



BOLT ACTION
Different Methods for Activating Units
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How many times have you played a game of Bolt Action only to experience the shock and awe as you watch three, four, or even five order dice of the same color get pulled consecutively from the Bolt Action bag. In rare cases this can give a player the opportunity to grab victory from the jaws of defeat. However, normally when something like this happens, it is a game changing event that often offsets the balance of what was an enjoyable game.

There is nothing wrong with randomly pulling order dice from a bag, and this is what gives Bolt Action one of its charming characteristics. However, there might be some that get discouraged by the random pull of the order dice and would like to try something different. For this reason, I have listed below several different methods for activating units in Bolt Action.

Tokens:

Some of the methods listed below require the use of tokens. These can be anything the players have at hand, but using something like small poker chips, simple counters, tiddlywinks, plastic or wooden tiles/discs, large buttons, or even plastic bottle caps will work just fine for this purpose.

Action Points:

For action points, these too can be anything the players have at hand, but using small cubes, discs, beans, beads, or even small buttons, washers, and coins will work just fine for this purpose. Using something small will also make it easier for bidding (because they can be hid in a player's hand) as well as help keep track of action points a player has remaining (which are not hidden, except when bidding).

Important Note:

The rules for going "Down" when a unit is shot at, "You Men, Snap to Action!", and other game usages of the order dice remain unchanged no matter which method for activating units you pick. Simply incorporate these rules as required when the situation arises, and pull the order dice from the dice pools as needed.

Method #1: Three Dice

During the Order Phase, instead of pulling one order die from the bag, pull three order dice instead. If all three order dice are the same color, put them back into the bag; give it a shake, and pull three dice until you get order dice of two different colors. If there are less than three order dice remaining, or if the dice are all the same color, then pull them individually.

The dice are played in alternating colors. That is, if the three order dice are two green and one brown, they are played as green, brown, green. When finished with these three, pull three more order dice as explained before.

Method #2: Action Points

Instead of putting the order dice in a bag, put them all to one side in a dice pool and give the players twenty* action points each. Before the start of the first turn, the player with the fewest number of units is given an initiative marker – this can be anything the players would like to use. In case of a tie, the attacker gets it, otherwise randomly pick.

During the Orders Phase, players bid for which order die will be taken from the dice pool. They do this by bidding from zero to the number of action points they have remaining. The player with the highest bid wins and gets to choose either his or his opponent's order die. In case of a tie, the player with the initiative gets to pick and passes the initiative marker to his opponent for the next time there is a tie. Don't forget to subtract your bids from your total. When a player is reduced to zero action points, all players add twenty action points after the bid is finished. However, no player can have more than forty action points.

If only one color of order dice remains in the dice pool, bidding stops and the order dice are played out as normal one at a time.

*Players may decide to increase or decrease this number as needed. Also, to represent a certain command quality, players might like to experiment with having an unequal number of

action points per side. For example, in a particular scenario, one side will get twenty action points while the other side gets eighteen action points. During the game, no player can have more than twice the number of their starting action points.

Method #3: Numbered Tokens

Create a simple unit roster and assign each unit in the game its own unique activation token. For example, if you have a total of twenty units in the game, you assign them a number from 1 to 20, and then place twenty tokens in your Bolt Action bag that are numbered from 1 to 20. When a token is pulled, the unit with the corresponding number is activated. The owner of the unit takes a Bolt Action order die from their dice pool and gives that unit an order.

If it helps, players can use two different colors of tokens. For example, if both players have ten units (a total of 20 units), you can use a set of ten red tokens numbered from 1 to 10 for one side, and a set of ten blue tokens numbered from 1 to 10 for the other side. Of course the units on both sides will need to be numbered from one to ten (using a unit roster) to correspond with the numbered tokens.

Method #4: Assign Tokens

Both players get a number of tokens equal to the player with the most units. For example, if player-R has ten units and player-G has eight units, then both players will get ten tokens each. The tokens are numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and so on until the last token is numbered.

Before the Order Phase, players assign their tokens with the number *face down* next to their units. Only one token can be assigned to a unit. **Note:** a player with fewer units will have extra tokens when finished. Just keep these hidden for now. For multiplayer team games, there is absolutely no talking among players while the tokens are being placed.

After all units have been assigned tokens, the Order Phase is ready to begin. Starting with token #1, a player replaces the token with a Bolt Action order die from their dice pool and gives that unit an order. When #1 is finished, token #2 is next, then token #3, and so on until all tokens have been replaced by order dice.

When two opposing units with the same token number are to activate, the unit with the higher morale value (subtract for pins) has the choice to go first or second. If both units have the same morale value, the player with the initiative marker has the choice to go first or second and then passes the initiative token to their opponent for the next time there is a tie. At the start of the game, the player with the fewest number of units is given the initiative marker. In case of a tie, the attacker gets it, otherwise randomly pick.

If you are like me and you prefer the visual appearance of a clean miniature gaming table without the clutter of some numbered tokens, then one thing players can do is to make unit rosters. The roster is set to one side of the game table and used as a placeholder for the numbered tokens.

Method #5 Assign Tokens & Action Points

Both players receive, assign, and use the tokens as discussed in method #4 above. Also, just like method #2, both players receive twenty* action points. Furthermore, the player with the fewest number of units is given the initiative marker. In case of a tie, the attacker gets it, otherwise randomly pick.

After all units have been assigned tokens, they are all revealed at the same time and the Order Phase is ready to begin. Starting with #1, players bid for each pair of tokens to see which one is activated first. If there is only a single token (not paired with another token with the same number), there is no bidding.

Players bid from zero to the number of action points they have remaining. The player with the highest bid wins and gets to choose which token (with the same number) is activated first. In case of a tie, the player with the initiative gets to pick and passes the initiative marker to his opponent for the next time there is a tie. Don't forget to subtract your bids from your total. When a player is reduced to zero action points, all players add twenty action points after the bid is finished. However, no player can have more than forty action points.

*Just as in method #2 above, players may decide to increase or decrease this number as needed. Also, to represent a certain command quality, players might like to experiment with

having an unequal number of action points per side. For example, in a particular scenario, one side will get twenty action points while the other side gets eighteen action points. During the game, no player can have more than twice the number of their starting action points.

Method #6: ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣

First, you will need an ordinary deck of 52 playing cards. Thoroughly shuffle the cards. Every turn each player is dealt one card for every unit they still have in play. For example, Greg has eight units, so he gets eight cards. Steven has seven units, so he gets seven cards. Players are allowed to look at their own cards, but never the cards of the other players. If there are not enough cards in the deck to give the players the correct number of cards, then the remaining cards in the deck and all discards from previous turns are shuffled together to create a fresh deck.

The Order Phase is played out from highest card (King) to lowest card (Two). Aces are Special Cards which are explained below. A player (or referee) calls out the cards by calling out “Kings!” Every player with a King card (if there is one) throws it down. Cards cannot be saved for later. Each card “activates” one of the player’s units. Use a Bolt Action order die from your dice pool to give that unit an order as normal. Next “Queens!” are called, and all players with a Queen card activate a unit, then Jacks, Tens, Nines, and so on.

In the case where more than one player has the same card, **Spades** go first, then **Hearts**, then **Diamonds**, then **Clubs** are last – same ranking order as used in Bridge (card game). After a unit finishes its order, the card used to activate it is placed in the discard pile.

Sometimes a player might end up with more cards than units. This happens when units go “Down” (as a result of being shot at), already activated by “You Men, Snap to Action!”, or simply being eliminated before that unit had a chance to activate. The player simply holds on to the extra cards until the end of the Order Phase and places them in the discard pile, unused.

In addition to activating units, some cards have special qualities. They are referred to as Special Cards. These Special Cards are played just like normal activation cards, but have special characteristics that will balance the card order, but also maybe spice up the game. The Special Cards and their characteristics are:

Seven cards – may roll one D6. Odds get one figure of the unit back (your opponent’s choice). Evens get nothing. This is justified by saying these are stragglers, chased off, lost, or patched-up soldiers returning to the unit. The unit can then proceed with its activation as normal.

Six cards – may reroll all their “to damage” dice. The second roll is binding. This can only be done once, and it must be all the dice or none.

Five cards – may reroll all their “to-hit” dice. The second roll is binding. This can only be done once, and it must be all the dice or none.

Four cards – may reroll their order test (if needed). The second roll is binding. This can only be done once, and it must be all the dice or none.

Three cards – may remove one pin from the unit before doing anything.

Two cards – may reroll their dice. This can be for order test, to-hit, or to-damage. The second roll is binding. This can only be done once, and it must be all the dice or none.

Ace cards – aces are wild and can be any card the player wishes. It must, however, be played in sequence. For example, if you use an Ace card to stand in for a six card for the reroll the “to-damage” characteristic, it must be played when “sixes” are called out. Not before or after. A “real” card always takes precedence over an Ace impersonating it. For example, a real King of Spades goes before an Ace acting as a King of Spades. If multiple Aces are played, all acting as the same card, then **Spades** go first, then **Hearts**, then **Diamonds**, then **Clubs**.

Credit: Method #6 for activating Bolt Action units is a modified and tweaked game mechanic from the *Fistful of Lead* rule book from Wiley Games.