: Our heroes get a Nine, the thugs a King. The distance is back to 20" and the thugs have the initiative.

The gangsters again try to Change Position, and this time they get a raise. Their two cards are a Six and an Ace. They take the Six and close the gap to just 15". Despite now having a Six for position, the thugs still open fire during the King phase of the round. Bullets fly, causing a wound to Ginny's car (we'll assume it's a Chassis hit for ease). She passes the Driving roll and doesn't go Out of Control.

Ginny tries to Flee again but fails! She turns onto a busy street, straight into a traffic jam. Buck leans out the window and blasts away, scoring two wounds to the thugs, Smoke pours from their radiator.

Round 4: Our heroes get another Six and the thugs score a Two, a distance of 20" again.

Ginny decides to head into the traffic on the other side of the road and drives against the flow! The GM invokes the Obstacles rule (and rightly so). Buck cringes and sinks back into his seat to reload his pistol. Before any maneuvers take place, Ginny has to make a Driving roll to avoid the oncoming cars. She does. She then tries a Force maneuver.

By moving closer to the center line of the road she hopes to force the traffic to cut inside her, in turning forcing the gangsters behind to swerve out of their way and mount the sidewalk. She beats the gangsters' Driving roll. The gangsters then have to make a Driving roll or hit an obstacle (Force condition one). They fail, swerve out of the way of the traffic, but drive straight into a building, wrecking their car. The chase is over.

The Other Way

Another method I've seen used is to keep position and initiative cards separate. Ideally you should use a second deck of cards for this, but you don't have to. At the start, deal position cards from one deck and leave them on the table. They don't get changed each round—only by using maneuvers can you change position card. Deal initiative cards each round as normal from the second deck.

Feet and Hooves

Okay, so that's a look at vehicles, but what about foot chases or ones involving mounts? Well, using mount just requires replacing Driving or Piloting with Riding and some creative description from the GM.

Mounted Chases

Nothing changes in terms of initiative and position. We're still talking about chases, so the guy behind usually wants to try and stay there. Only the maneuvers really need reinterpreting, and then not by any huge amount.

Change Position just represents turning to intercept your rival or spurring your horse on. It may, if the roll fails, represent the horse slipping, or it refusing to make a jump (for a success resulting in a worse card).

Flee is naturally slightly harder to interpret when chasing someone over an open field, but in such cases just disallow the maneuver. Then again, maybe you rule the chaser slips and falls (so you can escape), or his horse refuses to jump a hedge (not possible in a truly vast field, obviously). As GM, you have the power to interpret the rules any way you want, of course, and common sense should prevail.

Force maneuvers might represent high fences a horse has to clear, or a patch of rough ground. The guy in front has the advantage that he can see this coming, and take it into consideration. The rider behind may have his vision of a jump blocked by the person he is chasing, or just be at the wrong angle to get a clear view. There's no reason why chases have to be in a straight line. Then again, in a city, perhaps the rider gallops past a market stall and grabs the canopy, pulling the stall over in front of his chaser.

For instance, the lead rider may see a gap in a hedge, so he goes for it using a Force maneuver. If the rider behind fails, maybe his horse didn't have the right angle and hit it, or he has to pull up and try again (change of position cards).

Trail and Shake a Tail are slightly more subjective in a horse race. After all, a horse can perform very sharp turns or stop in an instant (having no Acceleration, and therefore no Deceleration). You could easily disallow this maneuver, or just give the lead rider the bonus to Shake a Tail instead of the chaser to represent the sudden turns. Unless the chase is in a built up area, horses usually have more freedom to move where they want, not being constrained by roads or buildings.

Obstacles, if you decide to use them, can be hedges, low walls, people, rough ground, or whatever else fits the terrain the chase takes place in. In a town, people (or vehicles) are likely to be the biggest obstacle. In the wilds, gopher holes may be a danger.

Foot Chases

As with mounted chases, common sense and loose interpretation of the rules should be used in foot chases. Stick to the letter of the rules and you will probably hit difficulties.

What skill do you use for foot chases? Agility for maneuverability? Maybe Vigor for stamina (though that's better in a long distance race, not a chase)? Notice, to spot things you can use to thwart your rival or help you escape? Some games have a Running skill specifically for chases, but *Savage Worlds* doesn't. Personally, I'd change the skill depending on what the character with the initiative was doing.

If the chaser wants to close the distance, he can use Strength for a burst of speed. If the lead runner wanted to use

Change Position, he could use Strength (for speed) or Agility (to run through or leap over obstacles).

Force could use opposed rolls based on common sense and the player's description of the maneuver. For instance, if the lead character wanted to knock some barrels into the chaser's path, I'd use Strength (to knock the barrels) versus Agility (to avoid them).

A stereotypical scene in most modern films or TV shows is to have the runners cross a busy road. You can guarantee that one guy will leap over the hood of a car (Change Position or Force) while the guy behind has to go around (for a Change of Position for Force condition 3) or get run down (for a Force condition 1 maneuver).

Flee, for instance, might use Stealth versus Notice if there's suitable scenery to hide behind. In a busy city there are usually plenty of vehicles or shops you can use to hide behind or in. If the hero wants to hop on a passing bus or tram (another common movie trick), just have the character make an Agility roll. If he makes it, the chase is probably over (unless his chaser is within one or two increments). Should he fail, you can either carry on the chase as is or deal the character two cards and make him take the less helpful.

Trail should be used as the maneuver to end a foot chase. Basically, it means the chaser has got within half the normal increment, which is 0.5"—all the guy has to do is reach out and he can hit you. A grapple maneuver is handy at this point because if you're chasing someone, you normally want to catch them. Any idiot can blast away at a fleeing foe with a gun if he wants a body count.

Out of Control

The Out of Control table doesn't work as listed for chases involving animals or people. It was never designed to be used that way. It's also a reason why there's two different set of rules for chases and regular combat.

A Roll Over or Flip indicates a fall and puts the character out of the fight. Maybe his horse twisted its ankle, or the character fell over a trash can and got tangled up. Treat Skid, Spin, or Slip as a -2 penalty all their next trait roll, whatever that may be.

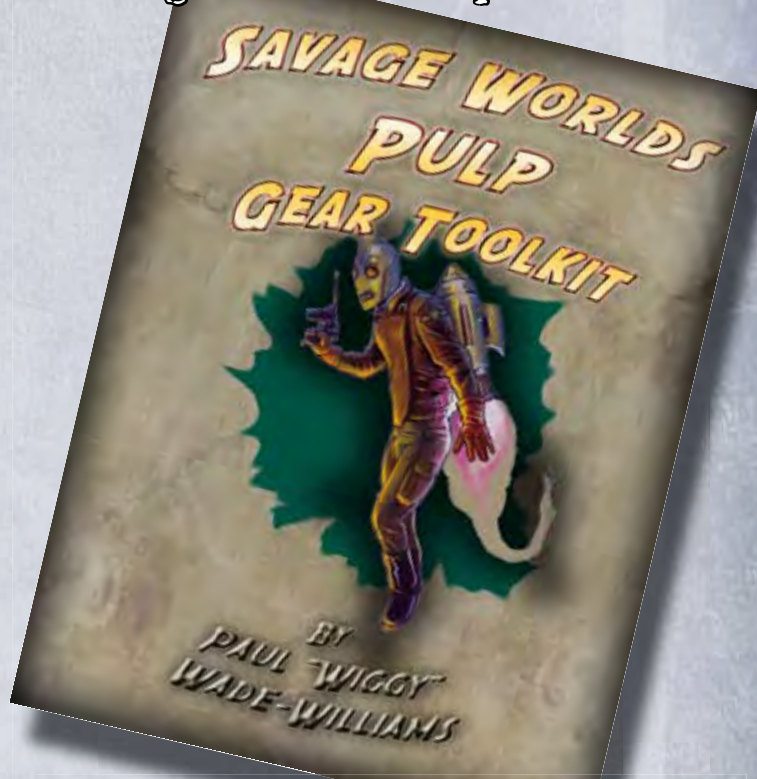
Summary

So, in summary, the chase rules are fast, furious, and fun, but they requires a little interpretation from the GM to make them fit different scenarios.

Wiggy

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