



War of The Ring heralds a new dawn for The Lord of The Rings, and a new way to crush the armies of your foes! Pausing briefly from the battle for Middle-earth, Matthew Ward delves into the tactics and tricks of War of The Ring.

I normally start these things with a bit of preamble, but this time I'm going to dive straight in. Suffice to say, my intention here is to set your feet firmly on the path to victory. We've a lot to cover, and by the time I get to the end I'd like to have given you a little bit of a feel for every corner of War of The Ring, from the basics of moving to the skills of sorcery. The clock is ticking, the word count is running and (of course) the deadline is looming, so let's get on with it!

THE MOVE PHASE

Movement might at first seem like the simplest phase of the game, but it's here that the road to victory begins. Your main job in the Move phase is to get your formations into position to do the most damage later on. Put simply, he who controls the battlefield, controls the game.

War of The Ring allows a lot of freedom when it comes to movement. Provided that a company does not exceed its movement allowance, and the formation ends in a legal configuration, it can pretty much do whatever you need it to. The first thing to look for in the Move phase are formations whose configurations are not going to be suitable in the upcoming turn. Maybe your archers are facing the wrong way, or your phalanx is too broad to pass between a pair of forests or you find your flanks are very exposed. Now's your chance to correct the error.

You'll also need to use the Move phase to set up your charges. This can sometimes require a little bit of careful thought. After all, due to the priority system, your enemy will either get to move his formations after you've finished moving, or he'll get to charge before you do. Canny tactics are therefore required, as well as a little psychological warfare – you don't actually have to hold the advantage if your enemy is convinced that he's on the back foot.

Loremaster's Tactic

The Pathfinders special rule is a handy boon – it allows your formations to ignore certain types of difficult terrain. Elves are particularly handy for this, as are the Grey Company, whose Pathfinders (Master) rule means they can freely traverse the board, regardless of swamps, undergrowth or piles of slain Orcs. Why not use a Pathfinder unit to lure the foe into difficult terrain? Your formation will have no problems withdrawing.





By advancing to within 6" of the enemy, the Riders of Rohan slow the Uruk-hai retreat.

The Enemy Are Upon Us!

Whilst you can't charge in the Move phase, you can lock the enemy down in another manner. The Enemy Are Upon Us! rule decrees that a formation with a foe within 6" will move at half rate. As a result, you can push one of your formations forwards to 'pin' the enemy in place. Whilst a pinned unit can still withdraw, the halved movement rate is unlikely to carry them completely out of danger.

Difficult Terrain

Formations are slowed by areas of difficult terrain, and will normally move at half speed. The main lesson to take from this is not to go into difficult terrain unless you really have to – by the time your formation gets out, the battle might be over. That said, if you can use a cheap (or expendable) unit to draw an enemy formation into difficult terrain, more power to you!

Strong Walls, High Hopes

Buildings, woods and other defensible terrain features can be key to victory in War of The Ring. If you can seize a defensible terrain feature before your opponent does, it'll allow you to dominate everything that occurs beneath its walls (or eaves). Why is this so? Well, apart from granting a Defence bonus to the occupying formation, a defensible terrain feature grants a 360-degree line of sight, making it perfect for installing archers or other missile-armed troops.



Loremaster's Tactic

If there's a defensible terrain feature in or near your deployment zone, grab it as soon as you can. Even the squishiest archers become a formidable foe when they've walls to shelter behind, giving you a solid bulwark to base the rest of your battleplan around.

THE SHOOT PHASE

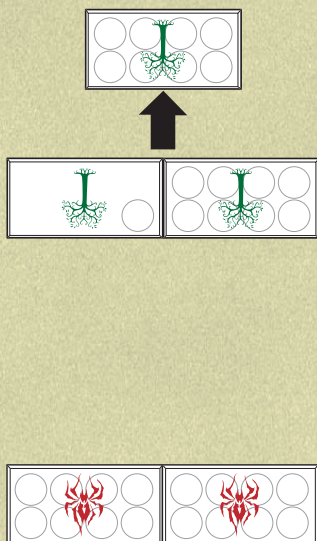
If you've set the pace of the battle properly in the Move phase, the Shoot phase should be a doddle. With careful planning, all of your missile units will have a least one target to play with, and the onslaught can begin.

The Shoot phase, as ever, is a question of target priority. Do you inflict heavy casualties on the ranks of the foe's levy troops, light casualties on his elites, or have a crack at a monster or two? Consider the following when making your choices.

Drive Them Back

First off, there's the driven back rule, which forces an enemy formation to retreat a short distance if you succeed in slaying a company. An inch or two might not seem like a battle winning manoeuvre, but it can stop a charge from hitting home. Remember that formations are driven back if a complete company is removed, regardless of the number of models in the company when the attack is made. Formations with a company that has only a couple of models left are ideal targets therefore, as only a little shooting will drive them back.

Here the Orcs have shot at a Minas Tirith Warrior formation. As the rear company had only one model left, the Orcs only needed to cause a single casualty to drive their enemy back.



Fear the Shield

Shield-equipped infantry (and, to an extent, cavalry) are the bane of archers, due to the hefty Defence bonus that their shields grant to the front. If you want to apply the smackdown on such formations, you'll need to get your archers into their flank or rear where, happily, the shield will help them not one whit.

Don't Shoot Until...

...the enemy get close. The Strength of missile fire is reduced by one at over half range, which can make a huge difference. This isn't to say that you shouldn't shoot at a distant target – every little helps, after all – but if you've a couple of potential pincushions, you're normally better off going for the one that's less than half your range away.

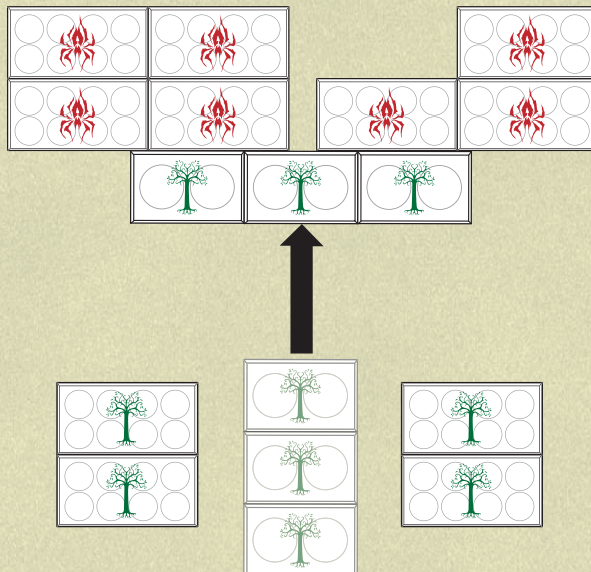
THE CHARGE PHASE

The hard part of charging – getting into position – has already been done in the Move phase. Simply put, if you want to charge, get as close as you possibly can. Different troop types have different minimum charge distances, so bear this in mind when you're moving. Infantry should aim to be within 4", monsters within 6", cavalry within 8" and flying monsters within 10". Of course, you can normally make a successful charge from further away, but the dice are bound to let you down if you push your luck too far.

There are also a few things to bear in mind: who your target is, are you planning to win or just wear them down a bit, and so on... Remember, don't bite off more than you can chew. Oft-times, you'll be faced with the chance to charge two enemies. This might be tempting, but will often just dilute the efficiency of your charge – particularly if you're striking before the foe and are relying on your charge to whittle down the number of foes fighting back.

That said, sometimes you're going to want to charge two or more enemies with the same formation, not because you're confident you can win, but because you don't want those formations to have the freedom to charge other parts of your line. Locking down the enemy in this way is a good way of dictating the flow of the battle, but can be costly as your formations will often find themselves outmatched and fighting on all sides.

The Knights of Minas Tirith charge two Orc formations to stop them attacking the Minas Tirith Archers.



Loremaster's Tactic

When you've got a stubborn or heavily armoured foe that you just can't shift, deploy the siege engine! Catapults can inflict massive damage on enemy formations, particularly large ones. You'll only get a few shots before the foe reaches your catapult, but even a couple of shots can mosh the enemy up good.



THE FIGHT PHASE

You're in contact with the enemy, so let the killing begin! You'll not have that many choices to make in the Fight phase, unless you've brought a Hero and want to begin a duel (see later for more on this). Hopefully, you've seized control of the Move and Charge phases and have a bunch of fights that will resolve in your favour. Regardless of whether or not this is the case, your fate is now in the hands of those fickle dice, so pick 'em up and see how they fall.

In War of The Ring, dice can normally be rolled in huge, satisfying handfuls, but you'll sometimes need to separate certain attacks out – particularly if you have two or more formations with different Strength values or wargear. If you don't have enough dice, just roll what you've got in batches – the dice don't care if you're rolling fifty dice all at once, or five lots of ten.

All Pile On

There are some choices to be made if you're in a multiple fight. Remember that you're looking to cause as many casualties as possible on the enemy – not only will this wear them down, it'll increase your chances of winning. Accordingly, it's normally best to direct your blows against the squishiest target, if there's a choice. That said, there is a school of thought that suggests hitting the biggest, toughest thing in the enemy ranks as a course of action. True, this can rob your foe of his elite troops, but you'll be sorry if you lose the fight because you were so busy giant-killing that you left the Orcs to their own foul devices... Another thing to bear in mind is the striking order. Monsters attack before cavalry, and cavalry attack before infantry. This can be exploited, if you're careful – by striking enemies that have yet to fight, you can attempt to whittle down their numbers and thus reduce the damage they can cause.

The Weapon of Choice

Different weaponry comes into its own against different targets. As they cancel out charge bonuses, pikes are great at defending against cavalry charges, but not so good when used against infantry. Two-handed weapons grant +1 to hit,

but impose a -1 Fight penalty, so are excellent at cracking heavily armoured troops, but will also increase the casualties dealt out by the enemy. Every weapon choice has advantages and disadvantages, depending on circumstance – it's up to you to place the right formation up against the right foe.

Loremaster's Tactic

Banners are all-important – not only do they allow you to re-roll the result of your charge move (always handy to avoid that inopportune '1') but also your Panic test – doubling your chances of standing fast in the face of the foe. Yes, banners are pricey (35 points can often buy you another company, after all) but beware of leaving home without one.



HEROES OF MIDDLE-EARTH

Formations will carry you an awful long way on the path to victory, but you'll need some Heroes to really seize the day. There are three main tricks that Heroes bring you. The first is a nice, passive augmentation of the formation's Fight and Courage. Second up is the At the Double! move – a Hero can make a formation move twice, perfect for getting into the enemy's flank. These are both important traits, and can prove the difference between winning and losing, but it's the third pillar of the Hero's skills, the Might point, that really makes him shine.

There's a common adage about The Lord of The Rings skirmish game. It essentially says that you can use Might points for two things: boosting dice rolls and winning the game. Naturally this is a little simplistic, but it is also fundamentally true. You can (and will, many times) use Might points to modify dice rolls in order to cause extra casualties. However, it's the Might point-driven actions that will win you the game.

Loremaster's Tactic

It should be noted that using Might to modify a single dice is not always to be discounted – sometimes it's crucial. If you're struggling to decide whether or not to spend Might on a dice roll, try to think about the benefits it'll bring. For example, spending a point of Might just to kill an extra enemy model is not always worth it, but if that casualty is the difference between winning and losing a fight, then it probably is worth it. Similarly, it's almost always worth using Might to extend a charge that would otherwise fall short – it won't matter much in the Charge phase, but come the Fight phase that Might point will quickly pay for itself.



Loremaster's Tactic

Put a Hero into an archery unit and deploy it on your flank. Then, with a timely At the Double! (to get into the enemy side arc) and an even more timely Heroic Shoot (to unleash a volley even though your formation has moved). As shields only offer a Defence bonus to the front, this can be a fantastic strike against a heavily armoured opponent.



Heroic Move

Want to get somewhere fast? Then you need a Heroic Move. Not only does it allow your formation to move before the enemy (in the event of priority having been lost) it also lets your formation triple its move distance for the turn. Remember that calling a Heroic Move stops a formation from charging, so unless you're just evading the enemy you need to think a turn or so ahead.

Heroic Shoot

A Hero that declares a Heroic Shoot enables his formation to unleash a volley before all other formations, even if they've moved At the Double! earlier in the turn. A canny Heroic Shoot can devastate an enemy archer formation before they come to fire, or it can be used to fire on the move, keeping your advance rolling forward whilst the formation carries on shooting.

Heroic Charge

I'm not going to dwell on this one, as its applications don't require a lot of pointing out. A Heroic Charge allows you to charge before other formations – ideal during a turn in which you don't have priority. Move up close, and then call a Heroic Charge to pounce on your enemy.

Heroic Fight

A Heroic Fight is what I like to call a 'doubler' – it can turn one victory into two for the very reasonable cost of a single Might point. How can it do this? Well, a Heroic Fight allows a formation to charge and fight again, providing that it can win its first fight. So, if you're convinced you're going to win, call a Heroic Fight. If you are victorious, you can follow up on your foe and get in another beating, or even charge a fresh enemy and shatter two opposing formations in a single turn!

Heroic Duel

Last but not least, the Heroic Duel is an action that needs a little judgement to employ. Basically, if the enemy formation has a Hero in it, you can launch a Heroic Duel. Take care as to how and when you issue such challenges, however – the tougher the Hero, the more likely they are to win the duel. A Goblin Captain should, therefore, think twice before calling Gil-galad out. That said, if the Goblin Captain succeeds in besting Gil-galad, he's got a good chance of killing him – making the odds in the ensuing formation-on-formation fight that much closer. This isn't the only reason to call a Heroic Duel, however. Truth is, your Hero will hack down a goodly number of the foe whilst searching for his nemesis, often garnering as many as a half-dozen kills along the way. That's pretty good for a single Might point!

Going 'Epic'

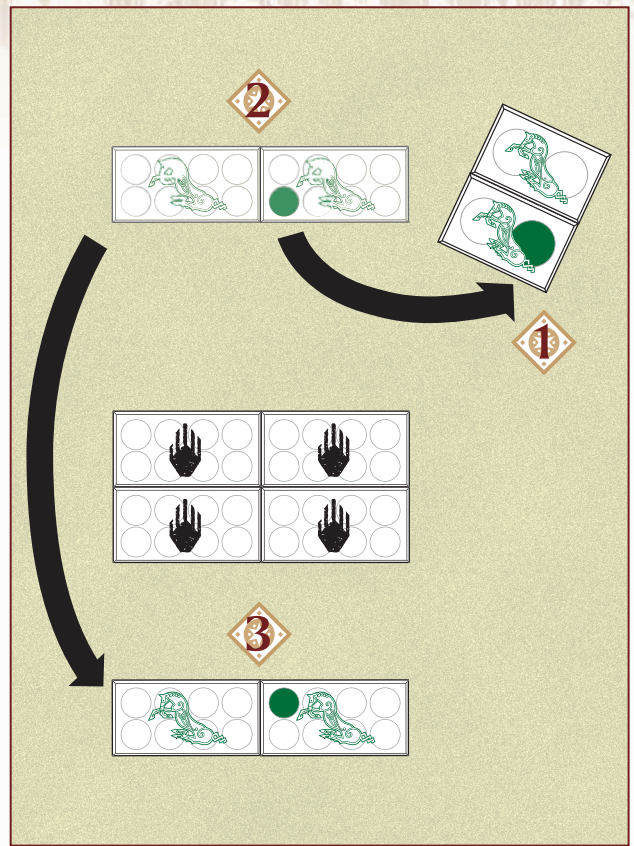
Of course, not all Heroes are equal. I talk here, of course, of the Epic Heroes – the most famous folk in all Middle-earth. Epic Heroes are without doubt the most powerful models in War of The Ring – each has Might enough to equal the fighting strength of most formations. However, Epic Heroes cannot act alone – they need to lead formations into battle. This isn't really a chore – the presence of an Epic Hero can vastly increase the amount of damage that a formation can dish out. But that's not the only reason to field an Epic Hero...

More Than One Way to Win a War

Some Heroes don't merely supply your army with extra muscle; they drastically increase your tactical options. This is clearly a good thing in and of itself – more options not only make your force more flexible, it also makes it harder for your opponent to predict how your army will behave. The more special rules and Epic actions at the Hero's disposal, the more dynamic and flexible your army becomes as a result.

Imagine you've got Aragorn in your army. Forget for the moment that there are three different ways of including Aragorn (Epic Hero, the Three Hunters and the Fellowship of The Ring Legendary formations) and let's just assume that the future king of Gondor is leading a bold formation of Oathsworn Militia with a formidable block of Uruk-hai Warriors bearing down on them (Evil has priority). You've now got several options:

- ❖ Aragorn can leave the Oathsworn Militia to lead a nearby formation of Riders of Rohan, further enhancing their mighty charge and calling a Heroic Charge to 'trump' the Uruk-hai's own attack.
- ❖ He can stay where he is, relying on his Might and a Heroic Duel to carry the day.
- ❖ Or, most deviously, Aragorn can take his companions on an Epic Journey, leading them across secret paths and reappearing behind the Uruk-hai!



These possibilities are quite dramatic, involving bold and obvious movements. Some Epic Heroes give you far less showy, but no less important choices. Saruman, for example, can call one Epic action for free each turn, but which? Does he use Epic Challenge to pin a foe in place for further pounding, Epic Channelling to increase his chances of unleashing magical volleys or Epic Ruination, to make his spells that little bit more devastating? Choose wisely – the battle may rest on your decision.





Similarly, picture this if you will. The Witch-king of Angmar, atop his fearsome flying Fell Beast, is lurking behind your advancing wave of Mordor Orcs. It's now your Move phase, and you've all kinds of options. Do you:

- ❶ Move into a position to allow the Witch-king a suitably crushing charge, thus taking full advantage of his 4 Attacks at Fight 6?
- ❷ Have the Witch-king perform a swoop attack, dive-bombing both Minas Tirith formations that lie in his path for D3 Strength 6 hits per formation?
- ❸ Or leave the Lord of Angmar in place, knowing that his baleful presence will ensure that the Orcs get their At the Double! moves without any chance of failure.

Of course, regardless of what you decide, the Witch-king has a battery of spells to supplement all three courses of action. So, he has three tactical options, and can cast up to three spells of his choice from a selection of 10. That's an awful lot of ways to use a Witch-king...

And those are just a few examples of the tactical options provided by Epic Heroes. Other high-powered Heroes are similarly replete with all manner of different tricks and tactics they can pull off with aplomb.



HERE COME THE MONSTERS

Monsters are second only to Heroes in the damage they can dish out, but beware! Their success is not a foregone conclusion. Due to the random factor provided by the *Hard to Kill!* family of tables, monsters can go on seemingly forever, or they can collapse after only a couple of blows. As a result, monsters can seem a little challenging to use, but nothing could be further from the truth. Even a single Troll can mash its points' worth of cavalry without any help, and will normally give an infantry formation a good fight before toppling over. Two Trolls? Now that's scary.

Loremaster's Tactic

Where monsters truly excel is in quickly reaching the parts of the battlefield other formations cannot reach – i.e. a fight somewhere behind them. As monsters can see and charge all around, they're great candidates for guarding the flanks. Even if the enemy gets a charge in, the monster can counter-charge quite handily!



What you have to bear in mind with monsters is that they're not designed to deal with ranked up formations – they'll not survive a slugging match, so you'll have to give them support. This can be another monster, if you like, but a big block of infantry is often a better choice. Either way, the tag team is sure to be more effective than its individual elements alones.

MUSTERING YOUR MAGIC

Last, but not least, I'd like to say a few words about sorcery. Whilst you can get along just fine in War of The Ring without a magic-wielding Hero, choosing a wizard or two really opens up your options. There are two key factors to consider when selecting your spellcaster: Mastery and discipline.

A spellcaster's Mastery determines how many spells he can attempt in a single turn. The higher the Mastery, the more powerful the wizard. Each wizard also knows a certain set of spell disciplines. There are five disciplines in War of The Ring: Dismay, Darkness, Command, Ruin and

the Wilderness. Each discipline has its own theme and, broadly speaking, its own alignment. Good wizards tend to have access to Spells of Command, Dismay and the Wilderness, whereas Evil sorcerers draw their power from Ruin, Darkness and Dismay. Each discipline has five spells, and can muster a range of magical effects, but there's one lesson that's true throughout – you'll achieve more by using your spells to support your main army, than by trying to win the game through magic alone...

Swords and Sorcery

Take the Spells of Ruin, for example. There are a couple of what I would call directly damaging spells in here (*Bolt of Fire* and *Exsiccate* come to mind) and it can be really rather tempting to have your wizard try to blatter the foe all by himself. However, it's worth looking a little deeper into the Spells of Ruin and combining the effects of *Dark Fury* and *Shatter Shields*. By casting *Shatter Shields* on an enemy unit, you can strip them of protection for at least a turn. Thereafter, you cast *Dark Fury* on a nice, wimpy and expendable formation, allowing them to re-roll 1s and 2s when striking in close combat. With the simple application of two spells, you've turned an Orc rabble's suicide charge against Knights of Dol Amroth into a glorious Evil victory! Sorcery is always more effective with a few swords on your side as backup.

On the Receiving End

Under magical assault? Fear not, a Hero can attempt to resist a spell by expending a Might point – this gives him a 50/50 chance of cancelling the spell's effects. Of course, if you really want to take control of the odds, you can always expend other Might points to turn that 2 or 3 into the all-important 4 that will keep you safe from the evils of the *Black Breath*.

Loremaster's Tactic

Remember, to take a magic power's Focus into account when casting your spells. Each time you cast a spell, you have to equal or beat the Focus value of the spell you have just cast in order to attempt another. Depending on the circumstances, it's sometimes best to go for that all-important high-power spell straightaway so you can be sure that you'll cast it. That said, you'll often want to build up to that big, all-important spell with a few little warm-up cantrips, in order to draw out a few Might points as the enemy attempts to resist.



Anyway, that's about all we have time for, at least for now. Hopefully I've given you a little food for thought, and maybe there's even the odd sneaky tactic beginning to emerge from the odd mind here or there. Regardless, I'll be back next month to unleash the Elves of Lothlórien on the fiendish Adam Troke – I'd say it's time to put a few of these tactics to the test...