In war, you need the right tool for the job, and sometimes you have to look a bit further afield to find it. That’s why we have Mat Ward – to go where lesser mortals fear to tread…

When it comes to selecting your army for battle, few games offer as much choice as The Lord of the Rings. With over forty army lists spread across a dozen factions, there are oodles of options to play with, and both Good and Evil have plenty of combinations to explore. But where to start? That’s the question.

The right tool for the job
Most armies in The Lord of the Rings strategy battle game have weaknesses that can only be countered by allies. Wood Elves are skilled but notoriously fragile, while Dwarves are tough but few in number. Neither of these armies have their own cavalry, while the masters of horsemanship – Rohan – have little in the way of heavily armoured or skilled fighters. Just from these three simple examples, you can see that Rohirrim, Elves and Dwarves are stronger together than apart, and there are countless other examples buried away in Legions of Middle-earth for both Good and Evil.

This got me thinking: Are there any common tactics at which Good excels over Evil, and vice versa? If so, are there troops on either side that every budding conqueror or defender of Middle-earth should consider adding to his army? After poring over Legions of Middle-earth and my growing pile of Sourcebooks, I think I’ve found a few distinct nuggets of strategy worth sharing. In traditional fashion, this month we’re going to look at the tactics that the forces of Good can best exploit, and the troops they can best exploit them with. Lest Evil generals feel slighted, I’ll be back next month to explore some slightly more devious deployments and dispositions on behalf of all murdering minions everywhere.
BULWARKS

Sometimes the best form of attack is defence – and by defence I mean heavily armoured, hard-as-nails troops.

By making good use of the terrain, and holding strategic positions with crack troops, you can force your enemy to waste a lot of time and minions on attacking your carefully planned positions. To make this work, you need not only a good eye for terrain, but also hardy troops: enter the “Bulwark”!

Bring it on!

Bulwark troops are typified by high Defence and good Fight values – they’ll often be outnumbered, so they have to be capable of surviving the worst your opponent can throw at them. Careful use of Bulwark troops can split your enemy in two. One part hammers and stabs at your Bulwarks to little or no effect, while the other part finds itself outnumbered and overwhelmed by the rest of your army.

There are few truly effective Bulwarks in The Lord of the Rings, even in the serried ranks of the Free Peoples. Guards of the Fountain Court and Elf Warriors are amongst the easiest to include as allies in your army, and the massed pikes of the Men-at-arms of Dol Amroth can prove incredibly stalwart, but for the best Bulwarks in the game, you need to look to the Dwarves. Regular Dwarf Warriors are hardy little chaps, with Fight and Defence values high enough to thwart most Evil minions, but the elites have to be seen to be believed.

Beating the Bulwark

Most Bulwark troops rely on formations of spears to work at full effectiveness, so watch out for the enemy creeping around the sides or using spells to the same effect.

Intrinsically Immovable Objects

1 Vault Warden Team – 25 points per team. Far and away the dustiest of all Bulwarks, the Vault Warden team shelters behind a massive shield (Defence 9) and strikes back at Strength 4. Nothing short of a Troll is going to shift a defence based around Vault Wardens.

2 Fountain Court Guard – 10 points each. At Defence 6 and armed with a spear, Fountain Court Guard can put up a dogged resistance against anything smaller than a Mordor Troll. Fountain Court Guard are also blissfully cheap.

3 Iron Guard – 15 points each. Unlike Vault Wardens, Dwarf Iron Guards rely on offence to carry the day. With 2 Attacks to help win the fight, and a Defence of 6 to keep them alive should things go ill, Iron Guard take some shifting – just as a Bulwark should!

Honourable Mention: Men-at-Arms of Dol Amroth – 9 points each (with Pike). A dozen or so Men-at-arms of Dol Amroth can hold a sizeable gap against all comers, providing the foe doesn’t point a Troll their way. They’re particularly good at fending off cavalry, whose large base allows about six Men-at-arms to bring their pikes to bear at once.
BRAWLERS

Brawlers are fighters par excellence, able to cut a bloody swathe through rank upon rank of Orcs without stopping for pause.

There are many approaches to achieving victory. Strategy, army selection, psychology, discretion and ingenuity all play their part – but sometimes you just have to hit stuff. By and large this isn’t a problem for the armies of Good. Their troops are generally of a better calibre than Sauron’s minions and, one on one, can be relied upon to hand out a whuppin’ any day of the week, and twice on Sundays. Unfortunately for the forces of light, such battles are rarely one-on-one. With plenty of cheap troops to call upon, an evil warlord can normally ensure that your warriors are hopelessly outnumbered – that’s when you need a Brawler.

As you might expect, a Brawler’s key attributes are a high fight value and a large number of Attacks to ensure he wins the fight, and a high Strength or special ability that magnifies his potential to dish out damage. Lots of Might and a high Defence are useful secondary traits, but can be managed without in a pinch. Aragorn is perhaps the best example of a Brawler, with Fight 6, three Attacks and Andúril (known in less literary circles as the “1-wound-you-on-a-4-4” sword), but Boromir, Gil-galad and Durin run him pretty close in the mass destruction stakes.

Truth be told, with no monsters, Good relies mostly on Heroes for Brawlers, but what a selection there is! Armies tailored to the Third Age need look no further than Condor for three prime Brawlers: Aragorn the King, Prince Imrahil and Boromir, Captain of the White Tower. If you’re more of a fan of Elves, then Lothlórien and Erebor offer up several options. Nor should Last Alliance themed armies fret – High King Erendil is as good a Brawler as any to be found in Middle-earth.

There’s nothing subtle about a Brawler – just point him in the direction of the enemy you want chopped, and he’ll go down. The best Brawlers can handle enemy Heroes as easily as they can the rank and file, so don’t be afraid of setting them loose on a lurking Orc Captain. Even better, as most Good Heroes have high Courage, Terror-causing beastsies are as vulnerable as their more mundane counterparts.

Brawlers beware!

There are two things that can end even the most promising Brawler’s rampage. The first, and most obvious, is over-confidence. A Brawler can handle himself against most foes, even when trapped, but you can guarantee that once in every game he’s going to roll a pair of twos and a one when trying to win a fight. If the Brawler is fighting a dozen or so Orcs at that point – entirely likely when you take spears into account – then he’s toast. The moral of the story is not to let your Brawler bite off more than he can chew. Even a couple of fairly mediocre buddies can stop the enemy getting all those bonus attacks for trapping your Brawler, and that can mean the difference between him ending up gravely injured or very, very dead.
Brilliant Brawlers

1 Aragorn / Strider – 175 points.
There’s no getting away from it.
Aragorn is the best Brawler the
game can offer. Fight 6 and a free
Might point every turn makes for
a lot of dead Evil critters. Aragorn
can work with almost anyone – as
a member of The Fellowship there
are but a handful of armies that
cannot Field him. Andúril is a tasty
bit of kit, but I’d normally forego it
and spend those points on a small
bodyguard of Warriors – or
perhaps Halbarad – as backup.

Aragorn is the best Brawler in the game,
and there are very few Good armies that
can’t Field him.

2 Gil-galad – 140 points.
Gil-galad gives very little away to
Aragorn when it comes to ladling
out large quantities of death.
Granted, he doesn’t have a free
Might point to fall back on, but he
does cause Terror, have a
whopping Fight value of 9 and
receives a +1 to wound in close
combat. Gil-galad is a great
choice for a Good player who’s
looking for a Brawler that can
clobber a Troll, but he’s also more
than capable of handling himself
against smaller foes.

3 Elladan and Erohir – 150 points
with heavy armour.
Okay, I’m sort of cheating here but,
as you have to buy both twins
together, they do count. Between
them, Elladan and Erohir have four
Attacks and six whole Might points.
Better still, you don’t need to worry
so much about bodyguarding them,
as they can watch each others’
backs. That’s not to say the twins
have to stay close by one another –
individually they can still cause a lot
of damage, but that’s nothing to
what they can achieve as a team.

Honourable Mention:
Treebeard – 190 points.
At a whisker shy of 200 points,
Treebeard is a little pricey for some
packets, but he’s still worth
consideration. Fight, Strength and
Defence of 8 make Treebeard one of
the drop dead hardest characters in
the game – he has little to fear from
Orcs, and even Uruk-hai will be
hard-pressed to bring him down.
The only thing is, he’s relatively
difficult to get into your army in
the first place – only about half of
the Good armies can ally with Fangorn.
SNEAKS

Sneaks hang around the edge of the battle, using cover to keep themselves safe and ranged attacks to pick off the enemy.

Remember earlier as a key to victory? Well that’s where Sneaks come in. For your opponent, Sneaks are bothersome beyond belief. He may think that those five Woses are just a distraction, but can’t be sure that they aren’t part of a master plan.

Naturally, sneaking about the place doesn’t work if there isn’t a substantial threat to your opponent’s front as well. Sneaks work best alongside fairly substantial armies, so you’ll have to restrain yourself from overspending on big, powerful Heroes and heavy cavalry. Rohan, Gondor and Thranduil’s Halls can put out a good selection of effective, but reasonably priced, troops, and so make excellent starting points for Sneak-heavy armies. Dwarf Hold and Elven Havens armies struggle a little bit more, but you should be able to make it work.

For a combatant to be a successful Sneak, he needs two or more tricks up his sleeve. The first, and most straightforward, trick is a simple bow – essential for sniping at the main body of the enemy’s army. Other tricks are somewhat harder to come by, as they’re generally innate abilities. The Woodland Creature and Mountain Dwellers special rules are incredibly useful for marching unimpeded through parts of the board that would normally be a death trap. Most important of all, however, is the humble Elven cloak. Whether a Sneak has a genuine handmade-in-Lothlorien Elven cloak, or a natural ability to mimic the effect of such a garb doesn’t matter – what matters is that an Elven-cloak clad model is all but invisible when obscured by terrain. The end result is that the Sneak in question can happily snipe away at all who pass by, without any fear of being shot himself. Unable to shoot the Sneaks, your opponent is back in the unenviable position of having to physically pursue them, or risk an assault to his flank.

Stopping the Sneak

Sneaks are difficult to deal with, but not impossible. Lightly armoured cavalry, such as Warg Riders are often only a little more pricey than the Sneaks they’ll be hunting, and their extra speed is normally enough to run them to ground. Sometimes, of course, the Sneaks will turn their bows and blowpipes on the oncoming cavalry, but the points values will often be close enough that losing a few models off your hunting party can be worth it to keep the Sneaks from wreaking havoc elsewhere.

Super Stealthy Sneaks

1. Wood Elf Sentinels – 25 points each
   With a bow, an Elven cloak, magical powers, Woodland Creature and 2 Attacks, the Wood Elf Sentinel is clearly King of the Sneaks. Wood Elf Sentinels may be pricey, but you don’t need that many. My favourite tactic is to keep sniping the enemy with a combined volley of Elven bowfire and Eldamar Madrigal to dish out large quantities of death and disruption.

2. Woses Warrior – 7 points each
   Cheap, cheerful and with the essential abilities of Stalk Unseen (Elven cloak) and Woodland Creature, Woses are a Sneak budgeted to any general’s pocket. A dozen or so Woses led by Ghân-buri-ghân cost less than 150 points, making them numerous enough to pose a real threat through numbers alone.

3. Legolas – 105 points with Elven cloak and armour.
   For my last choice, it’s back to Mirkwood. There’s nothing to say a Hero can’t be a Sneak, and Legolas is a one-man scout force. Able to fire three shots a turn, or one shot that hits automatically. Legolas can keep up a good volley of fire that’s sure to whittle the enemy down.

Honourable Mention:
Dwarf Rangers – 10 points each with Dwarf Longbow. Though they lack Elven cloaks, Dwarf Rangers earn their place through sheer toughness. Defence 5 is pretty damn good for a Sneak. They also have a high Shoot value and the ability to move through rocky terrain without penalty.
BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Here’s how to use all the different categories described in one coherent force of good guys.

So, with all that said, can all three tactics be combined into a viable army? Furthermore, can that army look like a real force, rather than a hodgepodge of models? To both questions I say to thee: “Ayel!” In the example here, I’ve chosen a fairly large force to the 700-point standard used in the UK Grand Tournament. I’ve also included all the categories I’ve described – Bulwarks, Brawlers and Sneaks – it wouldn’t be much good if I didn’t put my money where my mouth is, after all.

The Core Force – Chosen from Théoden’s Host: 410 points.
Erkenbrand is a solid leader for the centre of my army, with enough Might points to make a real difference, but cheap enough that I can spend plenty of points elsewhere. The grand total of 35 Rohirrim is not to be sniffed at either – their sheer numbers alone are formidable enough.

The Sneaks – Chosen from The Wild Men of Drúadan Forest: 108 points.
I’m going to confess to whimsy here – I love the Woses, and I’m going to include them, even though it cuts deeply into my ally choices for the rest of the army. I’m certain I shan’t regret it though – particularly in a game against the Orcs.

The Bulwark – Chosen from The White Tower of Ecthelion: 75 points.
With my selection options limited by the Wild Men of Drúadan, I’m going to head to The Tower of Ecthelion for my Bulwark, picking up Beregond and 5 Fountain Court Guard.

The Brawler – Chosen from The Fellowship: 105 points.
With points running out fast, I need an accomplished Brawler for my force. With the army list options open to me after my previous choices, there can be only one answer: Boromir! Though he lacks for Fate and Will, Boromir’s 6 Might will definitely make their presence felt on the skulls and limbs of his enemies.

There we have it! At 698 points, this force has a little of everything. It has plenty of firepower, 13 Might points and a respectable 52 models. As to its narrative? Well it could be plenty of things, but the one I prefer runs as follows. What if Boromir didn’t die on Amon Hen? On his return to Minas Tirith he could have united all the Men who lived in the shadow of the White Mountains. As a result, when Sauron attacked Gondor, his armies of Orcs faced an alliance of Men, ready and able to stand against his evil legions!