

MONSTERS HAVE FEELINGS TOO

How to get the Most from your Monsters

by Oliver MacDonald



A party is proceeding down an ancient road deep in the wilderness. Suddenly a cry goes up and a dozen goblins leap up from the roadside where they had been hiding among rocks. For a while all is confusion, but, finally there is a final low gurgle as the last goblin expires, and the party's leader wipes the gore off his axe on a handy clump of grass. A little later with all their wounds healed and a few more gold pieces in their pockets the party once again mounts up and continues on to their destination.

Several hours later the party is hidden at the top of a narrow pass watching a merchant's caravan slowly threading its way along the track at the bottom of the pass. On one side the two thieves lean against a narrow tree trunk, one end of which is thrust under a pile of loose rocks to serve as a lever. Nearby a pair of mages go over their rock to mud spells and check their fireball wands one last time. If you look carefully over to the other side of the pass several fighters can be seen slowly drawing their bows; all are smiling at the thought of the treasure that will soon be theirs.

While a party will plan its actions carefully with an eye on keeping their losses to a minimum, monsters are invariably a disorganised, randomly made up rabble whose only real function is to

serve as cannon fodder for the players' egos. Far too few GMs make any effort to play the monsters that inhabit their world in realistic or believable fashion. Should not the goblins in the above example at least be credited with the sense not to attack a group that they cannot possibly defeat. Why could they not have organised their ambush as efficiently as the players did theirs.

This leads to a first rule of monster behaviour, 'In all but a few cases a monster will value its life as much as any player character, and will take any reasonable steps within its ability to preserve that life'. There are exceptions, but these apply to those monsters that are programmed, such as undead, or have been brainwashed in some way, such as a highly trained animal or 'someone who has been religiously indoctrinated.'

The second rule concerning the behaviour of monsters is that 'No monster should attack without having a known reason for doing so'. Known reason means known to the GM not necessarily the players, but it should be there for the players to find out if they have a mind to. Occasionally the reason may simply be something like racial hatred or just that the monster has a sadistic▶

►streak, but such reasons should be kept at a minimum if the GM wishes to maintain the believability of his world. It is not really good enough to think up a reason once the GM has decided that a group of monsters is going to attack, rather a state of affairs already in existence should cause an otherwise neutral group of monsters to attack.

Another rule can be drawn from the above, 'If a monster can achieve its aims without resorting to out-and-out violence, and therefore putting its life at risk, it should do so'. If you do find yourself lacking ideas as to what a monster can do besides attacking people try reading a few fantasy novels and see how the monsters behave there.

The above rules should also apply to unintelligent monsters of the animal kind, as opposed to those of the automata or programmed kind. Just like other monsters animals will not attack things they cannot deal with, and will have a tendency to go for the easy kills. Most people must know that carnivores tend to pick off the weakest animals in a herd. Equally, just like other monsters, animals will attack for a reason, be it to get food, protect the young, self defence or whatever. Many animals have evolved behaviour patterns that result in them using tactics of some kind. Lionesses will often hunt by splitting into two groups, one of which drives the prey towards the others, that remain in hiding until the last moment when they leap out to seize animals fleeing past them. Such tactics can be used against parties of men just as efficiently, especially when you take into account the reactions of the parties' animals. Of course animals that hunt on their own are rather limited in the kind of tactics that they can use, but even with groups of people someone is likely to wander off from time to time, to find firewood or food, or to relieve themselves.

Not all predatory animals will necessarily kill their prey immediately, solitary wasps, or at least their giant FRP versions, will paralyse characters and carry them off to serve as a living larder for their young. A quick glance through a few books will turn up many similar examples of animal tactics. Just as a game where

the emphasis is on the players role-playing their characters is more fun than a simple hack-and-slash type game, so a game where the monsters are role-played by the GM is also more enjoyable. It also makes the game more of a challenge to the players; no longer can they hope to defeat monsters in a straight fight, and have all the advantages. If the players use blade venom on their swords, throw flasks of oil, and have magical support why can the monsters not do the same. Certainly if a party attacks a particular group of monsters more than once, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the monsters learn to use some of the same tricks as the characters, or at least prepare some kind of defence against them. This leads to a third rule of running monsters, 'Whatever applies to the player characters can also apply to non-player characters and monsters, and vice versa'.

By using the three rules above we can dispel the myth that certain monsters, such as kobolds and trollkin, are useless monsters when considering experienced characters. A GM should never treat any monster with contempt, and if the players do so then they should be made to pay for their foolishness. This in itself can be beneficial to a campaign in that the GM does not have to keep adding unrealistic, weird and different monsters in order to keep the players interested. My own campaign runs quite happily with a fairly small stock of monsters, but maintains its novelty because I am always trying to use these monsters in different ways. By using individual weaker monsters the GM also allows him or herself to play acceptable restraints on the amounts of treasure, magic, and experience given out.

Just as a character in a good campaign is more than a few numbers written on a piece of paper, and a world something the players can interact with rather than just a few maps upon which they can move around, so the world's monsters should have depth and believability beyond basic descriptions. Just as the players should try to bring their characters to life, so the GM should with monsters. Monsters may not be people, but they do have feelings. The following is an example of what use this article could be put to. The orcs have found it most useful...

Tarsyn High Command
 Commander-in-Chief, Extermination Forces
 Memorandum to: Intelligence Bureau, Phiroth.
 Re: Tarsyn-Orchish campaign, mopping-up exercises.

Severe resistance encountered in several Orchish strongholds, notably Althra-Ghash and outlying fortifications. Several parties of mercenary bounty hunters destroyed, two High Guard support groups missing, presumed lost. If remnant strongholds not destroyed, danger exists of Orchish Wars flaring up again. Investigate and report, *Priority Gold*.

Tarsyn Intelligence Bureau
 Memorandum to: C-in-C, Extermination Forces.
 Re: Althra-Ghash area.

PRIORITY GOLD
 Region Commander responsible for Althra-Ghash named Skharavash. Under name of Sechar Varsen served eight years with Ils'hareth Border Guard, attained rank of Area Commander. Trained in Ils'hareth Academy under Jago, three commendations for grasp of strategy and tactics. Halfbreed from Broken Mountains area, dishonourably discharged when race discovered. Enclose following documents recovered from Althra-Ghash Command. Request commendation for operative Sargo Helvin.
 Comments: We appear to have made a rod for our own backs.

Extracts from the Uruk-Hai Battle Manual



Edited and Translated
 by Graeme Davis

SECTION IV: DEFENSIVE STRATEGY

The settlements of orcs and other races, particularly those underground, are subject to frequent attacks by small, loosely co-ordinated human and demi-human groups with a high offensive capability and a great degree of versatility. These raids, be they for plunder, captives, or reprisal for our own foraging, are frequently more harmful than is either desirable or necessary, and in many cases can be contained and destroyed with comparatively small losses by the correct use of defensive strategy.

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*Uruk-Hai Battle Manual***A. Terrain**

A familiarity with terrain is essential for successful defence. Remember, the intruders do not know the ground, and can often be surprised, outflanked or surrounded. The defence of a settlement should be based on a thorough knowledge of the surrounding area and its potential, with minor structural modifications if necessary. This point will be elaborated below.

B. Sentries and Communications

It has far too often been the case that small groups of outpost sentries have been overpowered without the raising of any kind of alarm, resulting in a great deal of slaughter as other troops struggle into armour or rush blindly hither and yon awaiting orders from unit leaders who are nowhere to be found.

Firstly, sentry posts should be positioned in such a way that surprise is practically impossible. The ends of long, straight passages is an obvious choice, and the effectiveness of such a position may be enhanced by the use of barricades or the narrowing of the passage so as to allow only one intruder through at a time. This latter device will not only reduce the size of holding force necessary, but the corridor will also rapidly become choked with bodies, impeding the further progress of the enemy un-

it. Barricades, for their part, not only provide cover from enemy missile fire, but may also be fired to slow enemy progress and provide cover for a retreat. Sentries should be used in an artillery mode on first sighting, reverting to a holding role as combat closes. Both these terms are explained below. With each sentry unit should be stationed a runner charged with the task of raising the alarm as quickly as possible. To avoid weakening the main fighting force; this role may be fulfilled by females or juveniles.

C. Reaction to an Alarm

At least one-quarter of the main fighting force should be on full alert at any given time. These should consist of equal amounts of attack and holding troops, with a smaller artillery group. On the raising of the alarm, these troops should move according to a pre-arranged and well-drilled plan. The sentry units should be reinforced with holding troops, while the attack forces move to outflank and pincer the enemy. If the terrain allows, small groups of artillery should move in advance of the attack forces to open the counter-attack with a barrage of withering fire before falling back to allow the attack troops to close. The holding troops not used to reinforce the sentry units should back up the

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attack troops, who should fall back on encountering heavy resistance.

Upon full mobilisation, the main force should move along similar lines to close the pincer, trapping the enemy against the reinforced sentry lines for final annihilation.

It should go without saying that the movement options of the enemy force should be limited from the outset by the primary attack force, and if the enemy should seek to circumvent or evade the primary attack force, full information on their movements should be passed back to the main attack force immediately.

D. Types of Force

Holding Troops are employed to slow or halt enemy movement. They should be equipped with heavy armour and polearms, and should hold their ground or fall back slowly until the arrival of reinforcements or an attack force. While they are not in themselves intended to inflict much damage, careful choice of polearm types will allow front-rank members to disarm enemy personnel, and despite the impossibility of swinging a polearm in an enclosed space and in tight formation, weapons with thrusting points may be used to good effect. Tight formation should be maintained at all times, three or four ranks deep with all weap-

ons advanced to confront the enemy with a wall of blades and discouragement attempts at close attack, which is often the only combat mode available to enemy forces. Recommended weapons are ranseur, spetum, partizan and pike.

Artillery Forces should be unarmoured for high mobility, and should never be exposed to unnecessary danger. They may be armed with bows, slings or other missile weapons, and artillery units attached to a holding force can make good use of burning oil, both for offence and as a barrier. Priority should be given to the disablement of enemy spell-casters, who will normally be protected from direct combat, followed by enemy artillery.

Attack Troops are used for direct combat, and should be well-armoured and equipped with shields and close-combat weapons. As contact is most likely to be with enemy armour, weapons such as maces, flails and military picks may be used to good effect.

E. Use of Terrain

In addition to the obvious uses of side passages and hidden doors for flanking and surprise attacks, existing terrain configurations and minor modifications may lead the enemy into firepoints, especially at

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junctions, and leave them trapped in the fire of two or more groups of remote artillery. The use of narrowed corridors to slow progress and enhance the effectiveness of holding troops has already been discussed, and simple devices such as baffles, if well used, can result in an enemy force entering an area with its back to an attack force or artillery unit. Deliberately obvious hidden doors may be used to lure an enemy force into a trap, and false doors in passage walls may not only slow enemy progress as they are checked, but can also provide a certain amount of amusement as a cornered or surrounded enemy force searches for some means of escape. Other simple devices such as dummy arrow-slits and loose flagstones can impede enemy progress as they attempt to disarm non-existent traps.

F. Morale

It is the duty of every commander to keep morale as high as possible. Should the morale of one or more units break in the course of an action, these should be trapped between defending and enemy forces to provide a buffer which can be pushed into the enemy group to impede progress, or, if this proves impossible, they should be killed immediately in as small an area as possible, their bodies providing a

temporary barrier which may be fired with oil if necessary. This demands a certain amount of discipline on the part of the defensive forces, but the commander should always maintain a high standard of discipline, and must stress at every opportunity that cowardice is not only weakness, but is also the most reprehensible form of treacherous conduct towards one's comrades.

G. Spellcasters

If a tribal spellcaster is available, defensive capability may be enhanced as follows:

Magic mouth can make a significant contribution to early warning systems, especially in areas where the advantageous placing of sentry forces is strategically difficult.

Prayer, chant, and similar spells may be used to strengthen attack troops and raise morale generally.

Darkness can be used to slow enemy progress, and troops can move into position under cover of *invisibility* for surprise attacks.

Dancing lights and *audible glamor* may be used to confuse an enemy force, allowing attack forces to come upon them from behind as they await an attack from another direction.

Spells such as *push*, and *scare* may be used in a purely offensive capacity, and in a protracted action *cures* have obvious uses.

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Under no circumstances should a spellcaster be exposed to enemy attack; they are a valuable commodity and should be treated as such.

H. Heavy Weapons and Machinery

Heavy missile weapons such as ballistae have obvious uses in a defensive strategy, but their positioning is to be regarded as critical from two viewpoints; firstly, distance, and secondly, capture. Such weapons are wasted if they can only be fired once before their position is overrun, so that they should either be mobile and retreat with their crews or be fixed or fire only in one direction. In the latter case they may also be disabled on retreat, although this is somewhat wasteful.

Long, straight passages may allow the use of other heavy weapons; battering rams with crushing ends modified and tailored to the size and shape of the passage can be most effective in an anti-personnel mode, with or without spikes or blades fitted to the crushing end. Wheeled mantlets may be used to provide cover for artillery units, and if sufficient oil is available provide a very satisfactory mounting for a simple force-pump flame-thrower. On retreat, mantlets may be disabled and left in the passage as a barrier, fired or otherwise.

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J. Mechanical Traps

The use of mechanical traps is very much a two-edged sword; carelessness on the part of defensive troops can lead to severe and needless losses, and it is recommended that any area in which they are installed be placed out of bounds to all except maintenance personnel.

K. Concluding Remarks

Following the guidelines set out above, a competent commander should be able to conduct an effective defence of a settlement or base under most circumstances; an imaginative commander may be able to improve on these methods and develop new techniques. The importance of use of terrain cannot be overstressed; one passage insufficiently or incompetently guarded can lead to a massacre, as can bad timing, bad discipline and bad communications. As noted above, intrusive groups tend to be small and may be contained with relative ease, but one or two victories may lead to the appearance of larger forces, which, while they require greater force to neutralise, are more prone to the effective use of terrain and enclosed space.

Above all, troops should be drilled regularly in the procedures appropriate to attack from any direction, at any time without warning; slackness and incompetence should be severely dealt with.