

# **Battleground: Fantasy Warfare**

Strategy Guide v. 2.3

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### Basic Tactics: Maximum Engagement

One of the key concepts to keep in mind is that all other things being equal, the player that is able to bring the greater percentage of his forces to bear at one time has a decisive advantage. Put simply, if I am able to have 2,000 points worth of troops attacking you, and you're only swinging back with 1,500 points worth of troops, I'm going to be doing more damage to you than you're doing to me. Obviously, you can't win if every turn that passes, I do more damage than you do.

There are a few consequences of this axiom. First, use fast units on the flanks to sweep around an opponent's battle line (if it doesn't stretch the entire width of the table). Second, don't put more than a couple of melee units (if any) in reserve behind your main battle line. Third, use missile units behind your main line to engage the enemy even when there isn't room to get additional units into contact, allowing you to use all of your units effectively. Defensively, if your line doesn't cover the width of the table, consider some of the same tactics recommended for avoiding pinching (see next section)—don't let your opponent bring his superior numbers into contact all at once if you can possibly avoid it.

This same principle applies to individual match-ups as well: if you can arrange to engage a high-value unit with a low-value unit, you should do so as quickly as possible, whereas if you are faced with engaging one of your low-value units charging a much stronger enemy unit, you should try to put that off. The Orcs' ability to *lash* a unit can prove very useful here: an additional turn of engaging a 406 point unit of Trolls with a 90 point unit of Zombies is probably worth a command point in most situations. On the flip side, if you're about to initiate an engagement that's unfavorable, it may well be worth a command point (or even several points) to delay your charge. During the extra turn that you're delaying the unfavorable engagement, you are presumably bringing your other forces to bear where you do have favorable match-ups.

Pushing this latter idea to the extreme: you can sometimes angle one of your units facing in towards the center of the board on the turn before it is going to be impacted by a valuable enemy unit. After the enemy unit destroys your unit, it will now be facing away from the center of the table, instead of straight ahead. Since you can't charge a unit that is not in your front arc at the beginning of the turn, this could easily result in the unit being unable to engage for an additional turn, even if it is theoretically close enough to do so. Again, every turn that your opponent's biggest units aren't participating in combat is a turn that you should be doing more damage to him than he is to you.

### Basic Tactics: Pinching

The single most important bonus you can give to your army in melee is the bonus for *pinching*. This is a +1/+1 bonus for two units (assuming you're only pinching with the minimum two units—if you're pinching with three, it's a +2/+2 for three units!). +1/+1 for two units is better than any command card, by a significant margin.

Another great thing about pinching is that on the turn on which you pinch an enemy unit, it must make a pre-combat courage check or else rout. Even a unit that has good courage can sometimes fail a rout check. The consequences are devastating: it turns around, giving you a rear attack and a flank attack, both with the +1/+1 pinching bonus, plus the charge bonus for at least one of the units—the cumulative bonuses are crushing. It's hard not to put the enemy unit into the yellow or red, which means another courage check, which destroys the unit if it fails. Even if you somehow avoid doing significant damage on the free attack, the routing unit is out of action for all of the next turn, and it sucks a valuable command point out of your opponent to rally it.

It goes without saying that avoiding being pinched is equally important. There are various techniques you can employ in order to minimize your chances of suffering a pinching attack.

If your army is outnumbered, consider spreading out the cards with an inch or so between them, so that it is harder for your opponent to flank the units on the end. Another tactic to consider when outnumbered is advancing in a wedge shape, so that the flanks are a bit behind the rest of the line, but still far enough forward to prevent pinching attacks on the more central units. If you're holding in place, you can angle the units on the flanks outwards, making it almost impossible for your opponent to flank you.

Carefully weigh the importance of using a defensive command card to keep a unit alive for an extra turn. Even if the unit in question is unlikely to do any damage of its own (if it's a cheap unit, and in the red, maybe it doesn't even figure to do a single point of damage), if it is holding a spot in the line, you need to think about what will happen if it disappears. If your opponent is going to be able to exploit the gap to gain a pinching attack, then keeping the unit alive is worth more than the command card you spend doing so.

If you have the luxury of some units in reserve, spend a command point in order to move one of them behind a unit that is into the red. You can then use the "backup unit" rule to suck the reserve unit into the gap vacated when your front line unit is destroyed, either from damage or failing a rout check while already routing. This can be very powerful; while the backup unit does not receive any charge bonus or cause fear checks, neither does its opponent.

### Basic Tactics: Keeping Your Line Together

Because pinching bonuses are so extreme, it is important that you keep your line in good order, so that each unit has its flanks covered by a friendly unit. Not only will this limit the number of pinching attacks that your opponent can get, but it also puts all of your own units in position to immediately capitalize on any breakthroughs that you make in your opponents line, in order to get pinching bonuses for yourself.

One method for keeping your line together is to give your faster moving units a maximum movement modifier equal to that of the slowest moving unit in your line. So if you've got some units that move S, some that move L, and some that move SS, you

would give them all Close orders, with the “S” modifier, so they all move at the same rate. This is great for keeping your line together, but if you face a missile-heavy army, you’ll take many extra turns of missile fire with your fast moving units, compared to what they would have taken if they had been advancing at full speed.

In addition to the *rate* at which your units advance, you also need to be aware of which *direction* they’re moving in. If simply given the Close order, a unit will move towards the nearest enemy. This could easily result in your units turning and getting in one another’s way, rather than advancing across the battle field in a straight line. A clever opponent may even push a cheap unit out in front of his line to make it the closest enemy for all of your units, and laugh as your entire line begins converging on it, exposing all of their outside flanks to his remaining units!

One tactic for dealing with this is to give each unit in your army the Close order, with a terrain objective modifier. The objective should be located on the opposing side of the board, right against the edge, directly across from the unit receiving the order. Each unit gets its own terrain objective. This will insure that every unit advances straight ahead, and won’t turn or get in each other’s way. (If you use this tactic, you might ask your opponent if he minds using some sort of shorthand notation to indicate that this is what’s going on, as it’s awkward to mark 8 or 10 separate terrain objectives).

When using either of these tactics, be on the lookout for an opportune moment to *sound the charge*. Using “sound the charge” is expensive—in a standard 2,000 point game, it costs 4 command points, which is roughly equivalent to 4 hits—but it can often be worth it. If you’re close to the enemy line, there may be a turn in which you want all of your fast units to go ahead and start charging, or you want your units to stop heading directly forward and actually go for the nearest enemy, etc. You won’t want to use “sound the charge” every game, but it should be something that you consider.

### Basic Tactics: Deployment

Indirect missile fire units should generally be placed in your rear row; they pay no penalty for shooting over their own troops, and their defense is so poor that you don’t want them to get engaged by enemy melee troops. The exception is the Undead Giant Catapult (and any similar units released in future armies), which has good defense and good melee values. Missile units should usually be placed towards the center of your line, so that they have the maximum number of eligible targets, unless you have a specific plan that requires them to be elsewhere.

While units are not obligated to charge blindly ahead straight across the table, it can eat up valuable command points to maneuver one or more units to a different area, so it’s worth trying to arrange it such that your opponent doesn’t like the opponent that’s directly across from him. For example, Spearmen and Pikemen gain significant advantages facing large creatures and cavalry. Obviously, one player is trying to achieve this match-up, whilst the other player is trying to avoid it; since players alternate placing units, often these troops will be the last to be deployed.

If some units in your front line are significantly less powerful than others, you need to plan in advance how you're going to deal with this. If you scatter the weaker units throughout the line, you are setting yourself up to have them blown away, resulting in your stronger units suffering pinching/flanking attacks. If you are advancing, the standard strategy would seem to be putting your weaker units on one flank, and then attempting to "refuse" that flank by not advancing all the way into combat, but advancing far enough to protect your center from being flanked itself. This can't be maintained indefinitely, but if you get a couple of turns of combat with your strongest troops before your weaker troops are engaged, you should be in good shape to wrap the battle up before your weak flank gives way. Assuming that your opponent is pursuing a similar strategy on the opposite flank, a classic "wheel" pattern emerges on the board.

Very cheap units with poor defense (like Ravenwood Brownies) should probably not be considered part of your main battle line. They are specialty units that you can use to flank the enemy, or grab terrain objectives, or plug in holes in your line once both sides are damaged, or serve some other purpose; but a unit that is easily destroyed in a turn or two is going to be an obvious target for enemy missile troops to soften up and then blow through on first contact, leaving your better units to be pinched/flanked.

If you have a missile heavy army, you can consider "corner sitting" against some opponents. For example, if you have four missile units and four frontline units, you can deploy all the way in one corner, missile units behind melee units. The opposing melee heavy army is in a bit of a quandary: if he deploys seven units abreast as he was probably planning to do, his units out on the opposite flank are going to take several extra turns to get into combat. If he deploys in two lines himself, then when he makes contact, he'll be fighting with half his army whilst you will be fighting with all of yours, an untenable situation. If he slows his advance down so that he arranges to make contact with you from the flank and front simultaneously, he suffers extra turns of missile fire. This is not an auto-win tactic by any means, but it can be very effective against slow armies or with terrain gumming up the works.

Remember that you are not required to deploy facing the opposing table edge. It is often times more efficient for units behind your main battle line to be deployed facing the flank or at an angle; for example, if you deploy a unit of cavalry in the rear rank and give it a terrain objective off to one side, they will avoid needing to pay the cost of moving sideways or reforming if you deploy them facing sideways.

#### Basic Tactics: Choosing the Correct Missile Targets

The first priority for any missile unit should generally be any opposing missile unit that is in range (exception: the Undead Giant Catapult and any other missile units released in the future that have good defense values). This is because opposing missile units have the best ratio of offense to defense: you gain a lot by knocking them out of the fight, and it's easy to knock them out quickly. When attacking an enemy missile unit, you should carefully consider whether it's worth spending a command point or two to "gang up" on

it with multiple missile units; if you can put it out of action in a single turn, it's almost certainly worth it (and undoubtedly worth it if the enemy missile unit is Elite). You can often write your initial orders at the beginning of the game to concentrate on a particular missile unit; until it is within range, your units will fire at the closest opponent anyway, but when they get within range, they will then concentrate fire on it without the need for spending command points to change orders.

The second priority should be a unit that you can destroy to break a hole in your opponent's line. This gets back to a common theme: the importance of pinching and flanking. Ganging up on a unit that your opponent is relying on to hold a place in his line is almost always worthwhile: even if you can't see the immediate payoff, chances are good that sometime soon that gap is going to turn into a pinching/flanking attack.

The third priority is similar to the first priority: any opposing unit that has good offense but poor defense. The perfect example is the Undead Swarm of Rats. These units die quickly and efficiently, and you save yourself from taking painful attacks when you kill them before they have a chance to engage.

Try to avoid shooting at something that is very hard for you to hit if you have a melee unit that can deal with it more efficiently. With the addition of the -1 skill penalty for shooting at cavalry in the 2.x version of the rules, this will normally mean that cavalry aren't the best targets, particularly at extreme range.

#### Basic Tactics: Timing Rout Checks

There is a big difference between failing a rout check on your turn and failing a rout check on your opponent's turn. If one of your units fails a rout check on your opponent's turn, you will have the opportunity to rally it on your turn. It will then be facing the enemy with the Hold order by the time your opponent can pursue it. But if one of your units fails a rout check on your own turn, then your opponent will pursue the routing unit on his turn. In many cases, he will make contact with it, destroying it instantly.

This consideration is particularly important for slow moving units. If a unit of Goblin Wolf Riders fails a courage check, its 7" movement will probably take it beyond reach of the pursuing enemy anyway; but if a unit of Hawkshold Heavy Infantry fails a courage check, their 2.5" movement will probably not get them away from their pursuers, so that it is quite likely to be a death sentence for them to fail a courage check on their own turn.

Of course, failing a courage check is potentially devastating under even the best of circumstances, so you usually want to do everything in your power to prevent it. But you should keep this asymmetry in mind when deciding whether and how to engage on your turn, whether to play a command card that boosts courage before you make a rout check that you have a decent chance of passing anyway, and which unit to swing at when you have the option of choosing.

### Playing Command Cards: Basic Math

Frequently, you will find yourself with the choice of influencing the “to hit” roll or the “to damage” roll. It’s important to make the correct choice.

If you are the attacker, you want to help the roll that has the lesser chance of succeeding. If you are the defender, you want to hurt the roll that has the lesser chance of succeeding.

For example, say that you are rolling 6 dice needing 2’s to hit and 4’s to damage. Without any cards being played, you would expect to do  $1\frac{1}{3}$  points of damage.

As the attacker, if you were to change the “to damage” roll so that now you need 2’s followed by 5’s, you would now expect to do  $1\frac{2}{3}$  points of damage—you gained  $\frac{1}{3}$  damage. But if instead you followed this advice and changed the “to hit” roll (the one with the lesser chance of succeeding, 2’s instead of 4’s), you would now need 3’s followed by 4’s, yielding an expected 2 points of damage—an increase of  $\frac{2}{3}$  instead of  $\frac{1}{3}$ .

In the same situation, if you are the defender and choose to change the “to damage” roll so that the attacker now needs 2’s followed by 3’s, you have lowered his expected number of hits to 1 point, diminishing his hits by  $\frac{1}{3}$ . But if you focus on the roll that he’s already bad at, the “to hit” roll, he now needs 1’s followed by 4’s, for an expected  $\frac{2}{3}$  hits—you’ve cost him  $\frac{2}{3}$  hits instead of only  $\frac{1}{3}$  hits.

So, all other things being equal, concentrate on the roll that is already worst.

### Playing Command Cards: To Fail to Plan is to Plan to Fail

The first few times you play the game, chances are you use a pretty simple algorithm for deciding which blue and red command cards to play—probably something like “this roll is important, I’ll play whichever card in my hand helps the most.”

One of the ways that you can improve your play is by planning ahead to match specific command cards with the units that will benefit from them the most. This planning process can actually start during army construction itself, since you know which units you have and what your command card distribution is.

Assuming that you have an army of mixed factors, you should plan from the beginning to use the correct cards with the correct units. This means being willing to save a card that you have in your hand for a later turn when it will do the most good.

When planning which command cards should go with which units, you want to keep in mind the Basic Math that tells you which cards help which match-ups the most. But you also want to keep in mind which units are most valuable. For example, a given card might save a unit of Zombies from taking 2 hits, whilst saving a unit of Death Knights from taking only 1 hit. Even though the card does more for the Zombies, you’re probably

better off using it on the Death Knights, which are over 5 times as expensive as the Zombies, and cost 3 times as many command points to regenerate.

### Playing Command Cards: Timing is Everything

The most reliable method of winning the game is to win individual combats as quickly as possible, so that you can break holes in your opponent's position and enjoy the benefits of *flanking* and *pinching* attacks. The bonuses for pinching are so extreme that it is difficult to imagine a player losing a game if he has significantly more pinching attacks than his opponent over the course of the battle.

With this in mind, it is almost always worthwhile to play a command card if it is likely to result in destroying a unit or causing a rout check that a unit has a reasonable chance of failing, assuming that the opposing unit is not isolated on the board.

Similarly, it is almost always worthwhile to play a command card to prevent the same thing happening to one of your own units, unless the unit is off on its own somewhere unimportant. The effect on the battle can be so great from a single unit routing that it is probably worthwhile to play a card if there's even only a 25% chance of it making a difference in a given situation. Note, however, that keeping a unit alive on your turn means it will be alive when your opponent moves next, and he won't be able to exploit the gap for a pinching attack; but keeping a unit alive with just a hit or two left on your opponent's turn isn't nearly as useful, since it will most likely die on your turn, and then not be there to plug the gap when your opponent moves next: timing really is everything!

This doesn't mean that you should hold all of your command cards until these situations arise; it does mean that you should prioritize these situations, both on the current turn and also looking ahead a turn or two.

### Playing Command Cards: The Power of Trump

Although it is not spelled out in the current version of the rules, there is a definitive order in which the players decide whether and which command cards to play during melee. This order adds some nice subtleties to the game, and it's worth understanding how it works.

An *attack* consists of the attacker rolling "to hit", then rolling "to damage", and the damage being marked off. For each separate attack, the attacker can play a maximum of one red card, and the defender can play a maximum of one blue card. If a unit is being attacked by multiple opponents, each opponent could play its own red card, because each unit is making its own attack; similarly, the defending unit could play a blue card against each of the units attacking it.

During each attack, there are four distinct points at which either player can choose to play a card, assuming he hasn't played one yet during this attack: (1) before the attacker rolls "to hit", (2) after the attacker rolls "to hit", to modify the roll just made, (3) before the

attacker rolls “to damage”, and (4) after the attacker rolls “to damage”, to modify the roll just made.

At each of these four decision points, the same procedure is followed. First, the attacker has the option of playing a red card. If he does so, the defender gets to see what it is. Second, the defender decides if he is going to play a blue card. If he does, the attacker gets to see what it is. Third, if (and only if) the attacker initially chose not to play a card, but the defender did chose to play a card, the attacker may now change his mind and play a red card.

Because of the implications of the Basic Math section, it should be obvious that it is advantageous to see which card your opponent has played before playing your own. For example, if your opponent needs 3's followed by 3's to hit, and plays Accuracy to make that 5's followed by 3's, you'd like to counter with Mettle, to make that 5's followed by 1's. But if you play Mettle first, to make it 3's followed by 1's, your opponent can trump with Force, making it 3's followed by 3's again.

The first consequence of all of this is that there's a bit of a guessing game about when to play your card. If you are the attacker and you are willing to live with the roll the way it is, you should probably not play a card; if the defender does, you will be able to choose which card is most appropriate to respond with. Similarly, if you are the defender and the attacker doesn't play a card, you need to think about whether to play one or not; if you have reason to believe that he probably has some good attack cards in his hand (based on hand size and which cards you've seen him use already), you probably aren't going to do any better than just passing: if you play a defensive card, he's quite likely to be able to trump it, and maybe even get a better than break-even result. If you are the attacker and suspect that the situation is so dire for the defender that he's going to have to gamble and play a defensive card at this point, you might want to initially pass, even if you're sure you want to play a card: when he plays his defensive card, you'll be in position to choose the best response.

The second consequence is that cards that allow you to modify rolls that have already been made are stronger than they initially appear to be. Let's say that you're the attacker, and the results of this particular attack are important to you. If you have a card in your hand that lets you change the results of a die roll in some way, you can probably afford to initially pass. If your opponent, recognizing the importance of this attack, plays a defensive card, you have come out ahead: instead of him getting to see what you played and responding, you have turned the tables on him, and get to trump him instead. But if your opponent passes, you still have a back up plan: you can roll the dice and then modify them. Hopefully, your opponent will play first in several attacks, giving you quite an advantage for holding onto that single card.

This last reason is why the Elves of Ravenwood army ability to modify a die roll to a “2” can be so useful. It allows the player to initially pass in combat. If both players pass, he can always make a useful alteration to a “2”, usually worth an extra hit. But just by being

willing to do this, he is able to pass first, and get the benefit of seeing which defensive card his opponent plays before playing his own attack card.

### Army Construction: Size Counts

Given the importance of pinching and flanking bonuses, it stands to reason that you don't want to have a battle line that is shorter than your opponent's. Plan in advance how you will deploy if you encounter a melee heavy army; if you can't come up with a reasonable way to keep your front line from getting enveloped (either by having a battle line that stretches the full width of the table, or by using a wedge formation, or some other tactic), then you have probably spent too many points on very expensive units. Consider trading one of them in for some more cheap units. A small missile heavy army may be able to "corner sit" by deploying all of its units as far towards one corner as possible, the theory being that it will take the enemy army many extra turns to get all of its units into contact, and those extra turns of missile fire will do enough damage to cancel out the effect of having a shorter frontage.

Conversely, given the importance of bringing the highest percentage of your force to bear at one time as possible, you want to avoid having so many units that a significant fraction of them are standing around waiting for something to do. Having one or two units in reserve to fill a gap can be a reasonable strategy, but having an entire second line just doesn't work well; review the section on "Maximum Engagement" if this doesn't seem intuitive to you.

Don't fall into the trap of thinking of the width of the Deployment Zone, which is only wide enough to accommodate 7 units abreast, as being the maximum width of the battle field itself, which is wide enough for 10 units. A common tactic is to deploy fast units such as cavalry on the edges in the second rank, so that they immediately move out into the extra space on the edges of the board, giving a very effective 9 unit front, which may well wind up punishing an army that is fielded only 7 wide.

### Army Construction: The Need for Speed

One of the frustrating parts of designing an army is the wildly different Movement Classes that some units have. If you don't consider a unit's MC, you can design the "perfect" army on paper: the right mix of missile and melee, of high skill and high power, of cheap cannon fodder and hard hitting elites. It all looks great until you put them on the field and begin writing orders—at which point you find that if you want to keep your line together, you've paid a bunch of points for units that can supposedly move 5", but are limited to actually only moving 2.5" if they want to stay with the main battle line.

When designing your army, you should consider two sorts of opponents: melee heavy armies which will (presumably) be advancing towards you, and missile heavy armies which will (presumably) be holding and shooting at you from a distance. You need to know which sort of orders you will write against each type of opponent.

If you are going to be holding in both cases, then it really doesn't make sense to buy many units that have high MCs. These are just wasted points. You might want to buy one or two for the flanks, so that when the opposing army has closed you can get around their sides faster; but this probably isn't necessary, and any more than one or two units just isn't good value for your points.

If you are going to be closing against missile heavy armies, then you have a tough task ahead of you during army construction. You want to be moving as quickly as possible, because every turn you're taking damage from missile fire. On the other hand, you want to keep a coherent battle line, to avoid getting flanked and pinched, which means you want all your units to move at the same speed. If you're not disciplined when constructing your army, you'll find yourself faced with two ugly alternatives come the day of battle: send your fast units ahead to get chopped up piece-meal, or else slow your fast units down to the speed of your slowest units, to waste the points they spent on being able to move fast whilst taking extra turns of missile fire. The ideal situation is to have all or most of your units have the same MC, with the exception of specialized units you have a specific use for (like light cavalry that you're sending off around the flanks).

### Army Construction: Know Your Command Deck

Every army has a different deck of command cards. It is important to have at least a general sense of the distribution of cards in your deck, so that you can construct and play your army to take advantage of the cards you are likely to have.

Two extreme examples are the Undead and the Dwarves of Runegard. The Undead command deck has 18 red cards in it, the highest number of any army. When you take this into account, the many Undead units (like Zombies and Abominations) that have very good defensive but poor offensive statistics begin to seem a bit more balanced than they would otherwise. The Dwarves of Runegard have another extreme distribution: all 10 of their special cards (1/3 of their deck) lends some sort of bonus to their courage, making them a much tougher nut to crack than might initially appear to be the case.

In addition to understanding the implications of the basic distribution of the command deck, it is also useful to have a count of the really powerful cards in the deck. For example, it is worth knowing that the Undead have two "Vampirism" cards in the deck. These should represent two nearly-automatic points of regeneration for a unit that has good offensive stats, like Death Knights or even the Giant Catapult. If you're getting near the end of the deck and have only used one, knowing that there's another in the deck might very well lead you to spend your command points drawing those last few cards rather than spending 3 points to heal a unit: you get the same one point regenerated, but also have some extra cards in your hand.

The corollary to knowing your own command deck is that it is also quite useful to know your opponent's deck. If you've seen your Undead opponent play a bunch of red cards, and you mistakenly assume that this implies that his hand is now filled with blue cards,

you are likely to make mistakes that you wouldn't make if you understood the likely distribution of his hand.