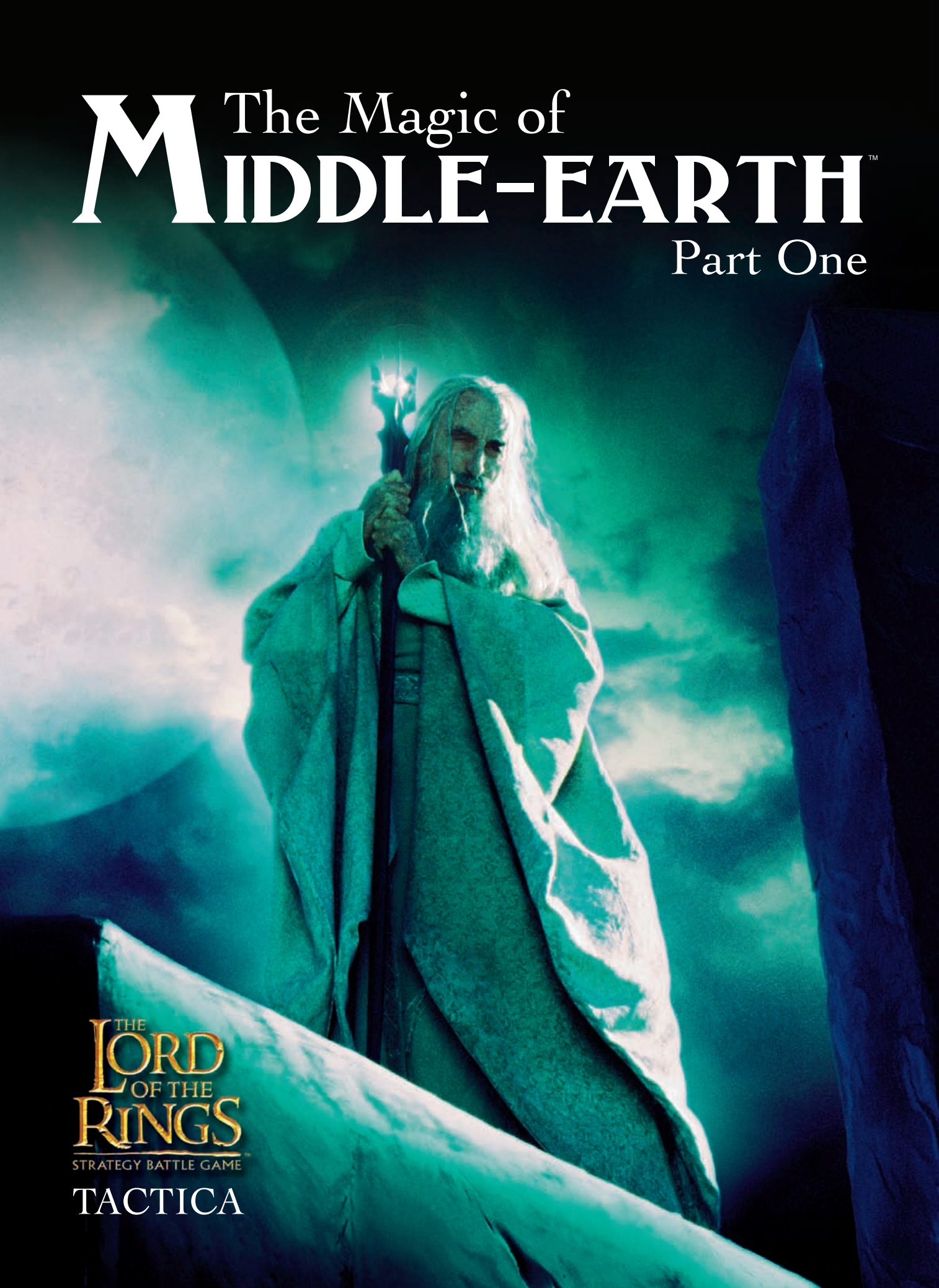


The Magic of MIDDLE-EARTH™

Part One



THE
LORD
OF THE
RINGS
STRATEGY BATTLE GAME™
TACTICA

In Middle-earth, those individuals who wield magical powers are held in awe by their fellows, their powers providing a massive boost on the battlefield. In part 1 of our Tactica, Simon Grant takes a look at the magic of Middle-earth.

Magic. I love magic. Whether it is commanded by one of the mighty Istari, or wielded to deadly effect by one of the terrifying Nazgûl, magic can be employed for good or ill to dominate any game of *The Lord of the Rings*. Having dabbled in the mysterious art of magic since the birth of the game, I will endeavour to share my hard-won experience and unlock the secrets of this hidden lore.

The ABC of Magic

There are plenty of magical powers available to the budding general, from the widely available *Immobilise/Transfix*, to the unique *Paralyse* and *Panic Steed*. All of these powers, however, can be grouped together into one of three general categories, each with a different part to play and time to use: Augment, Blast, and Confound. Some Heroes employ powers exclusively from one of these categories, such as Cirdan of the Grey Havens, who

bolsters the offensive and defensive capabilities of his allies with his magical skills, whilst others, such as Gandalf, have a wide variety of magical powers, encompassing aspects of all three categories of spell.

Whilst there are many Good and Evil Heroes that can command these powers, it is important to understand their uses before you decide which Hero you want to include in your army. Why waste too many points on a fully upgraded Ringwraith, when the Mouth of Sauron or even a humble Orc Shaman could suffice? Therefore, the second point to consider is whether you need a designated spellcaster, usually with a variety of magical powers available to them but somewhat vulnerable in combat, or an all-rounder able to hold their own in or dominate a fight, but with a more limited magical capability. I shall go into more details on spell-casting Heroes themselves next month, but for now it's all about the magic.





Shamanic Fury

It is worth pointing out that every Shaman in the game comes equipped with a spear. Why is this important? A model using a spear in combat to support a friendly model does not count as being part of the combat. This means that if the Shaman has already cast *Fury*, the spell will not be nullified if the model he is supporting loses the combat. It is usually best to support a tougher Hero, however, just in case the poor warrior in front of him is slain and your enemy has a clear path to your Shaman next turn.

Augment

Sometimes it's best to let your warriors do the talking, but why not give them a little helping hand?

Augment spells tend to affect an area of the battlefield around the caster, not only bolstering their own abilities, but those of their allies too. Spells such as *Aura of Dismay* and *Cast Blinding Light* can divert the worst attentions of your enemy away from a key section of the battleline or, perhaps more importantly, keep the best of your warriors alive, fighting for longer than they otherwise would. For the more aggressive players out there, *Aura of Command* and *Fury* will not only keep your army in the fight once broken, but will inspire them to attack even the most terrifying enemy relentlessly, essential for countering mighty heroes or gribbly creatures. For the evil denizens of Middle-earth, *Fury* also has the added benefit of giving them a chance to survive even the most grievous wound that would slay another outright.

The other spells in this category affect individuals, only affecting the caster himself or a single model of his choice. *Terrifying Aura*, *Renew* and *Strengthen Will* are the three examples here. In a similar vein to *Aura of Dismay*, *Terrifying Aura* will help to keep the worst of your opponent's attentions away from your valuable Hero, hopefully allowing you to keep up the momentum of your attack. *Renew* has the

obvious use of healing wounded models, but do not underestimate *Strengthen Will* – giving Elrond or Arwen another Will point with which to cast *Nature's Wrath*, for example, is priceless! The greatest strength of this category of magical powers is that, with the exception of *Aura of Dismay*, the effects remain in play in subsequent turns, and are only nullified when certain conditions are met. For example, *Cast Blinding Light* will cease its effect if the caster runs out of Will. It's well worth checking the conditions of your magical powers when selecting a spellcaster for battle, so that you don't get caught short.

“Augment this!” (Whack!)

So if you can't stop Augment powers, then how do you counter them? There are two methods here. The first is to endeavour to attack the enemy Wizard as quickly as possible. Remember that a spellcaster cannot cast a spell if he is already embroiled in combat, and *Fury* will be nullified if the casting model loses the ensuing fight. A more permanent solution is to send a hit squad of warriors, cavalry or a more powerful Hero to kill them as soon as possible! You can't cast *Aura of Command* if you're a big, red smear on the end of a Troll's hammer, after all.



Blast

For the more aggressive general, there is nothing more satisfying than breaking open an enemy shield wall with a devastating blast of magical energy.

There are only five spells in the category of Blast spells, but they are the least subtle and most destructive of all the spell types. *Sorcerous Blast* and *Nature's Wrath* are both spells that can devastate even the most heavily defended section of the battleline. *Sorcerous Blast* is more precise in its application, bowling models over in a straight line and inflicting damage, whilst *Nature's Wrath* is more indiscriminate, hurling all enemies within 6" to the ground. Both spells, however, leave all enemies involved on their backs just begging to be trampled on or swarmed over as they lie defenceless. It is essential to remember at this point that a spell can be cast at any point during the caster's move, allowing other models, and even the spellcaster himself, to take full advantage of the enemy's vulnerability.

The Nazgûl are blessed with a more precise, but much more powerful, attack in the form of a *Black Dart*. Hitting automatically and inflicting a Strength 9 attack on their chosen target, this spell is exceptional as a method of assassination. Whether aimed at a wounded Hero awaiting the final blow or a banner bearer just asking to be picked off, this power is second only to Sauron's *Chill Soul*, which

causes a wound automatically. Even the most powerful Hero can fall to multiple attacks of this kind, making a group of Nazgûl exceptionally dangerous. Those of a less scrupulous nature might even choose to attack a Hero's steed with a *Black Dart*, forcing him to fight on foot for the remainder of the battle. *Panic Steed* does this automatically, despite being the least aggressive of the Blast spells.

Heroic Intervention

To counter these spells, you can again attempt to engage the troublesome spellcasters in combat and/or kill them, but there is also a more subtle way. Blast spells can all be resisted by the target of the spell using their own store of Will points. By making sure that there is a Hero within range of *Nature's Wrath*, you stand a chance of preventing it from happening. Wily players will almost certainly target warriors with *Sorcerous Blast*, preventing an opportunity to resist, but by positioning a Hero nearby, you can call a Heroic action to engage the enemy first. My preferred method, as always, is to hunt the pesky Wizard down and bludgeon them mercilessly to death: a more direct approach, and infinitely more satisfying!

Radagast

Radagast is the only Hero in the game to have mastered the *Panic Steed* power. With it, he becomes second to none at dealing with a flying Nazgûl. As much as the target Ringwraith can attempt to resist the spell on behalf of his ignoble steed, the moment the spell breaches his defences, the Fell Beast will be gone for good, forcing your opponent to pour Will points into resisting the spell, weakening the model's potential for the rest of the game. All this from a spell that only needs a 2+ to cast!



Unleashing Nature's Wrath



Utterly deadly, *Nature's Wrath* can devastate even the most determined charge. Its best use is to counter the effects of a cavalry charge. By keeping Arwen (or Elrond) safe and tucked behind your battleline, you can unleash *Nature's Wrath* once the enemy has completed his charge (1). This will also knock the rider from his mount. Then, any remaining models can sweep in to engage the models that are already on the floor. Remember also that models on the ground have no



Control Zone, so you can push through their ranks (provided you've space to move through the gaps) to take on back-rankers like banner bearers (2). The *Wrath of Bruinen* takes *Nature's Wrath* to a whole new level, and used against a densely packed formation can take a grievous toll on the enemy force. Imagine how badly a formation of twenty or thirty Goblins, Orcs or Corsairs will suffer when each takes a Strength 2 hit.



Isengard

I have been known to use a fiendish combination of models in my Isengard force to create a small, very expensive, yet utterly deadly hit squad. By combining the debilitating effects of Grima Wormtongue's presence with Saruman's magic, enemy Heroes stand little chance of resisting my trap. I then surround the near defenceless Hero with 3 Uruk-hai Berserkers. At Courage 7, you can rely on them to complete the charge even against a Terror-causing target, and it's no less than 12 Strength 4 Attacks with +1 to wound if you win the ensuing combat.

Confound

Why fight fair, when you can fight dirty?

The spells in the final category, Confound, are best used against enemy Heroes or monsters. The easiest and therefore the most common confounding spell to use is *Immobilise/Transfix*. Most spellcasters have access to this spell, and I can assure you that it is a game-winning one if used correctly. Reducing the scariest beastie or mightiest Hero to a single Fight Value 1 attack, can give even the most diminutive warriors a great chance to do damage way above and beyond their usual ability. By allowing you to nullify a powerful model's strengths, even temporarily, they can be either kept at bay, or dealt with on a more permanent basis. In the latter case, it is sensible to have your hardest hitting models on hand waiting for their cue to deliver the killing blow. Look to try and surround your chosen target, trapping them, and if you have any models with two-handed weapons, get them stuck in and make them count – it's all about the timing. This can be made easier through the use of the *Command/Compel* spell, allowing you to draw your chosen target away from the protection of their allies as well as crippling their fighting ability, leaving them even more vulnerable to attack by your best troops. By far and away the most effective Confound power is the *Paralyse* spell, unique to the Barrow Wights. Rendering its victim completely useless and utterly open to attack, this power has the potential to last indefinitely!

The other Confound spells are slightly less drastic in their effect, but can be useful

nonetheless. *Drain Courage* and *Sap Will* are both spells that are fantastic for weakening a powerful Hero that you have neither the means nor the numbers to deal with effectively at the time – an opening gambit of sorts. *Sap Will* is also the perfect counter to enemy spellcasters with augmenting powers – Cirdan may be impressive, but without Will he's easy meat. Spells of this type usually have lower casting values, and therefore require fewer dice to attempt – yet their effectiveness should not be underestimated. Try fighting Aragorn and the Hobbits in the Amon-sul scenario using only these two spells and you'll see what I mean. *Your Staff is Broken!* is a highly effective, but very specific power, only able to target one of the three Istari. This spell is great for draining their huge store of Will points, as they will invariably try and resist this spell's effects, but if you can actually overcome their mental resistance, their game effectiveness will be hugely reduced.

Fighting Even Dirtier

Again, your best defence against these sneaky spells is your own store of Will points. It is also worth considering your deployment, as setting up your Mordor Troll opposite Gandalf the White and his bodyguard of Clansmen of Lamedon is just asking for trouble, but don't let your plan be scuppered simply because your enemy has selected such a Hero. As mentioned earlier, there are still ways of negating the effects of spellcasters, leaving your best brawlers unmolested by their attentions. Keep them occupied with your warriors and punish another area of the battleline with your best fighters.

A Magical Middle-earth

That's it for this month folks. I hope I have inspired you to look at the effectiveness of spells in The Lord of the Rings strategy battle game in a new light. Magic really does hold the key to help level the playing field if you are outclassed by your opponent's army, and can help make an effective army even more brutally efficient. I have seen four winged Nazgûl devastate an entire army, and witnessed an army of brutish Mordor Trolls overwhelmed with the help of a certain White Wizard. Without the effective use of magic, the outcome of those battles would almost certainly have been different. With that in mind, next month I will take a look at the types of Hero that can wield magic, and how to get the most out of them on the battlefield. Until then, fare thee well!



Casting Spells

It is important to judge how many Will points to use when casting a spell. Use a single point and you may not roll high enough or it may be too easy to resist; use too many and you may limit your spellcasting ability later on in the game. I would suggest that if you really, really need to cast a spell, then use enough to make it happen. For those Heroes that generate a free Will point every turn, take advantage of it and use a single point unless you really need a high score to cast.

Resisting Spells

Always use as many Will points as you feel you need to succeed, but don't be afraid to let the odd spell through – you might still be able to support your targeted models and regroup in the following turn. Will points are a rare commodity for most Heroes, so don't throw them away unless you absolutely have to. You can, however, be more carefree with Will points when using Heroes with the Resistant to Magic special rule, as you'll always have a chance to resist.