

WAR ON ALL SIDES

In this issue, friend of the Middle-earth team and all-round Hobbit fan Sam Jeffery presents a way to play the Middle-earth Strategy Battle Game with three players, including a new three-player scenario! It's Good versus Evil versus Good and/or Evil!



SAM JEFFERY

Sam has collected many forces for the Strategy Battle Game, from the noble and stoic Arnor to the vicious Orcs of Mordor, and even a small collection of Hobbits. Sam is also a worthy opponent on the battlefield – a fact proven by his many fourth-place awards!

The tales of Middle-earth are largely between two opposing forces – Good versus Evil, Light versus Darkness, the Free Peoples versus those who serve the Dark Lord. Naturally, the Strategy Battle Game represents this, and therefore the game is designed to be played between two forces. Whether this is between two players or teams doesn't really matter, the result is still the same: two opposing armies fighting for the fate of Middle-earth.

However, there have been instances in these epic tales where there have been more than two sides during a particular fight; Thorin's Company is pursued by both the Elves of Mirkwood and Azog's Hunters in the Barrels out of Bond scene, for example. This got me thinking about ways in which we could represent a three-player game within the current rules. After all, more people playing the game often means more fun for everybody!

Growing up, my gaming group had an odd number of people who all played the Middle-earth Strategy Battle Game, a common problem in gaming clubs across the globe. This often meant that one of us had to sit out or act as referee for any rules disputes – which there always are when you are growing up!

Having a three-player version of the game would allow for a greater level of inclusivity, getting more people involved in the game. So I got to thinking about a proper way to have a three-player version of the Strategy Battle Game. How would a three-player version of the game work? What would it look like? And what exciting new mechanics could be used to make a different and inclusive experience?

As the Strategy Battle Game is designed to be played between two opposing forces, some of the mechanics don't quite work if you simply throw

three armies onto the battlefield. So, over the next few pages I am going to present some small adjustments to the core rules to make them work properly for three players, as well as a brand new scenario specifically designed for these multiplayer games. Enjoy!

PRIORITY

The first change that is needed has to do with rolling for Priority. All three players should roll for Priority as normal. However, the player who scores the highest will have First Priority, the player who scores the next highest will have Second Priority, and the player who scores lowest will have Final Priority. If there is a tie between two or more players on the first turn, then all players should re-roll. If there is a tie in subsequent turns, then whoever went later in the previous turn will go first on this turn. For example, Rob has rolled a 6, whilst Jay and Adam rolled a 3. Rob will have First Priority, Adam will have Second Priority as he went after Jay in the previous turn, and Jay will have Final Priority. If all three players tie the Priority roll, then the order will simply reverse.

HEROIC ROLL-OFFS

Normally, if both players declare the same Heroic Action in a phase, they will roll off to see whose goes first; on a 1-3 the Evil player goes first, and on a 4+ the Good player goes first. Obviously, this doesn't quite work for three players and needs a slight tweak.

The first thing that needs to happen is to decide whose army is the 'Most Good', whose is the 'Most Evil', and whose is 'Neutral'. The best way (and easily the most fun way) to decide this is to have a quick discussion about everyone's army and how Good/Evil they are. Some Heroes are clearly more Good or Evil than others, and some could be described as ambiguous at best!

For example, Rob has a Mordor army led by the Witch-king of Angmar, Adam has a Minas Tirith army led by Gandalf the White, and Jay has an Isengard army led by Lurtz. As Adam is the only player with a Good force, he

becomes Most Good. As Rob and Jay both have Evil forces, they need to decide which of them is Most Evil. They decide that as the Witch-king is one of Sauron's deadliest servants, Rob's Mordor force has the best claim of being Most Evil, leaving Jay's army as Neutral.

In roll-offs between two players, follow the standard rules, with the Neutral player winning on a 4+ against the Most Evil player, and on a 1-3 against the Most Good player. If a roll-off is required between all three players, then the Most Evil player will win on a 1-2, the Neutral player will win on a 3-4, and the Most Good player will win on a 5+. If after the first Heroic Action is resolved, the two remaining players are both still able to perform their Heroic Action, simply perform a two-player roll-off as normal.

Continuing from our example, Rob, Jay and Adam have all declared a Heroic Move in the same turn with their leaders. A 2 is rolled for the roll-off, allowing Rob's Witch-king to use his Heroic Move first. After Rob has moved, both Jay's and Adam's leaders are not in combat, and both can still use their Heroic Move. They will have to roll-off themselves. This time a 3 is rolled, allowing Jay to use his Heroic Move before Adam.

SHOOTING INTO COMBAT

In a standard two-player game, Good models cannot shoot into combat at all as they would risk hurting their allies, which is not something they are prepared to do (Evil models have no such qualms). However, in a three-player game, there will be combats that will feature models from the other two forces, and so it seems a bit odd that a Good model couldn't shoot into a combat that only contained enemies.

With that in mind, there is a small change to shooting into combat in a three-player game. Good forces may shoot into combat as detailed in the main rules manual, provided that the target combat contains no friendly models and that there are no friendly models, or combats containing friendly models, that would be In The Way of



In the pictured example, Adam's Warrior of Minas Tirith is shooting into combat. Rob and Jay have an Orc Warrior and a Warrior of Rohan in the targeted combat, respectively. Usually, the Warrior of Minas Tirith would not be able to target this combat as it has other Good models in the combat – the Warrior of Rohan in this case. However, as neither of the models are a part of Adam's army, they both count as enemy models. This allows Adam to shoot into the combat with no risk of hurting any friendly models.

the shot. As you may have guessed, there is no change to Evil models when shooting – they are still free to shoot into combat with the same levels of disregard for their allies as they always have!

SPLITTING COMBAT

When it comes to deciding the order in which combats take place, this works in the same way as a standard game in that the player with Priority will decide how combats are split and the order in which they take place. However, there is an important clarification to make for when this occurs in a three-player game. During the Fight phase, the player with First Priority will split the combats and choose the order in which they happen, even if the combat does not involve any of that player's models.

COMBAT

Perhaps the most important thing to explain is how exactly three-way combats work. After all, combat is an essential part of any game, and there will inevitably be fights that involve models from all three sides. When this occurs, there are a few rules that are different from the standard game.

When a combat features models from all three forces, all three players will make a Duel roll in the usual way. The player that wins the Duel roll will win the combat as usual, with both the other two players having to Back Away for losing the fight. However, models from the winning force may only make Strikes against models they were in base contact with during the fight (or models in base contact with a friendly model they were supporting). To make this clearer, below are two examples to show how it works.

Three-player games are a very different way of playing the Strategy Battle Game that adds an extra level of unpredictability and tactics, as well as being a lot of fun. The rules and clarifications you have read here will allow for your own three-player battles to run smoothly without having to debate the finer points of the game that are designed specifically for two forces. But that's not all! Provided here is a specially designed three-way scenario for you to try in your own games. This scenario is designed around the idea of three forces coming across a vast treasure hoard, with each trying to claim as much of it for themselves as they can. Of course, this can be adapted to fit any theme you like. Enjoy!

Example 1: Here Rob, Jay and Adam are all engaged in a combat with each other, with each of their models in base contact with each other. For the Duel roll, Rob's Orc Warrior rolls a 4, Jay's Uruk-hai Scout rolls a 1, and Adam's Warrior of Minas Tirith rolls a 2, meaning that Rob's Orc Warrior wins the fight. As Rob's Orc Warrior is in base contact with both of his enemies, it may choose to make its Strikes against either of them.



Example 2: In this example, Rob's Orc Warrior is in base contact with both Jay's Uruk-hai Scout and Adam's Warrior of Minas Tirith, though they are not in base contact with each other. For the Duel roll, Rob rolls a 2, and Jay and Adam both roll a 5. This means that Jay wins the Fight as his Uruk-hai Scout has the higher Fight value. Although Jay wants to make his Strike against Adam's Warrior of Minas Tirith, his Uruk-hai Scout is only in base contact with the Orc Warrior and so must make its Strike against the Orc – a lucky escape for Adam!



SCENARIO – THE TREASURE HOARD

Three armies have stumbled across a vast hoard of gold, jewels and all manner of treasure, and now they must fight to claim as much of it for themselves as they can.

SCENARIO OUTLINE

Secure as much treasure from the centre as possible, whilst fighting off others that have come to claim it.

THE ARMIES

Players choose their forces, as described on page 130 of the Middle-earth Strategy Battle Game rule manual, to an equal points value before the game.

LAYOUT

Set up terrain as described on page 136 of the Middle-earth Strategy Battle Game rules manual. Place a 60mm base in the centre of the board; this is the Gold Pile and is impassable terrain. Each player then places a 40mm Stash Marker at the edge of their deployment zone as shown on the map.

STARTING POSITIONS

All players roll a D6 – the player with the highest result chooses one of the deployment zones. The player who rolled next highest chooses one of the remaining deployment zones.

Then, starting with the player who chose the first deployment zone and finishing with the player who did not choose a deployment zone, each player selects a warband in their force to deploy within their deployment zone. Models may not be deployed further than 6" from the captain of their warband.

When this has been done, players continue to deploy warbands in this manner in the same order as described above, until all of their warbands have been placed.

INITIAL PRIORITY

All players roll a D6. The player who scores the highest has First Priority in the first turn.

OBJECTIVES

Once two forces have been broken, the game might suddenly end. At the end of each turn, after this condition has been met, roll a D6. On the roll of a 1-2, the game ends. Otherwise, the battle continues for another turn. At the end of the game, the force that has scored the most Victory Points wins the game. If all players have the same number of Victory Points, or two players have tied for the highest number of Victory Points, the game is a draw.

SCORING VICTORY POINTS

- You score **1 Victory Point** for securing the least number of Gold Tokens but securing at least one. If you have secured the second most Gold Tokens, you instead score **3 Victory Points**. If you have secured the most Gold Tokens, you instead score **5 Victory Points**.
- You score **1 Victory Point** for killing one of the enemy leaders. If you have killed both enemy leaders, you instead score **3 Victory Points**.
- You score **1 Victory Point** if one of the enemy forces is Broken at the end of the game. If both enemy forces are Broken, you instead score **2 Victory Points**.
- You score **2 Victory Points** if you have at least one banner remaining at the end of the game.

SPECIAL RULES

The Gold Pile – If an **Infantry** model moves into base contact with the Gold Pile, and is not engaged in combat, they may collect one Gold Token. A Gold Token counts as a Light Object. Models may only carry one Gold Token at a time, though collecting one from the Gold Pile does not end their movement; they may continue to move after collecting a Gold Token.

Stash Markers – If an **Infantry** model carrying a Gold Token finishes their movement in base contact with their force's Stash Marker, they may secure the Gold Token. The Gold Token is removed from the model; make a note of how many Gold Tokens your force secures throughout the game.

Collapsing Gold – As more treasure is removed from the Gold Pile, it will become unstable and may collapse. If the Priority roll is ever drawn between two or more players, some of the Gold Pile will fall on those nearby. When this happens, models within 1" of the Gold Pile are immediately knocked Prone.

