

It all started when little Tommy Longfurrow went missing!

Up until then only a few livestock had been nabbed; a baby lamb, a couple of free grazing goats, a few chickens and a prize goose... the last snatched right out of the mill pond below Crazy Acre Farm, if you please.

But this was serious.

There was no doubt in anybody's mind who... *or rather, what...* has taken the small Hobbit child. The villagers of Old Windy Mile *knew* it was the Boogie Man. Tommy Longfurrow had been grabbed from his bed and dragged kicking and screaming out of his open window and into the cold and blustery night.

It was Lobelia Sackville Baggins of Bag End *visiting her sister in Upper Windy Mile* who proposed mounting the search party. Bilbo Baggins *no doubt, on one of his regular excursions roaming some of the more wild and uncharted parts of the Shire*, his friend, Fatty Bolger... and three local Sheriffs, all agreed to join Lobelia in the hunt for the missing child – in the morning, after the pale winter's sun came peeping over the crest of Rangers Hill away off in the East. It was a well known fact that the Boogie Man didn't come out once the sun has risen.

But Bilbo Baggins hadn't been idle during the night; and the second the commotion had started, while the village folk were consoling the Longfurrows over little Tommy, Bilbo had searched the fields immediately surrounding Crazy Acre Farm.

The farm was built to one side of the village, set back from the Mill House and village pond. Quite visible to most the burrow dwellings of Old Windy Mile, but secluded enough for anyone to whisk the child away before people could do anything about it.

Bilbo didn't believe in the Boogie Man. He was wise enough to know there were enough strange and terrifying things in the world without having to invent more from the imagination.

Then he discovered the footprints in the snow! Big, like a large dog's paw prints. A wolf, driven down from the hills by hunger, no doubt? Strange, Bilbo hadn't heard of wolves straying this far south in almost a life time of winters. But Bilbo reflected, this cold February... although not particularly snowy... had been bitterly cold and cruel none the less.

Yes, as he scouted around, he found a few more paw prints in the last remaining tufts of snow. *"That's lucky,"* Bilbo thought, *"in a few more days that snow would have been gone altogether, and I'd never have noticed those prints leading up to... and away from Tommy's window."* He was right, of course, the new born sun was already gathering strength and preparing to enthuse his waxing power upon the tired and hungry land. In another day, or two, at the most, the snow prints would not have been visible at all - even to a keen and searching eye.

"There's more to this than meets the eye" Bilbo said to himself, *"or I'm no Baggins."*

“Where there was one wolf,” Bilbo reflected, “there’s often a dozen more.” Acting with haste, the venturesome and bold Hobbit made his way out of Windy Mile, towards the Apple Woods, where he knew he could find an old friend who might be able to help. “Radagast is usually tending to his trees at this time of the year.” Bilbo remembered. After all, the old wizard was particularly fond of home made cider, and rarely allowed the blight of winter to harm a single branch. After all, the trees north of the village were particularly fine specimens.

Search Party, looking for little Tommy Longfurrow:

Radagast the Brown	70 points
Lobelia Sackville Baggins	10 points
Fredegar (Fatty) Bolger	10 points
Bilbo Baggins (Frodo Template)	50 points
Hobbit Sheriffs (with axe and club) X2	6 points
Hobbit Sheriff (with bow)	3 points

Total Points 149



(left to right) Bilbo, Sheriff with club, Lobelia, Sheriff with axe, Fatty Bolger, Radagast the Wizard, Sheriff with bow.

The Enemy:

Wild Warg Chieftain (Werewolf template)	35 points
Wild Wargs X 5	100 points

Total Points 135



Fangtooth's and his pack watch the enemy approach.

The Battle of 5 Mile Woods:

The battle would take place on 6 large grass hex tiles, with a tree dotted hill dominating the top corner of the far edge of the battle board. A few single snow hexes would represent the last drifts of winter's snow, and a crumbling wall section and a ruin would do to represent the last remains of an ancient `Big Folk` dwelling. A large stature *depicting some forgotten king of Arnor from days long ago* stands almost directly central on the map board.

The Hobbits and their Wizard friend would enter the game from the right, and their objective would be to get at least one of their number off the far end of the battle board via a hill hex on the opposite side of the board... and thus rescue Tommy Longfurrow (not eaten, but soon about to be shared out amongst the ravenous wargs). The Enemy would win by simply to stopping the Hobbits and the Wizard from achieving their objective.

Special Game Conditions: none really. The Game would be fought using my own Battle Chain rules system. Bilbo Baggins would use the Frodo template *including the One Ring*, and the Wild Warg Chieftain would use the Werewolf template. Other than that, usual rules apply.... Except, neither side would receive any initial initiative bonus for being the attacker. Initiative would begin either with the Wargs as they issue out of the Woods and charge the surprised Hobbits; or it would fall with the Hobbits, whose keen eyes notice the Wargs lurking at the edge of the Woods and act accordingly.

This is to be my first proper game using the 2010 revised Middle Earth rules, and I am hoping this small skirmish level battle will highlight whether these new rules work effectively or not.



The Warg Chieftain Snarled nastily from the edge of the Woods, and foul ichor fell from its wolverine jaws. The fiend watched with vicious intent as the unsuspecting man-things approached from the East. They were all being extremely wary, but none of them had spotted Fangtooth's pack. Fangtooth narrowed his eyes, allowing his feral brain to take in the scene playing out before him. These fleshy mortals seemed to be being led by a tall, dangerous looking man; Fangtooth knew this one... a Wizard! The rest looked tasty.... easy meat. But one had a sharp pointy bow, and experience had taught this Warg leader exactly what this weapon could do. He inadvertently licked at an old wound as he remembered the cold bite of a Ranger's bow, many moons ago.

The Wizard would die slowly, Fangtooth decided. Re-payment for the damage he had inflicted on his kin last winter. The rest would nourish the pack.

Fangtooth tightened his grip on the unfortunate woodsman lying crushed and bleeding beneath his paws; yet another casualty to have strayed too close, and within easy reach of the hungry Wargs of the Wild North Hills.

Fangtooth uttered a low, unearthly chuckle... half growl, yet strangely human. His plan had worked. Snatching that childling from the man-thing settlement has drawn more of their kind out... more warm flesh to feed his ravenous pack.

With a sudden ear piercing howl of aggressive authority, Fangtooth gave the signal to attack.

Move 1:

The Hobbit Rescue Party throw a 1; even with Bilbo's +1 **initiative**, the Wargs easily win the first round of the game, and bound with great loping strides toward their enemy, their slack jaws salivating in anticipation of the kill.

Their **fast** special ability bought them easily within range of their enemy, yet they chose to halt within a few paces of the terrified Hobbits, unable to deny their inherent nature... to *toy* with their victims when they sense an easy kill.

The Hobbit Sheriff with the bow took aim, and shot an arrow speeding towards the lead Warg, but his hands were shaking so badly, the arrow flew wide.



“Stick together, and form a wedge,” the Wizard cried, *“we must try and drive a hole through the middle of them... that wall on our right will help protect our flank.”* The Hobbits rushed forward in a tight knot, led by the Wild Wizard of the Forests.

Move 2:

The Hobbits win initiative for the move, and charge headlong into the Wargs in front of them. Bilbo uses **sneak** to drive through the middle of the Wargs, and Lobelia uses her **battle cry** to encourage the rest of the gang in their counter attack.

The lone Hobbit archer stands his ground, swallows hard, takes aim, and for a second time... *misses* his mark entirely. Two Wargs advance menacingly towards the archer, who has rather foolishly lagged behind the rest of his friends. With an evil glint in their eyes, they suddenly rush the bowman in perfect unison.



beginning of combat round, Move 2



The bowman is attacked by two Wargs.

Fredegar Bolger watched in horrified fascination at the ease and deadly efficiency with which the two Wargs attacking the lone sheriff archer dispatched their foe. Caught out on a limb, trailing the rest of the company as he tried to shoot a Warg through the throat... he didn't stand a chance.

The Warg Chieftain merely sits atop a high mount of snow, lifts his head and howls; for a moment, it sounds just like a human laugh.



One Warg is chopped down by the combined might of Lobelia, Bilbo, a Sheriff, and the Wizard, denying the enemy 5 precious combat dice during the ensuing counter strike. But the Wargs throw well, and inflict four points of damage. They assign all damage on Bilbo, who uses hero to reduce the damage to 2 wounds.



combat Move 2.

The Hobbit bowman is literally torn to pieces by the pair of Wargs overrunning the poor Militia man.



end of Move 2.

Move 3:

Bilbo uses **initiative** to help win the phase for the Hobbits. Seeing the desperate plight of their situation, and knowing that at all costs, little Tommy Longfurrow must be saved, Bilbo puts on his magic ring, and vanishes from sight. He throws well for his *struggle roll* and manages to keep possession of his wits.



The Warg Chieftain sniffs the air, but can't see Bilbo, who is wearing his magic ring.

Radagast, see his small friend vanish *and having been made aware about the ring by Gandalf many years ago*, uses **sneak** to break free of the Wargs and join Bilbo. Lobelia and Fredegar, witness the sudden break for freedom, and both run through the middle and past the Wargs and try to catch up with their companions. A Warg lunges at Lobelia as she rushes past, but his jaws snap shut on thin air. The diminutive Hobbit woman swats the creature on the head with an umbrella as she passes, uttering something which sounds like: “*shooo!*” on her way by. Fredegar takes a Warg bite as he passes and receives 1 point of damage.



The two remaining Sheriffs tackle the Warg pack on their own, buying time so the rest of the gang can attempt their rescue of little Tommy.

The Sheriffs look at one another, fear glinting in the whites of their eyes. But Hobbits treasure and nurture their young, and to die attempting to protect a Hobbit child doesn't even need to be considered. They both take a firm grip of their weapons and face the inevitable... side by side.

The Wargs move in for the kill.

Bilbo and Radagast rush on ahead, but the Wargs are too quick for them. Suddenly the way is barred by the Warg Chieftain himself, who snaps and snarls angrily at the Wizard with a free **fast strike** attack *which fails to make a single hit*; there is a score to settle here, the fell beast is eager for revenge. Another Warg lopez up to join its leader for the ensuing combat. Neither creature seems aware of Bilbo, who still wears his ring of invisibility. The Wizard strikes the Warg leader with his staff, inflicting 1 wound upon the beast.

Meanwhile the two sheriffs pulling up the rear manage to score one wound on the Wargs surrounding them. During the return round, neither the Chieftain nor the Warg

pack member manages to penetrate the Wizard's toughness with their combined attacks. But the two brave sheriffs, who have sold their lives dearly in an attempt to buy time for the others, are literally taken apart by the hungry wolves.



Showdown between Radagast the Brown and the Wild Warg Chieftain.

Move 4:

The Wargs win initiative for the move. The pack moves in to surround their enemy. Sensing imminent victory, they start yapping and barking excitedly.



Bilbo makes his break for freedom, to find Tommy Longfurrow

Meanwhile, Radagast activates **healing**: throws a 1 and removes a point of damage from Bilbo. *Point of note ~ hmmm, should an adjacent character capable of activating the healing special ability be able to use it on Bilbo whilst he is wearing the ring? The rules don't state you can not – so for this game at least I will allow it.*

Bilbo makes his struggle roll for the second time, and trots off towards the Woods on the hill.

Radagast uses sneak, and once again breaks free from combat.

Lobelia and Fredegar, however, are completely surrounded with no such escape route available to them. They must take the full brunt of the Wargs attack during the ensuing Close Combat Phase. During which, Fredegar Bolger has the fat torn from him, and goes down screaming in agony as the Wargs finish the job efficiently... but not *too* quickly. Lobelia takes her first point of damage; but her 4 wounds, and Toughness 6 is going to make her a hard cookie to bring down. She might just survive the game if she can stay alive long enough for Bilbo to escape off the battle board safely. That's assuming he can control the evil influence of the ring and stay on top of it. Mind you, to take the ring off at the moment might be tantamount to suicide.



Poor old Fredegar is slain

Hmmm, everything now hinges on either Bilbo or Radagast making it safely off the board to rescue the Hobbit Child.

Move 5:

Once again, Bilbo helps his side win the initiative for the move. Bilbo keeps the ring on his finger *and* manages to keep control of it's evil power. Good old Bilbo.



Bilbo moves toward achieving victory... just a bit further.

Radagast moves away towards the map edge.



Radagast watches and hopes against hope that victory can be achieved in time to save Lobelia

The Wargs completely surround Lobelia, and she takes her second wound of the game. Lobelia fails even to prod a wolf with her umbrella this move. *Wow! The changes I have made to the special ability **hero** works like a charm; the rule plays much better now than it did before. I've always been concerned with the way this ability has worked up until now.*



The indomitable Lobelia Sackville Baggins.... complete with umbrella accessory.

Move 6:

The dice are tied, but Bilbo adds his +1 to win the initiative for the move once again.

Bilbo stays on top of the ring's influence, and continues his relentless trudge towards the edge of the game board. Next move he will be off the map.

But it's all over before he can make it.

Radagast climbs the hill, moves into the Woods, and escapes off the map to rescue little Tommy.

This achieves an automatic win for the good guys, and the game ends *immediately* before the Wargs even get a chance to counter act during their own phase segments.

Suddenly, the Warg leader, a nasty looking brute somewhat larger than the rest, gives a howl of frustration as he realizes the game is up, displays a perfect tantrum, turns tail and lopes from the field in disgust. The rest of his pack follow their master, somewhat confused; and wistfully looking back at the morsel of flesh that was so nearly theirs for the taking.

The indomitable Hobbit woman, blooded and torn; hair a tangled lump sitting on her head, merely huffs... staggered a second, quickly regained her composure, and said out loud: "well that'll learn you to mess with a Sackville Baggins."

She then fell flat on her butt with a loud plop!

Fortunately... for anyone else present.... noone witnessed this undignified and involuntary act of utter exhaustion. It would never have occurred to her she was actually a heroine, or that she had fought off an entire pack of Wild Wargs, single headedly - and had survived.



Lobelia – unsung heroine.

Losses:

1 Warg killed.

Another carries 1 single wound.

1 wound inflicted on the Wild Warg Chieftain.

All 3 Hobbit Sheriffs Killed.

Fredegar Bolger killed.

1 wound inflicted on Bilbo.

1 wound inflicted on Lobelia

Tommy Longfarrow SAVED.

Conclusions:

So why did the Wargs take so little damage? Basically, because neither the Hobbits nor the Wizard had much in the way of hard hitting damage attacks. If you look closely, you'll see that the entire rescue party *even if it could all have been bought to bear in one battle chain* only totalled 15 attack dice. Whereas the combined attack dice of the Wargs came to 30... and that's without the Wild Warg Champions **fast strike** attack ability. Toe to toe, the good guys could never win a fair fight against the Wargs. And the Hobbit Bowman was *well* inadequate comes to mind, which is perfectly how it should be for basic Hobbit Militia. After all, they're only simple Halflings; not mean, hard hitting fighting, killing machines... and they're not meant to be. The Shire Folks' strengths lay in subtlety, cunning, solidarity of numbers, and the wonderful array of **heroes** they can muster for their battles, complete with all those nifty special abilities their heroes can muster – if utilized properly.

So why did the Wargs lose? Basically, two reasons. First, they got side tracked into concentrating all their efforts on bumping off Fredegar and the Sheriffs (and attempting the same with Lobelia) allowing Radagast a relatively safe route to victory. Secondly, they lost because Bilbo was *extremely* lucky in his struggle roll every move, and never once succumbed to the lure of the ring. I am also to blame here because I completely forgot to deduct 1 point of movement from him every move he travelled through the Woods. This means he should have taken at *least* two or three more moves to escape off the map – which is at *least* two or three more moves he could potentially have fallen foul of the ring's negative influence. However, this proved academic during the game, because the Wargs allowed Radagast to escape off the map and secure the victory all by himself.

All in all, I can see that the points values of both sides were pretty evenly matched; this indicates to me, that so far (from what I can tell) I haven't been too far off track with my assessment of each model's points value.

I'm going to have to make one small alteration to the rules I think. At the moment, the **sneak** special ability is slightly too powerful. I'm going to need to limit this slightly: probably by simply making it necessary to throw a 4, 5, or 6 to be able to break away from an adjacent opponent.

Well, so far so good (pheeew) this.....er.... 20th or so re-write of the rules seems to be working out okay. I'm surprised actually, that the first battle ran as smoothly as it did, considering the changes to the current edition of the game is such a major re-write. Oh well, I'm not knocking it.

Steve.

The End.

