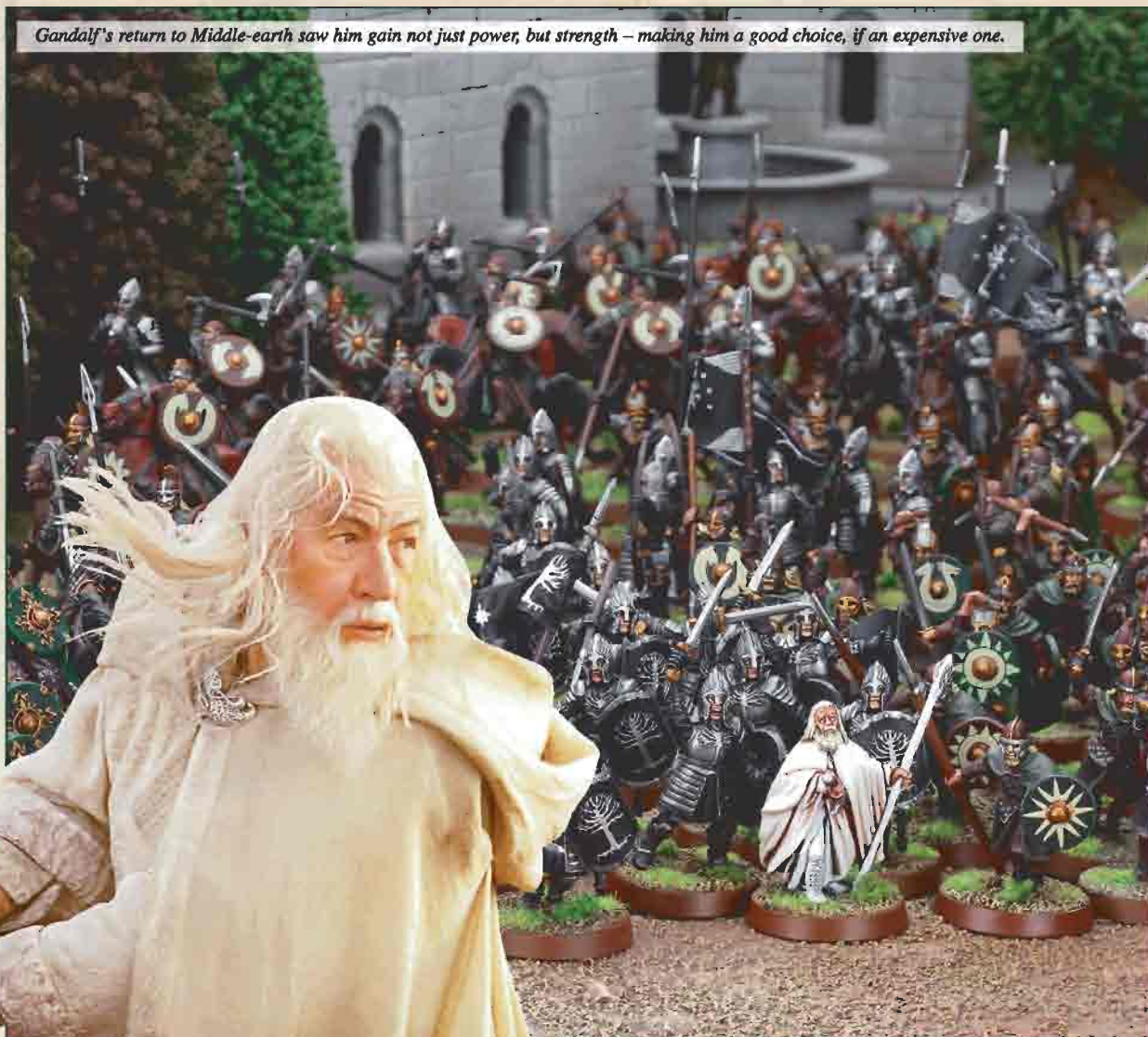


This month sees the release of a slew of Middle-earth spellcasters. With the ranks of his Good and Evil forces now bursting with wizards, wraiths and shamans, Matthew Ward casts an eye over the good, the bad, and the ugly.

THE WIZARDS OF MIDDLE-EARTH

Matt Ward reveals some tricks for the budding spellcaster

Gandalf's return to Middle-earth saw him gain not just power, but strength – making him a good choice, if an expensive one.



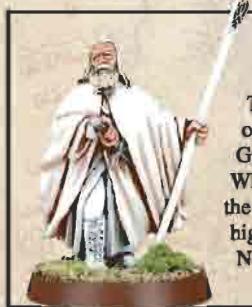
Among the final, and for me the most entertaining, set of releases for Shadow and Flame are the spellcasters. With the diligent Radagast, the twisted Moria Goblin and Uruk-hai Shamans, the carefree Tom Bombadil and Goldberry and the insidious Barrow-wights, the range of magic users available to a player has increased dramatically. To mark this boon, let's take a look at the main spellcasters in the game, starting with the Free Peoples...

GANDALF THE GREY

Probably the most famous of all the spellcasters, and possibly the most renowned individual in all of Middle-earth, Gandalf the Grey is one of the most versatile Heroes available to the Good player. With an awesome range of six spells, a free point of Will each turn and a fairly solid stat-line, Gandalf is always a good choice to give support to a beleaguered force. Like most magic users in Middle-earth, Gandalf doesn't have many blatantly pyrotechnical spells, preferring to work on the fragile wills and psyches of his opponents – though by no means does this make them any less effective. *Immobilise* and *Command* can quite happily pin opponents in place, either to buy time or to make them more

vulnerable to being hacked down by a well-timed blow from a Good warrior. With a Defence of 5, Gandalf is fairly resilient for an unarmoured old man, a state that is only enhanced by his two defensive auras: *Terrifying Aura*, and *Last Light*. One keeps him safe from being charged, while the other drastically reduces the chance of him being hit by arrows. Admittedly, as it casts a brilliant white radiance, *Last Light* definitely does not fit into the 'subtle' group, but then neither does the regular favourite, and mainstay of Gandalf's repertoire, *Sorcerous Blast*. While *Sorcerous Blast* has its finer points, it is relatively difficult to cast (needing a 5+) so use it sparingly. It's always tempting to send magical blast after blast into the enemy lines but this can drain Gandalf's

Will like there is no tomorrow, so the voice of caution should be heeded. Last, but not least, is *Strengthen Will* – always useful when confronted with tricky enemy spellcasters, particularly ones with *Sap Will*. Ultimately, Gandalf the Grey is an excellent support character, well-suited to protecting your warriors, disrupting the enemy, or clobbering opposing troops depending on your mood and the tactical situation.



GANDALF THE WHITE

The next iteration of Gandalf the Grey, Gandalf the White is more of the same but at a higher power level. Nearly all of his

spells are a pip easier to cast, and some have additional effects (*Ultimate Sorcerous Blast* is Strength 6, rather than the Strength 5 of *Sorcerous Blast*). Added to the mélange of magical powers is *Your Staff is Broken!* – not of great use, but enough to keep Saruman at a distance should he be lurking on the same battlefield. Finally, with Strength 5 and Defence 6, Gandalf is tougher than ever,

able to take and hand out a fair amount of hurt. With access to both *Shadowfax* and an Elven cloak Gandalf the White is literally stronger, faster and more difficult to hit than before. The only downside is that at 200 points he is a bit of an indulgence in small games and still quite expensive in large ones. That said, if you want a cornerstone for your force that you can absolutely rely on, this is he!

RADAGAST THE BROWN

Marching out of the pages of *Shadow and Flame*, Radagast is another of the wizards from the West sent to battle Sauron. Though commonly believed to be the weakest of the wizards, Radagast is no mean opponent and certainly not to be trifled with. Radagast brings the always useful *Immobilise* to the battle, but more tellingly the excellent *Renew*, and the daunting *Aura of Dismay*. *Renew* is one of the simplest but potentially one of the most useful spells in the game, allowing Radagast to heal Wounds wherever there is need (although it won't bring anyone back from the dead). More tactically useful, *Aura of Dismay* is slightly unusual, making a good chunk of your force cause Terror for a

turn – it's only useful if you get priority, but there's always the option of Heroic Movement if you don't. Radagast's mastery of beasts means that he is an anti-cavalry Hero without peer. *Panic Steed* is easy to cast and can really wreak havoc amongst enemy cavalry. Even better, his *Terrifying Aura* forces cavalry to test on the Courage value of both rider and mount to successfully charge him. The combination of these two can often turn Radagast into a breakwater in the quadrupedal tide of Warg Riders, with the Evil player preferring to tangle with almost anyone else than risk the wrath of Radagast. In the meantime, his innate ability to move through terrain without penalty and with his raven providing line of sight to anywhere on the

battlefield, Radagast can swiftly get to where he needs to be in time to do whatever it is he needs to do. Essentially, Radagast is a defensive tour de force, his own *Terrifying Aura* and *Aura of Dismay* can keep the numbers on your side in a fight, *Renew* heals wounded friends, while *Panic Steed* can keep cavalry at a distance. All this for 150 points! Oh, and he counts as wearing an Elven cloak too.



TOM BOMBADIL AND GOLDBERRY

Unsurprisingly, Tom and Goldberry are a bit odd. Given their unwillingness to leave the Old Forest, they'll normally only be seen in scenario play – and

then rarely enough – something that many Evil players will breathe a sigh of relief over. Why? Perhaps it's because both Tom and Goldberry can instantly heal all the Wounds, Might, Fate and Will of a single friendly model each turn? Maybe because they can never be wounded or even struck in combat? Or perhaps it is because they are immune to spells and ignore terrain

effects? It may even be because of that pesky ability that means all Good models within 6"/14cm of them automatically pass Courage tests. Whatever it is, Tom Bombadil and Goldberry make their mark wherever they go.



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SAURON

Of course, we can't talk about spellcasters without a nod to the prime Evil of Middle-earth: Sauron, The Lord of The Rings. The first thing people notice about Sauron is the fact that he's rather tough. While having Defence 10 and 5 Wounds often means that you don't have to say sorry to anyone, it isn't as impenetrable as you might think.

Once he gets surrounded, he's in trouble. For this reason, if no other, Sauron should be kept lurking at the back of your army doing what he does best, which is flexing his magical might.

As the supreme lord of darkness, Sauron can marshal all the powers that a Ringwraith can, not only more easily, but

also at greater range. With a range of 18"/42cm on all his powers, Sauron has the best magical reach in the game, able to reach out and touch anyone from the same distance as an Orc bow.

Even better, *Chill Soul* is a whole step better than *Black Dart*, automatically causing a Wound if it is successful. Although it is tempting to *Chill Soul* the characters, it is sometimes better to zap normal warriors – all the better to outnumber the foe!

By teaming Sauron up with your archers while a Captain leads the main wave forward, you can really hurt the enemy. You can, of course, still move him into combat later if you wish, but it's wise to wait until after you've thinned out the enemy.



SARUMAN THE WHITE...

...or Saruman the Wise, or Saruman of Many Colours, or Saruman Ringmaker. There is no limit, it seems, to the self-imposed titles bestowed on the head of the wizardly order.

As an individual who has trodden the paths of both Good and Evil, Saruman has a fairly substantial

repertoire of spells to inflict upon his foes. Those of you who own *The Fellowship of the Ring* or *The Two Towers* rules manuals will notice that Saruman's spell list has changed a little for *The Return of The King*.

Master of deception and dismay, Saruman can cast *Immobilise* and *Command* at the level of Gandalf the White, and with the palantir he can target anyone anywhere on the battlefield. When the foe gets close, Saruman can happily repel them with a few *Sorcerous Blasts* while sheltering behind his *Terrifying Aura*.

Though perhaps not as versatile as his fellow wizards, Saruman has one unparalleled ability – he can affect his enemy all the way across the battlefield. This is not a skill to be underestimated. After all, when it is combined with *Immobilise* cast on a 2+, you can be assailing Heroes' reserves of Will, or just delaying warriors, from a very safe distance indeed. Another plus is a purely comparative one. Even though Gandalf (for example) is not half as efficient in combat as many Good Heroes, such is the lack of skill displayed by Evil leaders that Saruman is the equal to many Evil Heroes and far better than some.

THE RINGWRAITHS

The most versatile spellcasters available to the Evil player, Nazgûl offer no end of tricks and nasty surprises to play on your opponent. Starting off with *Transfix* and *Compel* (the Evil versions of *Immobilise* and *Command*) the Nazgûl have all the basics for disrupting your enemies' strategy.

Their tricks don't end here though – *Black Dart* can pierce the toughest armour with ease, *Sap Will* can prevent the enemy resisting, or even drain enemy wizards of their casting reserves. The key weapon in the arsenal of a Ringwraith is none of these.

As Ringwraiths rely on their Will, and worse lose it through combat, the best way to use these armoured spectres is from a distance.

The fact that they cause Terror will help immensely in this regard, but the trick to making it work is a handy spell named *Drain Courage*.

A battery of Nazgûl can quickly get the Courage of even the bravest Hero down to a point where they have to roll ridiculously high to even charge a Ringwraith. Essentially, Ringwraiths are meant as support. Even though the new versions come with *Might* and *Fate*, don't be tempted to throw them into the fray needlessly – cautious is the way to play. It's always hard to resist the rising bloodlust and charge everything in as soon as you can. Fight it! It won't work.

The one and only to this is if your Nazgûl has a fell beast as transport. Speaking from experience, nothing attracts arrows quite like a fell beast and its sheer size means it cannot hide easily.

Once it is in combat, Good can no longer target it and with *Strength 6* attacks coming in from the beast itself, your Nazgûl will be able to tear up an awful lot of foes in short order. If you don't get him into combat he's just one big target and, correspondingly, dead.





SHAMANS

Coming in both Uruk-hai and Moria Goblin flavours, Shamans can be an essential part of any Evil force. Like most spellcasters they have an immobilisation

spell – in their case *Transfix*. This isn't the core of their worth, however.

Not being very good at magic, their spell only succeeds on a 5+, not great odds. *Transfix* is therefore the backup ability the Shamans should rely on while their real worth comes into play with *Fury*.

Fury is an excellent support spell. Keep your Shamans close to your troops and watch as your hordes of Goblins and

Uruk-hai suddenly pass all of their Courage tests, driven by the shamanic force of one Hero. Even better, enthused to the point of senselessness by the magical aura, 1 in 6 of your minions will shrug off otherwise fatal blows and live to fight another day! For only 45 or 50 points, Shamans are an ideal investment for an Evil player – they even come with a point of Might to let them do some heroic leadership.



BARROW-WIGHTS

Evil spirits housed in the corrupted flesh of kings long dead, the Barrow-wights are part of the legacy of Angmar, and the tyrannical reign of the Witch King.

As you might expect, these

soulless creatures are very similar to the Ringwraiths in form and aspect, giving them a very similar profile. With a Strength of 2 and only 1 Attack, Barrow-wights are not going to last long against enemy troops (although, as ever, terror will help them stay alive).

Why take a Barrow-wight? The answer is simple; *Paralyse*. *Paralyse* is one of the most powerful (and most vocally reviled) spell in the game. Does your opponent take powerful Heroes like Aragorn or

Elrond? *Paralyse* will deal with them, knocking them out and leaving them vulnerable to your vengeful attacks.

A Ringwraith paired with a Barrow-wight is an incredibly powerful double-whammy. The Ringwraith casts *Sap Will* on the Hero who is then Paralysed. On this not-so-subtle cue, a dozen or so Orcs or Goblins rush forward and beat the offending Hero into a pulp while he can't fight back. This may not sound fair but then, nobody ever said that evil was fair.

Right: A shaman can be a crucial ingredient for ensuring success over the forces of Good.



Ultimately, there is a spellcaster to match every taste, whether you are Good or Evil. Just choose with care for the task you have in mind. A Barrow-wight can deal with enemy Heroes with ease, but will die to troops. Saruman can deal with Heroes and warriors alike with moderate skill while Radagast is the bane of cavalry. The choice is yours.