

WARMMASTER

Elven Stratagems

Warmaster Competition Finalist
By H. Schillinger

SHORTCUTS TO THE ANCIENT ELVEN ART OF WAR

Elven generals are admired and dreaded by friend and foe alike for their mastery of war. Building upon their ancient people's refined knowledge and centuries of individual experience (Elves do live a long time), they have developed unsurpassed leadership skills and unmatched awareness of the battle.

Over time the Elven Stratagems have been formulated – short aphorisms that condense extensive tactical considerations and military guile to only a few words. The Stratagems' brevity and simplicity make them easily memorable and raises a general's awareness of essential knowledge amidst the rage and confusion of battle.

The Stratagems are not considered secret knowledge by the Elves. However, being a rather solitary people they have not provided much assistance to those taking an interest. It is the work of imperial scholars, and especially the highly accomplished and widely renowned Academicus S. von Harrer, that made them available to a wider audience. However, it remains to be researched whether the striking similarities to the writings of other military thinkers, e.g. Grunt Tzu (see the article Grunt Tzu by Wayne Rozier), point to yet different paths of diffusion.

BASIC STRATAGEMS

Over the next pages, those Stratagems, that have been uncovered so far by imperial scholars and adepts to things Elven, are introduced and commented upon their application in battle. As the lessons contained are rather basic - albeit most Stratagems allow for a wide range of interpretations - they apply not only to Elven armies but rather for any army in Warmaster.

1. Prepare for the Challenge

This applies to the meta-game. Choose your units with a basic plan concerning their role in battle and the army you will face. Choose and place your terrain accordingly - it might well make the difference.

2. Exploiting a fire for a theft

Failed orders are a common event and sometimes leave units vulnerable and battle lines in disarray. A strong tactical reserve helps you to exploit (or alleviate) such a situation. Reserves are not just 'fail-safe-units', but are the troops waiting to exploit an opponents' occasional mistakes or misfortunes to achieve victory for you.



3. Burning the brewery to lure the Dwarfs off the mountain

A feigned attack upon his lines might lure him into a premature employment of tactical reserves or even into initiating his battle plan before time. This will open up opportunities for you to exploit.

4. Brawling in the West, attacking in the East

Indulge yourself in extensive manoeuvring to feign an attack. Bring characters in positions. Convince him, that your charge will be directed at a certain spot in his battle line. If he starts to react by redeploying forces, hit another spot. It must not be decisive, just induce him to make unnecessary manoeuvres and command rolls, giving him opportunity for mistakes:





5. Marching swiftly to surprise the Dwarfs

Units can move surprisingly fast, if given several follow-up orders. While this is not without risk (use everything that enhances command!), it can shift the decisive engagement to a place where it is highly inconvenient for your opponent. Make sure that you spare your command-improving items (e.g. 'Orb of Majesty') for the right moment.

Also, do not forget, that after you defeated an enemy unit in his round you may pursue and advance.

6. Using beautiful maidens to seduce the Bretonnians

Never underestimate the impact of a beautifully painted unit on your opponent's perception - and, especially with inexperienced players, on his decisions. Well-painted and nicely based units are in more than the purely optical sense more visible. So, if you can bear it, let your decisive units look rather dim in comparison with your expandable units. This means that you should not judge (your own and others') units by their appearance. Do not forget banners, items, special rules etc.

7. Defeating a band of Goblins by catching their Chieftain

Warmaster is a game of command and control. Deny it to him. Target his characters, especially his general. Remember, if enemy units move through a character and it cannot reach one of his own units within a move of 30cm, it is taken out. Some players consider this as 'unfair', however, as such a strategy requires a lot of thought, resources (point-wise), and efforts a decent opponent should find ways to exploit this.

Even 'hunting' an opponent's characters will hinder his ability to issue orders in accordance with his original plans and distract him from your actual objectives - but do not let yourself carried away.

8. Muddying the enemy's fish pond

There are even more options for denying your opponent full command over his troops. Some armies have magic abilities for this purpose, e.g. the Undead spell 'Doom and Despair'.

A more commonly available means is confusion. Aim your shooting (the position of your units) with an eye to confuse enemy units, e.g. by driving them back into a combat. A confused unit loses much of its tactical value to your opponent.

9. Remove the fire wood under the wizard's cauldron

Use shooting to control the battlefield. Shooting can, by drive back, deny support to your opponent's units, take units out of a formation set up for attack, or isolate single units for your own attacks.

10. Retreat to preserve one's strength

A unit's initiative can not only be used to charge, but also to

evade. Rather than fighting at odds against superior forces or even in cases the outcome in your favour is uncertain, it might be wise to retreat. That way, you will be able to use a unit when it might be more useful in the greater context of the battle or stand better chances at winning. Evading can also be useful to avoid disarray in your battle lines.

11. Killing with another one's sword

Use all sorts of combat multipliers when attacking opponent's units. That applies to characters as well as to other units that give support or charge the same target unit. Basically it is conducive to get as

many units as possible into charging a single enemy unit - not only does it maximize chances at destroying your target, but transforms single pursuits and advances into large-scale tactical operations that can break up enemy lines. However, be aware that bringing in another unit can also tip the hit-balance against your favour as your opponent decides on how to allocate a unit's attacks. Magic attacks, unlike shooting, can target any unit within range - you might want to withhold them for finishing off damaged units.

12. Watching the fire from the opposite ocean shore

This is a warning applying to shooting and close-combat as well, while it may be helpful to bring as many units into a specific engagement for tactical reasons, an 'overkill' of hits is a waste of resources. A stand can only take so many hits - the additional hits you can inflict might be more useful elsewhere.

This also applies for characters, if for other reasons. Only tie them up, if they will make a difference. Carefully consider, whether the risk of losing them balances the value added to the combat.

13. Forfeiting rank and file to preserve the knights

Do not hesitate to sacrifice a unit in order to save another that is more important to your plan, maintain your line of battle or even to avoid confusion among other troops. Of course you should consider such a forfeit carefully, however, be aware that starting rescue operation might sometimes result in even more losses (including the game).

CONCLUDING WORDS

As already pointed out, the Elves do not consider these Stratagems as a secret. The reasons for this are obvious. The ever-shifting tides of battle are not easily seized in all-encompassing fixed rules. A single minor mistake may undo a hundred wise decisions; a slight variance in events might call for a radically different action. Accordingly, the Elven Stratagems will reveal their use and their full depth only to those, who are already, have gained a certain insight into the art of war. Their benefit does not lie in elaborate advice for victory, but in keeping a general aware of tactical considerations.

Annotations

* These Stratagems are loosely based on the ancient Chinese "36 Stratagems" which have been made available mainly through the publications of Prof. Harro von Senger. I have made use of the German original works, but translations into English are available. Concerning the content, I was inspired by the article 'Micro Tactics' by Mike Headden, available at the Specialist Games' website. Thank you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

H. Schillinger hails from Munich, Germany where he is an accomplished Warmaster player!