The -Loremaster's Guide- To Mythic Battles

A Supplemental Resource for The One Ring™ Roleplaying Game

James R. Brown and S.W. Hodgman

-Credits-

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*Dedicated to Francesco Nepitello & Dominic McDowall-Thomas,
Thank you for developing a remarkable roleplaying game in a setting we adore.*

We wrote this guide primarily as a help for Loremasters wishing to compose their own large battles in Middle-earth. While the main rulebooks provide the foundational mechanics for all combat, it is the supplemental adventures *Words of the Wise* and those found in *Tales from Wilderland* that really illustrate the wonderful possibilities of how to use those mechanics in innovative ways. Originally, I produced a document called Mass Combat Rules, which was completed prior to the aforementioned works. After the release of *Tales from Wilderland*, I went back to the drawing board and began this project. Coming to the realisation that I would need a co-author to help me finish, I sought and found Scott Hodgman, a fellow member of the Cubicle7 Forum, a fan of TOR, and a notable Tolkien Loremaster in his own right. After a wonderful period of collaboration, we were finally ready to bring you the fully complete document you now hold in your hands.

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- The Loremaster's Guide -
to Mythic Battles

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Part 1:
-introduction-

So began a battle that none had expected...
Upon one side were the Goblins and the Wild Wolves,
and upon the other were Elves and Men and Dwarves.

In a land darkening with Shadow, a company of adventurers will soon enough find themselves in the midst of mythic battles, fighting as members of the Free Peoples of Middle-earth — the protectors of Wilderland. Perhaps they will join an alliance of Beornings, Dwarves, and Woodman to rout the legions of Goblins and Wargs that have infested the Misty Mountains. Maybe they will fight alongside the Elves of Mirkwood against a tormenting army of Spiders threatening the Woodland Realm; or possibly, they will accompany a new warband of Bardings and Men of the Lake, who guard their villages along the Running River, ready to battle the swarms of Werewolves and Vampires sent from their breeding nests in the Mountains of Mirkwood.

When battles involve large numbers of combatants — along with the fellowship of companions — special suggestions may be needed for how to run them, which is the purpose of this guide. Very easily, a game can get bogged down with every detail, leading to long sessions of dice rolling and boredom. One great way to avoid this is to make sure the story of the player-heroes remains central to the game, and the fate of their allies, as important as it is, is told in the backdrop of the tale. Therefore, we have done our best to expand the ideas of the core rules and supplements while avoiding new mass combat rules that feel like a miniatures game or a strategy board-game. We've also tried to maintain the wonderful commitment to Tolkien's work that the authors have displayed. Our goal has been to make it possible for Loremasters to present battles and sieges in a way very close to the source material. Within these pages, Loremasters can discover the tools for making those battles meaningful, memorable, and mythic.

Chances are, those of you reading this guide are Loremasters yourselves. Therefore, from this point on, we will address 'you' directly in the text. Take

these suggestions and use them as you wish. One of the great qualities of *The One Ring* roleplaying game is its wonderful flexibility. In the course of creating this document, there were many revisions to preserve that quality. So enjoy the read and have fun changing things to suit your style of play!

The Ethics of the Wise

While the subject of this guide is warfare, we do not recommend glorifying war or killing — especially if you want to capture the feel of Tolkien's work. It is very clear that the wise of Middle-earth hold to a common ethical principle governing the defeat of evil. In summary, the wise believe that it is never acceptable to defeat an enemy, regardless of how cruel that enemy is, by the same cruel practices of that enemy. Evil actions will not lead to the defeat of evil or to true victory. By refusing to take the Ring in order to destroy Sauron himself, did not Gandalf, Elrond, Aragorn, Galadriel, and Faramir demonstrate this principle? Did they not show their belief that the Ring would turn them into a copy of Sauron?

Tolkien's Values

The ethical principle expressed above is a direct reflection of Tolkien's values, which he admits inevitably get worked into an author's writing. In a letter he wrote in 1956, Tolkien speaks about this:

[*The Lord of the Rings*] is a "fairy-story," but one written — according to the belief I once expressed in an extended essay "On Fairy-stories" that they are the proper audience — for adults. Because I think that fairy story has its own mode of reflecting "truth," different from allegory, or (sustained) satire, or "realism," and in some ways more powerful. But first of all it must succeed just as a tale, excite, please, and even on occasion move, and within its own imagined world be accorded (literary) belief. To succeed in that was my primary objective.
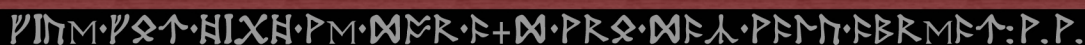
But, of course, if one sets out to address "adults" (mentally adult people anyway), they will not be pleased, excited, or moved unless the whole, or the incidents, seem to be about something worth considering, more e.g., than mere danger and escape: there must be some relevance to the "human situation" (of all periods). So something of the teller's own reflections and "values" will inevitably get worked in. (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 232-33)

"Get worked in," in Tolkien's case, seems like a gross understatement. The "defeat of evil" ethical principle is repeated so many times by his characters in various ways and scenes that to leave it out of any Middle-earth tale would be to change a core ingredient of the setting. This places the burden on the "teller" to familiarise himself with Tolkien's ethics and values, lest he merely reflect his own, which may not end up feeling anything like the Middle-earth we know and love.

Mythic Battles

"Open war lies before [us all],
with Sauron or against him."

Myths are the stories that tell us about the most important ideas and truths of a culture. They are often presented as epic poems or ballads in ancient literature, but for us, they can also be told while roleplaying around a table or sitting in a parlour. According to Tolkien, if our stories are to be "successful," then they must give us a glimpse of an "underlying reality or truth," often dealing with themes such as heroism, love, and healing.

You have an opportunity to present battles that transcend physical description: lifting players — by imagination and intellect — out of their own realities into fantasy, in order to comprehend themselves wholly. This process is what Tolkien called "sub-creation." Through meaningful language you can speak a secondary world into existence, but it will only be a *good* fairy-tale if that world has its own "inner consistency of reality" — that is, it must speak to the players' lives also.

As human beings, we are all fascinated with the desire to understand the world in which we live. Even though we have made poor choices, we have an inner yearning to be restored to uncorrupted times; a longing to heal. The myths we share by playing *The One Ring* can satisfy these basic human needs. Through your storytelling efforts, you can lead players out of the sometimes pessimistic and hopeless attitude of our current world.

Perhaps your goals for battles can follow the professor's own recipe for a good fairy-tale, which we will paraphrase here and put into the context of roleplaying:

● First, present players with material that helps them to recover their appreciation of the simple and humble things of life, like gardens, fireworks, parties, and a good laugh. Even in the middle of war, their character's trousers can fall to their ankles, and for some reason it would seem funnier than if it had happened elsewhere. A greater appreciation for belts may follow, along with a reminder that even the greatest of heroes is subject to embarrassing moments. These kinds of events can spark memories of real life situations among the players. Humour and reflection are great tools to help you with this goal.

● Then, allow your players to escape their own narrow and distorted view of the real world by giving their characters reasons to hope and believe they can — and should — make a difference in the imaginary world, however small or powerless they think they are.

> "I am [still willing to help]," said Mr. Butterbur. "More than ever. Though I don't know what the likes of me can do against, against —" he faltered.
>
> "Against the Shadow in the East," said Strider quietly. "Not much, Barliman, but every little helps."
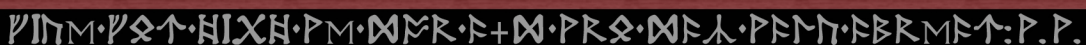
● Finally, let them experience consolation that leads to joy. You don't have to "fix" every battle so that the player-heroes always win and never experience pain or loss, but if you run your game without consolation, you risk failing Tolkien's recipe for a successful fairy-tale. Let the professor explain:

> The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending: or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous "turn" (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale): this joy, which is one of the things which fairy-stories can produce supremely well, is not essentially "escapist," nor "fugitive." In its fairy-tale — or otherworld — setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. ("On Fairy-Stories," in *The Monsters and the Critics, and Other Essays*, 153)

The Training of Hobbits

Near the end of *The Return of the King*, "The Scouring of the Shire" is only possible because of the prior training of Gandalf. He had been a wise teacher, speaking words of truth to the hobbits, introducing them to important people, and guiding them along their journey from naive comfortability in Hobbit holes to victory over the Shadow and friendship with the King. Throughout the War of the Ring, their body, heart, and wits had been tested, until finally, when the Ring was destroyed, they no longer needed Gandalf: they had matured in wisdom and valour.

In the Shire, they succeeded all by themselves. Frodo had begun thinking like Gandalf and he convinced his companions that they should rescue "the Chief," Lotho Pimple, from the ruffians, even though Pippin had said, "Destroy him[.]" In the end, it was discovered that Lotho had been murdered by the order of Saruman, but Frodo was able to show Saruman the mercy of Gandalf. "You have grown, Halfling," [Saruman said to Frodo]. "Yes, you have grown very much. You are wise, and cruel. You have robbed my revenge of sweetness, and now 1 must go hence in bitterness, in debt to your mercy. 1 hate it and you!"

Over the course of your campaigns, you can provide your player-heroes with the same kind of training, using Gandalf or one of their patrons to provide support and counsel, and to prepare them for the battles that they will face in the future. Using wise speeches, strategic introductions to key Loremaster characters, and just the right amount of intervention, you will add to the mythic quality of your battles and your games in general. There will be a sense that not only are the companions learning how to take up sword, axe, and bow against true villainy, but there is a lesson for the players as well: fight life's battles with truth, righteousness, mercy, and peace and then you will surely be victorious.

STORYTELLING MODE

One of the first questions to ask yourself before designing a mythic battle concerns your choice of storytelling *mode*. As the chief narrator of the adventure, you decide what approach to take. Do you want the players to experience the fight in detail? Or do you want to tell the story of the battle in a quicker fashion as an overview? *The One Ring* core rules offers either mode as a valid choice for storytelling (see page 19 of the Adventurer's Book), referring to them in another way as an episode and narrative time respectively.

When a battle is conducted as an episode, it does not mean that every scene of the battlefield will be played using the combat rules — this would be an insurmountable task — only combats involving the player-heroes will be handled in such a fashion, while the remainder of the battle will be narrated by you.

In contrast, a battle directed in narrative time may occasionally include detailed character combats, but the majority of the action will unfold through storytelling, both by you and your players. This is not to say that narrative time excludes dice rolling. Not at all! It simply means that longer segments of story time will pass between rolls and that a focus on narration is maintained.

In deciding the storytelling mode, you are also selecting a specific set of rules to govern your game. Episode mode uses the core combat rules you are already familiar with, but narrative time mode uses the **Battle & Siege Resolution Rules** we have created specifically for this guide. An entire part of this work has been dedicated to each of these modes.

No matter what set of rules you use, our hope is that these suggestions assist you in crafting a successful tale; one that everyone is pleased with, excited about, occasionally moved by, and absolutely believes in!

Part 2:
-narrative time mode-

*"I wish Merry was here," he heard himself saying,
and quick thoughts raced through his mind,
even as he watched the enemy
come charging to the assault..."*

Battles are unavoidable in Middle-earth, though a hero may wish to avoid them, preferring the laughter of friends around a table to the crashing of shields on the battlefield. However, as the events of the world unfold, the purpose of the Dark Lord is revealed through his servants: they have been bred to destroy the world of Men and they will not allow that peace. A hero's call to arms is necessary for the continued good of all the Free Peoples. War is at hand.

The combat rules found in the core set have been designed for episode mode, where the details of a conflict are played out round by round. But what if you wanted a quicker way to tell the story of a battle? There are some battles only meant to be told as an overview. War, after all, is a very gloomy business. One or two scenes of close-up action may be important for the advancement of the plot, but mostly it is the thoughts and feelings of the heroes that need expression as they face the discomforts and distresses of war.

With some creative additions to the combat rules, supplemental materials, such as *Tales from Wilderland*, have done an excellent job of providing the feel of being in the thick of massive battles. These additions include great devices such as **Battle Events**, an **Allies in Battle table**, and situational rules governing engagements and tactics, etc. But even with the inclusion of these elements, the episode mode of storytelling does not change as the combat rules remain central to the action.

In order to find a quicker way to tell the story of a battle, we need to change the storytelling mode to narrative time. This, in turn, requires a new set of rules.

Perspective

As the chief narrator and director of the story, you will have the privilege of setting *perspective*. This means that you will select the viewpoint of *your* liking — one that magnifies things crucial to the plot. If that means you hand storytelling initiative to just one player who interprets the results of the battle as seen through her character's eyes, then so be it — that is the perspective you have chosen. This will give her the chance to talk about things important to her, such as friends, home, sunlight and green grasses. You may also call for multiple perspectives of the same battle which, when woven together, form a larger tale. The exercise of changing perspective can be a source of enjoyment in your games that you did not expect. It is a simple method for involving players in ways that dice rolling cannot accomplish.

BATTLE & SIEGE RESOLUTION RULES

Battles and sieges can be complex, involving multiple companies of mounted combatants, foot-soldiers, and even machines of war. The rules presented in this part should help you narrate these aspects without the need for time consuming rolls or stat blocks. They are meant for quickly summarising the affects of a battle or siege on the companions, but they can also provide glimpses of detailed action during momentary lapses into episode mode. As you will see, we have drawn heavily from the rules governing journeys to bring familiarity to the process.

OVERVIEW

In episode mode, combats are conducted in rounds representing roughly thirty seconds of action. In narrative time mode, battles and sieges are conducted in assault waves that may last one hour or one day each; it is entirely up to you and the unfolding story.

After an opening scene, which provides a description of the sizes of the forces and their core tactics, a series of assault waves will measure the performance of the Free Peoples, as well as test the Endurance of each companion. Think of this as you would a journey, where the affects of travelling over a number of days are determined by Fatigue tests.

When one assault wave ends, a new one begins and the relative strength of numbers between the Free Peoples and the Shadow forces rises and falls. This leads to the end of the engagement where the companions may participate in a **Last Stand** episode to simply finish the narrative or to improve their results. To accomplish this, you should apply the following five steps.

1. Opening Scene

At the outset of every battle or siege, you will hold storytelling initiative and set the scene by describing various elements, such as the strength of numbers of the engaged forces, the threat level of the Shadow forces, the engagement mood, and the core tactics of the Free Peoples. Player-heroes should be given a chance to affect these details through creative roleplaying and clever application of their abilities (see the sidebar 'Player-hero Intervention').

Strength of Numbers

The term *company* or *great company* may be used as a default description for most forces in Middle-earth representing anywhere from one-hundred to ten-thousand or more soldiers. For forces larger than this (upwards of twenty-five, fifty, or even one-hundred thousand) the terms *army*, *host*, or *great host* seem most appropriate. Anything smaller (between ten and a couple hundred soldiers) can be called a *band*. Sometimes an Enemy force can be referred to as a *legion*, especially those whose strength is around ten-thousand.

In addition to these general descriptions, you should also establish the starting relative strengths between the Free Peoples and the Shadow in your narration. Use one of the following statements from the table below to guide you, noting that the advantage usually belongs to the Shadow in these dark times.

Over the course of several assault waves, the statements for relative strength of numbers will shift up and down toward a victory for the Free Peoples or a victory for the Shadow. For example, if "The Free Peoples are ***overwhelmed in numbers*** by the Shadow" and they roll a *Drums of Doom* result on the **Assault Wave table** (see Step 2: Tides of War), the statement will shift one step up to "**The Shadow has Prevailed**" and the engagement will conclude decisively. As the narrator, it will be up to you to *interpret* the actual sizes of the forces remaining after each assault wave and when it is appropriate for the Shadow forces to give up and turn back, even if they haven't been defeated through strength of numbers.

Relative Strength of Numbers Table:

The Shadow has Prevailed.
The Free Peoples are ***overwhelmed in numbers*** by the Shadow.
The Shadow significantly ***outnumbers*** the Free Peoples.
Both sides are near enough ***evenly sized***.
The Free Peoples are ***greater*** than the Shadow forces.
The Shadow remnant is ***overpowered in numbers*** by the Free Peoples.
The Free Peoples are Victorious!

After several assault waves, the Free Peoples and Shadow forces are near enough evenly sized. What began as a clash between great hosts has now dwindled to a battle between hundreds, both sides suffering heavy losses due to their wrath kindled to madness. If the Free Peoples hold the line or achieve any more objectives, the Shadow forces will turn back.

THREAT LEVEL OF THE SHADOW

Puny and weak Goblins, led by low-ranking Orc-chieftains, may present very little threat to the Free Peoples, but when they are accompanied by fearsome Hill-trolls, the danger of the battle or siege increases. For the player-heroes, this means an increased number of Endurance tests per assault wave (see Step 3: Blood & Tears).

The **Shadow Threat table** provides an average attribute rating and description to help you assign an overall threat level to the Shadow forces. You can simply add up the attribute ratings of the major types of enemies in the conflict and calculate their average rating, or you can use the descriptions to guide you.

Once you have assigned an average rating or description, note the number of Endurance tests each hero will make per assault wave during the battle or siege.

ENGAGEMENT MOOD

As part of the opening scene, you must decide the general temperament of both sides going into the conflict. This decision will directly affect the lethality of all failed Endurance tests on the companions. (If you prefer, you can make a Success die roll to determine the starting mood.) Moods are very fluid and can wax or wane as the narrative unfolds. It is up to you to decide when and how to change the mood, but the player-heroes should also be afforded opportunities to influence it.

The basic engagement moods, in decreasing threat and ferocity, are listed on the **Engagement Mood table** below.

Engagement Mood Table:

BATTLE CAN BE DESCRIBED AS...	ENDURANCE LOSS PER FAILED TEST
wrath kindled to madness	6
grim determination	5
a bold assault	4
a war of cunning tactics	3
wary and elusive	2
a war of attrition	1

Shadow Threat Table:

AVERAGE ENEMY ATTRIBUTE RATING	DESCRIPTION	NUMBER OF ENDURANCE TESTS PER ASSAULT WAVE
1-2	*weak (puny Goblins)*	1
3-4	*tormenting (Orcs, Spiders)*	2
5-6	*worthy (Wolves, Vampires)*	3
7-8	*fearsome (Trolls)*	4
9-10	*lethal (Mountain Trolls)*	5
11-12	*otherworldly (Dragons)*	6

CORE TACTICS OF THE FREE PEOPLES

After you have described the sizes of the forces, the threat of the Shadow, and the engagement mood of the conflict, you and the players will settle what the core tactics of the Free Peoples will be. Core tactics include two basic elements fundamental to every battle and siege: command objectives and areas of engagement.

● *Command objectives* are the stated goals of the Free Peoples. Narrating the command objectives kickstarts the action and lays out possible endings for the engagement. You can allow the players to spend as little or as much time on command objectives as you wish, possibly roleplaying important speeches and directives. The type of engagement and whether or not the Free Peoples are defending or attacking are key factors for stating command objectives.

● *Areas of engagement* signify where the captains and lords have deployed forces on the battlefield during a particular conflict. Every battle or siege is unique and will include specific formations different from other engagements. For the player-heroes, areas of engagement become the locations where they choose to stand and fight. The decision where a player-hero fights during an assault is one of the most important one he can make. Ideally, these choices should reflect to some extent his proficiency and competency in certain Weapon and Common skills. For example, a player-hero proficient in **Bows** might take up position in the *Rear Guard* where other archers stand. Or, a player-hero with high **Inspire** skill might fight *At the Center* of a battlefield or stand *At the Gates* during a siege. If at least one hero is also a commander (see 'Commanders'), he will decide what areas are active to deploy forces; otherwise, you decide.

The **Areas of Engagement table** below lists all the possible positions on a battlefield or in a siege. Notice that every position lists its own *optional* Endurance test TN. This is because players will be making a number of Endurance rolls each assault wave to test their individual performance (see 'Step 3: Blood & Tears'). The most dangerous positions (optionally) are *Amidst the Vanguard* and *The Main Assault*. The more dangerous the position chosen, however, the greater the opportunity to earn special honours, which can translate into gifts of Treasure, Standing, or even an additional Experience point later on (see 'Awards & Honours').

Areas of Engagement Table:

Battlefield-positions	Siege-positions	Endurance Test TN
In Reserve	In Reserve	10
Rear Guard	Engines of War	12
On the Flank	On the Wall	**14**
Skirmishers	Skirmishers	**14**
At the Center	At the Gates	16
Amidst the Vanguard	The Main Assault	18

Player-hero Intervention

While you are busy narrating the opening scene of the battle or siege, players also have an opportunity to influence the narrative. Building on the idea of 'Player-hero Intervention' (AB, 174), a player may attempt to make a case for directly or indirectly altering decisions you have made concerning the size of the Free Peoples forces, command objectives, engagement mood, areas of engagement, or anything else he can plausibly narrate using his abilities and resources. If you accept the player's tale, then he can "propose a task roll summarizing his possible intervention. Upon a successful roll, he briefly describes an alternative course of events describing the presence of his character or the effect of his influence."

2. Tides of War

When the details of the opening scene have been established, the battle or siege begins! The first assault wave commences with the players making a Feat die roll on the **Assault Wave table** below. The results of this roll will affect the progress of the Free Peoples and have ramifications on each companion's ability to endure.

Each result on the table has been given a name to quickly identify the effects of the roll and to assist you in narrating the outcomes of the battle or siege. If appropriate, you will need to change the relative strength of numbers statement by one step up or down in favor of the Shadow or the Free Peoples. *Drums of Doom* and *Shattered Shields* also affect the Damage amounts on companions that fail Endurance tests during Step 3: Blood & Tears.

Assault Wave Table:

👁	Drums of Doom	The Free Peoples are decimated and complete no command objectives. Change the relative strength of numbers by one step in favor of the Shadow forces. All player-heroes double the amount of Damage they take on failed Endurance tests this assault wave.
1, 2, 3, or 4	Shattered Shields	Battle is fierce and casualties run deep among the Free Peoples; they achieve only a minor objective. All player-heroes double the amount of Damage they take on failed Endurance tests this assault wave. If this result is rolled twice in a row, change the relative strength of numbers by one step in favor of the Shadow forces.
5, 6, 7	The Line is Held	The Free Peoples hold their line and keep fighting, winning one or two command objectives.
8, 9, or 10	Night is Ending	A glimmer of hope arises as the Free Peoples push back their enemies and achieve several command objectives. If this result is rolled twice in a row, change the relative strength of numbers by one step in favor of the Free Peoples.
ᚠ	Will of the west	The bodies of Shadow creatures are strewn everywhere across the battlefield as major command objectives are completed. Change the relative strength of numbers by one step in favor of the Free Peoples.

3. Blood & Tears

After the Free Peoples have made their roll on the **Assault Wave table** and all affects have been applied, the assault wave continues as the endurance of each player-hero is challenged through a number of **Endurance** tests.

Endurance Tests

The Battle & Siege Resolution rules add yet another type of test to those found on pages 28-30 of the Loremaster's Book: the **Endurance** test. Whereas failed Fatigue tests lead to an increased Fatigue score and possible Weariness, failed Endurance tests lead to a loss of Endurance points and possible unconsciousness and death.

An Endurance test is accomplished by rolling the Feat die and a number of Success dice equal to a character's **Battle** skill rating.

The default Target Number for all Endurance tests is 14. (You may instead use the **Areas of Engagement table** to set the TN, which is more representative of the danger of the chosen position.)

Endurance tests are related to the Heart Attribute (through the use of the **Battle** skill) and can profit from a Heart Attribute bonus.

For each instance that a player-hero fails an Endurance test, he loses a number of Endurance points set by the stated engagement mood of the Free Peoples and modified by the results of the Feat die roll on the **Assault Wave table**. This Damage is applied immediately.

Anytime a player-hero fails an Endurance test and the Feat die shows an 👁 result, he has suffered a **Piercing blow** <u>or</u> a **Battle Hazard** sequence has been triggered that the hero may or may not be a part of. The choice of consequence is up to you as the narrator and will largely depend on whether you want to temporarily switch to episode mode or not. If it doesn't matter either way, you can let the active player decide if he wants to take a **Piercing blow** or trigger a **Battle Hazard** episode; or you can simply roll a random Success die to determine what to do in each case.

Piercing Blows

Any hero that has taken a Piercing blow must make a Protection test (TN 14) to check whether his armour has protected him from taking a Wound. You may adjust the TN for the Protection test (typically by one level up or down) if you feel the weapons of the enemy justify it.

Protect Companion Action

Before a hero makes a Protection test, you may allow a companion to intervene on his behalf and declare a special 'Protect Companion' action. This works much like the special combat task found on page 163 of the Adventurer's Book but without the requirement of a combat stance. A hero may spend a point of Hope to take the Piercing blow himself. He must then make a Protection test to keep from taking a Wound.

It is important to note that the hero taking this action should be stationed in the same area of engagement as the one he is trying to protect.

States of Health

Players should follow all the normal rules of 'Life and Death' found on pages 142-144 of the Adventurer's Book. For example, a killing blow is executed when a hero has already taken one Wound and then he fails a Protection test to prevent a second Wound while at the same time he is reduced to zero Endurance.

Unconscious heroes are in danger of a *coup de grâce* on the battlefield. It is up to you to decide their fate. If you cannot decide, roll a Success die. On a roll of 1-3, their enemies kill them immediately. Otherwise, they survive the assault wave. It will be important for you to resolve this roll at the end of Step 4: Heroic Actions, however, as player-heroes may want to perform a heroic action to rescue them. If they do not, you can repeat this procedure every assault wave until the end of the battle.

Battle Hazards

When things are not going well for the companions, a **Battle Hazard** sequence can temporarily interrupt the broader narrative to present a quick episode of detailed and dangerous action. This kind of scene is meant to test the resolve and bravery of the heroes and to play out the story of a critical moment in the battle or siege.

If a **Battle Hazard** episode has been triggered, you should first roll a Feat die on the table below to determine the area of engagement where the action takes place. Any companions positioned in the area rolled will take part in the hazard. If the area of engagement rolled is not an active area for that particular battle or siege, choose the next available area down on the table.

If at least one character has been positioned at the selected area, then the sequence will be resolved normally by that hero. If no hero was stationed there beforehand, or other heroes want to join the active character(s), they may each spend a point of Hope to change positions to take part in the action. If no-one does so, the hazard is considered a failure and the Free Peoples suffer the stated consequences.

Flanks, Walls, & Gates

During the opening scene, heroes may be deployed to left or right flanks, east or west walls, or north or south gates, etc., according to the layout of the battlefield and the tactics of the Free Peoples commanders. When rolling on the **Battle Hazard table** to determine precisely where a hazard takes place, just determine randomly among flanks, walls, or gates when you roll those results.

Battle Hazard Table:

Feat Die Result	Battlefield-positions	Siege-positions
ᚠ	Player's Choice	
1	In Reserve	In Reserve
2	Rear Guard	Engines of War
3-4	On the Flank	On the Wall
5-6	Skirmishers	Skirmishers
7-8	At the Center	At the Gates
9-10	Amidst the Vanguard	The Main Assault
👁	The Loremaster chooses one active position not currently covered (if available)	

Sample Battle Hazard Episodes

The sample Battle Hazard episodes below provide you with an example of how to present a Battle Hazard episode to the player-heroes. Each of them includes a general description of what may have triggered the hazard, how to overcome it, and the conditions for failure.

Suggested areas of engagement for each episode are included in brackets next to the title, although they are not limited to these areas. You may use these samples as written, but you are encouraged to tailor each event according to the current battle or siege.

Cut Off the Head (At the Center, At the Gates, Amidst the Vanguard, The Main Assault)

An enemy captain or prominent leader, such as an Orc-Chieftain or a Hill-Troll Chief, is going berserk, attacking the heroes who must fight to eliminate it; escape is not an option. To increase the difficulty of this challenge, give the enemy leader some defenders. The Battle Hazard episode is lost if the heroes do not

succeed or if the hazard goes unchallenged; increase the Threat level of the Shadow by one level.

Protect the Commander (At the Center, At the Gates, Amidst the Vanguard, The Main Assault)
A Free Peoples' commander is under heavy attack and needs to be defended immediately against a maximum number of dangerous attackers. The heroes must use the *Protect Companion* special combat task to keep their leader from taking serious injuries or even dying. If the commander dies, the heroes lose their source of inspiration and the Battle Hazard episode is lost. Heroes may not invoke an Attribute bonus on Endurance tests for the remainder of the battle.

Hold the Ground (On the Flank, On the Wall)
Shadow forces have broken through the defenses and are threatening to take control of a key area of the battlefield. This could be a tower, a trench, a section of forest, or any area that gives an advantage to the side that holds it. The heroes cannot allow a certain number of enemies to get by them and overtake the area. This means they must kill at a pace quick enough to engage new attackers as they arrive. The challenge should last 10+ rounds and each companion should receive one new attacker every round. If any new enemies cannot engage them because they already have their full compliment of attackers, they slip by. The Battle Hazard episode is lost when the heroes allow the pre-determined number of enemies to pass. During the next assault wave, the heroes will roll twice on the **Assault Wave table**, keeping the worst result. You can make this hazard more or less difficult by changing the number of enemies not allowed to pass, the number of rounds the episode will last, and the number of new enemies each hero will face every round.

Secret Strike (On the Flank, On the Wall, Skirmishers)
The enemy launches a secret strike against the Free Peoples who are busy fighting other battles. The companions must make a roll of **Awareness** (TN 16) to notice it in time before they are ambushed. Follow the rules for 'Being Ambushed' in the Loremaster's Book, pp. 42-43. There is no need to play out the scene completely. If more than half the companions fail their rolls, they are surprised and the Battle Hazard episode is lost, forcing the engagement mood to increase by one level. You should narrate the attack and its impact on the Free Peoples.

String of Warriors (Rearguard, Engines of War, Skirmishers)
The companions are caught in a flow of rushing enemies. They must eliminate a long and steady string of enemy warriors to complete this hazard. Each companion will face 1-2 enemies at a time until they kill the pre-determined total. The Battle Hazard episode is lost if they do not succeed, causing an immediate shift in relative strength of numbers in favor of the Shadow.

Repairs & Fortifications (Engines of War, On the Wall)
Under siege, the Free Peoples have experienced heavy damage to their walls, gates, and towers. They must desperately try to fortify their defences, repair the machines of war, or some other project before they are overrun by the Shadow. They must make three rolls of **Craft** (TN 14) to succeed. They do not have to make these in a row, but the Battle Hazard episode is lost if they fail a total of three attempts or if an 👁 is rolled at any time during the challenge, forcing the Threat level of the Shadow to increase by one level.

Blasting Fire (In Reserve, Rearguard, Engines of War)
Volleys of deadly catapult shot threaten to crush the heroes who must run or jump out of the way to avoid damage. Each hero must make 3 **Athletics** tests (TN 12) in a row or be reduced to zero Endurance. If they take damage, they receive an automatic Wound and must make a Protection test (TN 20) to keep from being killed outright — treating this the same as a deadly fall (see Loremaster's Book, p. 51). The Battle Hazard episode is lost if no player-heroes are left alive or conscious. If unchallenged, shift the relative strength of numbers one step in favor of the Shadow.

Certain Death (All areas of engagement)
The heroes must fight in an impossible situation that can very well lead to death. They must survive 5+ combat rounds against a heavy assault to complete the challenge. Every hero faces a maximum number of adversaries. To make matters worse, archers or spearmen can also fire upon them. If the heroes die — the Battle Hazard episode is lost and the Free Peoples will remember them in their songs and tales for years to come! If this hazard goes unchallenged, increase the engagement mood by one level as the ferocity of the war intensifies.

COMMANDERS

The forces of the Free Peoples are led by brave commanders often called Lords, High-kings, Kings, Heralds, High-captains, Captains, Chiefs, or Chieftains. If a player-hero has a high enough standing (4, 5, or 6), he might be called upon to lead his company into battle.

Commanders give the orders of deployment to the other player-heroes during the opening scene, but they also choose which area of engagement they will take on the battlefield. This becomes very important because their choice will affect the other player-heroes deployed in the same area of engagement.

First, commanders do not need to make Endurance tests during an assault wave due to the protection of their unit. Instead, they can make a single roll of **Inspire** at the beginning of every assault wave. A success means they have inspired the other player-heroes in the same area of engagement and lower the difficulty of their Endurance tests by one level; a great or extraordinary success means they have lowered the difficulty by two levels (to a minimum TN 10). This effect lasts for the current assault wave only.

Secondly, instead of rolling **Inspire**, the commander may make a single roll of **Awe** at the beginning of every assault wave to lower the threat level of the enemies in the same area of engagement, reducing the number of Endurance tests required of each player-hero stationed there. A success lowers it by one level, while a great or extraordinary success lowers it by two levels (the minimum level is 'weak'). This effect lasts for the current assault wave only.

Finally, a commander can forget the first two choices and simply make the proper number of Endurance tests himself, signifying that he is not relying on the protection of his unit, but putting himself in danger with them. If he chooses this option, he assists the other player-heroes in passing their Endurance tests. For every success the commander rolls (regardless of the degree), he grants one automatic success — good for one roll — to any other player-hero in the same area of engagement.

If more than one player-hero is commanding the Free Peoples in the same area of engagement, they can each choose a different option to gain the benefits of success for those activities. However, if two or more commanders choose **Inspire** or **Awe**, keep only the best result among them. Results from commanders making their own Endurance rolls stack.

*Two of the companions are commanding the Free Peoples among the main assault. One of them chooses to fight side-by-side with his soldiers and make his own Endurance rolls this assault wave. The other chooses to **Inspire** the troops. The first one passes both of his Endurance tests granting automatic successes to two Endurance rolls among his companions. The other succeeds at **Inspire** with a great success and lowers the TN of all Endurance tests — this assault wave — by two levels, for all companions in the area.*

4. Heroic Actions

Once all Endurance tests are complete (along with any Protection tests and Battle Hazard sequences) and the player-heroes are still alive and conscious, they should be given an opportunity to use their Common skills to perform actions on the battlefield. This affords a good opportunity to earn Advancement points and to make a difference in the tale.

During an average assault wave, players are entitled to perform at least one heroic action, but it is up to you to decide how many to allow. Encourage them to use creativity when choosing their skills and actions. The scenes of their successes and failures provide the highlights of the assault wave.

*A hero is Wounded and has fallen unconscious in the middle of the fray. You allow one of his companions to make an **Athletics** roll to pull him to safety and then a **Healing** roll to treat his Wound.*

If a player-hero wishes to switch areas of engagement or a commander wants to activate or deactivate areas of engagement, he may do so freely during this step.

Fear & Corruption Tests

"There is more in you of good than you know, child of the kindly West. Some courage and some wisdom, blended in measure. If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world."

The Shadow grows stronger in numbers while the Free Peoples of Middle-earth remain largely unaware. With each passing day, the odds increase against the world of Men. Sauron's plan of domination slowly unfolds and the Free Peoples find themselves outnumbered and overwhelmed by their enemies. They must cling to hope and persevere through the darkness, for the Will of the West shall prevail and all will not be lost.

Perseverance is the virtue that allows heroes to keep pressing on even when they would rather surrender, escape, hide, or brood over their failures. In Middle-earth, perseverance is tied closely to valour and wisdom. Therefore, in the game, the Free Peoples demonstrate perseverance through successful **Fear** tests and **Corruption** tests. Within the context of a battle or siege, any hero that fails one of these tests showing the 👁, also flees the battlefield.

Corruption Tests

The core rules call for **Corruption** tests when the companions face something that could taint their spirit (LB, 28). These situations include moments of anguish, lingering in a blighted place, committing a misdeed, or even taking possession of a cursed item (LB, 56-58). The Special ability, *Dreadful Spells*, can also force companions to make **Corruption** tests (LB, 66). It will be up to your imagination to weave these elements into the story, especially when operating in narrative time. Step 4: Heroic Actions provides the ideal spot to include scenes of corruption.

One of the player-heroes suffers a killing blow when making his Endurance rolls. You narrate that a swift Orc arrow suddenly buries itself in his neck. He slowly drops his sword, falls to his knees, and grabs at the black-feathered shaft, hesitating to pull it out. He tries to speak his final words, but he chokes on his own blood, slumping lifelessly to the side. Everyone looks away in anguish. You call for the remaining player-heroes to each make a Corruption test (TN 12) to keep from gaining a Shadow point.

Fear Tests

Fear tests are normally triggered during an episode by a Special ability that a Shadow creature possesses (namely the *Strike Fear* and *Thing of Terror* abilities). In narrative time, you may want to expand and redefine how these abilities operate, but you may also want to expand the triggers for a **Fear** test to include facing overwhelming numbers of Shadow and extremely bad conditions.

*During the current assault wave, the heroes roll a second 'Shattered Shields' result in a row, forcing the relative strength of numbers to shift to "The Shadow significantly **outnumbers** the Free Peoples." You narrate the scene. The companions stand ready at the main gate with their spears pointed toward whatever may come through the doors. A few moments later, a giant battering ram crashes through, followed by four massive trolls and a swarm of goblins. You require each player-hero to make a Fear test (TN 14) or lose their ability to invoke an Attribute bonus on any Endurance tests that assault wave.*

5. End of Battle

After the heroes have resolved their heroic actions, you will determine if the conflict has come to an end. Here are a couple of default indicators that a battle or siege has concluded (see also 'The Rule of Three' sidebar):

- The relative strength of numbers statement has shifted up to "The Shadow has Prevailed" or down to "The Free Peoples are Victorious!" This is a decisive victory for the winning side.

- One side has chosen to take their losses and retreat (see 'Retreat' below).

When either of these conditions are present, you are ready to narrate the end of the battle or move into an optional **Last Stand** episode in which the player-heroes have a chance to improve their results.

If none of these conditions are present, repeat Steps 2 to 5 until the war does come to an end.

RETREAT

After several assault waves, it is possible that the player-heroes will have lost a dangerous amount of Endurance points or they will have suffered a Wound or even died. Personal retreat may be an option to avoid further harm. In addition, if at least one of the companions is a commander, he can order all of the Free Peoples to fall back, retreating to safety. Retreating in narrative time requires no dice rolling; it automatically succeeds. However, added danger can come through an optional **Last Stand** episode.

Depending on the circumstances of your story, the Shadow may retreat under any conditions that you decide. Your considerations can include factors such as the actual sizes of the forces remaining (as interpreted by you), the number of assault waves that have already taken place, or the current relative strength of numbers. These factors reflect the Shadow's morale, endurance, and even strategy during the war, which are all part of your narration.

The Rule of Three

In addition to one side reaching victory through relative strength of numbers or the retreat of their enemies, you may optionally declare the following conditions for victory:

- The Free Peoples have routed the Shadow when three ᚡ have been rolled on the **Assault Wave** table.

- The Shadow have defeated the Free Peoples when three ◉ have been rolled on the **Assault Wave** table.

When the battle or siege ends in one of these ways, it should be treated essentially like a retreat scenario, but you are also encouraged to find a 'magical' reason for the sudden break in fighting.

To Stand or Not to Stand?

The condition of the player-heroes, at the conclusion of a battle or siege, will largely determine whether or not they are ready for a **Last Stand** episode. If they have suffered too much Endurance loss, they risk unconsciousness or death and a **Last Stand** episode may not be the wisest choice. Instead, they may accept the results of the battle as is and choose to narrate their escape or their satisfaction in watching the Shadow remnants flee. If you feel that it enhances the narrative, you can decide to run a **Last Stand** episode regardless of the players' decision, but be warned — you might not be popular, depending on the results. On the other hand — it could turn out to be an epic finish and your decision will be heralded!

OPTIONAL LAST STAND EPISODE

You and the players must decide whether or not to play a **Last Stand** episode at the conclusion of the battle or siege. Bearing in mind that the **Battle & Siege Resolution Rules** were created for narrative time mode, this is completely optional, as the final scene would need to be played using the regular combat rules in episode mode. You may think of this as the first episode at the end of a long journey; the Endurance of the player-heroes has been tested and the impact of their rolls have taken their toll. Now, a final scene of combat can either improve the success of the Free Peoples or worsen the damage on the player-heroes.

The recommended conditions for a **Last Stand** episode are listed on the **Last Stand table** below according to whatever the final result on the **Assault Wave table** was during the current assault wave. Most often, the last roll will be *Drums of Doom* or *Will of the West* because those results automatically shift the relative strength of numbers up or down and can be used as triggers to end the battle. However, if one side retreats, any result is likely to have been rolled last on the **Assault Wave table**.

On the table, you will find simple descriptions to guide you in crafting a **Last Stand** scene, but if you require even more advisement, we make the following suggestions based on the conditions statements listed:

- *Worst possible conditions* are where the heroes are outnumbered 8 to 1 or the Attribute levels of their adversaries add up to 25-32 per player-hero.

- *Horrid conditions* are where the heroes are outnumbered 6 to 1 or the Attribute levels of their adversaries add up to 17-24 per player-hero.

- *Bad conditions* are where the heroes are outnumbered 4 to 1 or the Attribute levels of their adversaries add up to 9-16 per player-hero.

- *Fair conditions* are where the heroes are outnumbered 2 to 1 or the Attribute levels of their adversaries add up to 5-8 per player-hero.

- *Good conditions* are where the heroes are evenly matched or the Attribute levels of their adversaries add up to 2-4 per player-hero.

Last Stand Table:

FINAL RESULT ON THE ASSAULT WAVE TABLE	SUGGESTED CONDITIONS FOR A LAST STAND EPISODE...
Drums of Doom	Enter a **Last Stand** episode under the *worst possible conditions*.
Shattered Shields	Enter a **Last Stand** episode under *horrid conditions*.
The Line is Held	Enter a **Last Stand** episode under *bad conditions*.
Night is Ending	Enter a **Last Stand** episode under *fair conditions*.
Will of the west	Enter a **Last Stand** episode under *good conditions*.

Three player-heroes have joined the Free Peoples in an intense siege against an Orc infested stronghold. They have managed to survive two assault waves when one of the players rolls an 👁 *on the **Assault Wave table**, shifting the relative strength of numbers from "The Shadow significantly **outnumbers** the Free Peoples," to "The Free Peoples are **overwhelmed in numbers** by the Shadow." This automatically forces every player-hero to apply double Damage on any failed Endurance tests they make this assault wave. After making those rolls and performing heroic actions, they consider falling back from the siege to spare any more lives. However, on their way out of the Orc stronghold, they would like to strike*

one final blow to improve their results. They will need to enter a **Last Stand** episode under **worst possible conditions**, meaning they will face up to eight enemies (Attribute level 4) each! If they are victorious, you allow them to complete their objective in dramatic fashion during their escape. In this case, they topple a tower, killing a very important commander in the process.

Awards & Honours

"And there were brought before him many to receive his praise and reward for their valour[.]"

In the aftermath of a battle or siege, the Free Peoples may celebrate their victory with a feast or a ceremony. During this time, the heroes who performed valiantly can be recognized and given awards for their courage. Celebrations are not always in order, but when they are, the awards are usually in the form of Treasure. You may choose to increase their Standing and award them with an additional Experience point as well, if you feel they deserve it.

Awarding Treasure

A great way for the Free Peoples to honour their heroes is to award them with gifts of Treasure. The amount of Treasure that can be awarded will vary based on the resources of the awarding culture and the tale being told. You can decide on the specific amounts any way you would like. For those wanting a more definitive guideline for awarding Treasure, we offer the following suggestions:

Begin by recording every instance a player rolls a 𝕲 on an Endurance test, during a Battle Hazard episode, during a Heroic action, and during a Last Stand episode. In addition, write down whether he rolled any 6's along with each success and the area of engagement where he was deployed. Every 𝕲 represents a notable accomplishment or an act of valour performed by the hero on the battlefield. A great or extraordinary success indicates an even more courageous deed. The higher the TN — as determined by the area of engagement — the greater the valiance. Therefore, the highest honour any hero can earn, in this way, is accomplished by rolling: 𝕲, 6, 6 while *Amidst the Vanguard* in a battle or *The Main Assault* during a siege.

Then, award 1 point of Treasure per 𝕲 rolled, 2 points of Treasure per 𝕲 + 6, and 3 points of Treasure per 𝕲 + 6 + 6. If the TN for any roll was higher than 14, increase the award by 1 Treasure point per level of increase.

> *A hero is stationed 'Amidst the Vanguard' (TN 18) and rolls a 𝕲 + 6 + 6 on an Endurance test. This indicates a highly valourous act and will earn him 5 Treasure points if he can survive the battle!*

Increasing Standing

Normally, player-heroes must spend Treasure points during an undertaking to Raise Standing among their people. Battles and sieges can provide them the opportunity to raise their Standing without spending Treasure, simply because they are risking their lives to protect their culture and the peace of Middle-earth.

You may decide if a hero has performed valiantly enough to earn the honour of an increase in Standing. But if you would rather have a guideline, add up the amount of Treasure a hero earns during an engagement. If the amount he earns is equal to his current Standing or higher, then he can increase his Standing by one point.

Additional Experience Point

The rules in the Loremaster's Book, page 17, give instructions for awarding Experience points after each session of play, as well as at the conclusion of an Adventuring phase. If winning a battle or siege is part of the Company objective, you may use it as the reason to award players an **additional Experience point** at the end of a session. If they do very well, performing acts of valour, you should also feel free to award them a **supplemental Experience point** at the conclusion of the Adventuring phase.