

# BattleForge for Beginners

by Richard Hagon



**Let's** start with a confession, shall we? There's a reason this column has the name it has, and it's this: I've never played a Real-Time Strategy game in my life. Unless you count marriage. If BattleForge was 'just' another RTS, there are a ton of people who could guide you through it step by step. So what's the deal? How come I get one of the best gigs in town, and get to chat to you about this fantastic new game from Phenomic and EA?

**Well,** as you should know by now, BattleForge is a lot more than an RTS. It has three other letters intimately allied with those strategic elements, and they are three letters that really light my fire:

**T.C.G.**

**That,** my friends, stands for Trading Card Game, and in BattleForge we get to see something never tried before, a seamless blend of two hugely-entertaining, pulse-pounding, brain-frying genres. And where do I come in? Well, the RTS bit may be new to me, but the TCG bit certainly isn't. I spend my life covering some of the best TCGs ever to hit the shelves. I get to travel the world watching the best players on planet Earth go toe-to-toe in a genre so compelling that millions upon millions of words get written about it every year. Quite a few of those words have been written, read, or spoken, by yours truly.

**So** I'll make you a deal. Over the next few weeks, I'll be delving into the world of BattleForge from a TCG perspective. That means I'll be talking to you about the characteristics of the different kinds of decks available in the game. I'll be showing you some of the skills that make the best in the TCG world so good at what they do, and how you can apply those skillsets to master the world of BattleForge. And I'll be showing you inside the deep hidden strategies of deckbuilding that the TCG world has been developing over the last fifteen years or so.

**But** for all the thousands upon thousands of TCG duels I've played, and watched, and analysed, and commented on, we come back to the fact that, as I sit staring at the button marked 'tutorial', I'm both excited and nervous, because this is a step into the unknown for me. Perhaps it is for you too? Then let's raise a lantern, and step hopefully forward into a brave new world of gaming, together. Ready? Let's begin.



**Rich Hagon** spends his life around games. Whether it's role-playing, board, trading card, console, or computer games, he covers events ranging from conventions to world championships. He writes for various websites, and creates audio and video content for clients around the globe, including many of the biggest names in the gaming industry. Watching the best, talking and writing about the best, and playing with the best – it doesn't get much better than that.





**Skylord?** I like the sound of that, and come to think of it, I like our tutorial guide. We haven't done anything yet, but already I'm impressed. This thing looks fantastic, and sounds simply amazing. Who wrote that stirring music? As someone who writes music for TV and film, I can say with certainty that the composer knows their stuff. Talk about immersive. Right, pay attention Rich, she's talking to you. Here come...six Northguards. They're my guys to command, right? It's quickly apparent that I get six of them every time I use my Northguards 'card' sitting at the bottom of the screen. I'm expecting them to have some sort of cost to cast, and I'm not wrong. In Battle-Forge, this comes in the form of a Power cost, and a number of Orbs, featuring the appropriate color. Because the Northguards are from the Frost faction, they're blue. Looking at my cards at the bottom of the screen, I have a bunch more blue cards, and some red ones too. I guess the purple and green are for next time.

**My** Northguards have 450 attack, and 720 hitpoints. Is that good? I have no idea, but I know from TCGs not to expect too much from my early plays. If this is what I get for 50 Power and just 1 Orb, I'm guessing that I'm going to get a ton more later on. Some of those other cards in my deck are looking plenty juicy. Still, Northguards I've been given, so let's take them out for a spin. Moving them? Easy-peasy. Attack the tent? Yep, I can manage that. Job done.

**Oh** good, she's explaining some stuff. Creatures, spells and structures are my deck. That's fine. Do I draw cards during the game? Ah, no, I get to have all the options straight away. Cool. Of course, just because all my cards are visible doesn't mean I can cast them, as I won't necessarily have the resources to do so immediately.

**Now** we're on to the four colors in the game. Frost and Fire are what we get to play with. Nature, I can hazard a good guess at. Shadow? Now that sounds like something I want to explore very soon.

**Alright,** what's next? Power wells create power for your Power Pool. They may cost 100 each, but that's a tiny price to pay. POWER. Give me POWER!!!! The Orbs get to do their thing at Monuments. Now this is interesting. It sounds to me like whoever controls the Monuments controls the game. In TCGs, we would talk about this as a strategy of Mana Denial, or Resource Denial. Either way, making sure your opponent can't get hold of these Monuments is going to be a big deal. What color do I get out of the Monument? Whatever color spell I cast first. Logical, and neat and tidy.



**Seems** like it's time to make some more guys. Great. The Northguards are awesome, but I suspect the Master Archers that are coming any second are going to be awesome. Well, they certainly look the part. In all forms of gaming, I'm a big fan of the whole Ranged Attack thing. To be honest, if I can avoid taking any damage at all, you can bet that I'm going to do precisely that, and sitting behind a bunch of death-propelling shaft-slingers works for me every time. They may have just 300 Attack and 600 Hitpoints, but you've got to hit them in the first place, and hopefully that's going to be tough.

**Off** you go then boys, into battle. Boys? Come on boys, what are you playing at? Whew. They did the job – just! Perhaps I was playing a little bit too fair with only one set of Archers and Northguards. Won't make that mistake again, let's make another set of each, while our guide tells us about getting the first Orb for free, and then subsequent ones requiring time and Power to build. That's fine darlin', I want me some Orbs, and if that's the cost, fine.

**By** the time she's gone through this, my rather battered troops have been steadily regenerating. Now that's a neat trick, something that's very hard to replicate in a pure TCG. There, regeneration is generally 'on' or 'off', but here I can see those bars steadily increasing could be the difference between life and death. Literally, at least for them.

**In** the world of the TCG, creatures have plenty of plus points, the most potent being that they get to attack (and hopefully maim/kill) turn after turn after turn. Although I nearly lost my Northguards and Archers in that last skirmish, they're ready to go again. That's great, but for the real moment of Power in your hands there's nothing like a straight-up spell. Why send guys to do your dirty work when you can churn out something awesome like Eruption? It's a bit more expensive than my guys so far, costing 80 Power and 1 Orb, but it's about to do a lot of damage. I hope the bad guys made a will, because I think they're in trouble. BOOM!!!! Oh yes, thank you so much, that was fun. Although probably not for them.

**I'm** sure this is a natural RTS device, but I really like the idea of supply lines. The further away from your main outposts you summon your men, the weaker and more ineffectual they're going to be. Oh, and I'll tell you something else I like – more guys. I'm up to three sets of Northguards and Master Archers each now, and my finger is positively itching over the Eruption card, ready to rain down destruction on whoever or whatever decides to get cute.





The cool stuff keeps on coming. Fortifications are next. In TCGs, Walls can be a right pain in the backside, sheltering your opponent from a stack of damage, and being a serious roadblock when it comes to putting them in the bin. Right now, I don't take kindly to those bad guys on their precious ramparts. It's time to do something about it, but not before I've summoned a fourth set of Master Archers. Well, my Power Pool has plenty in it, might as well sway things my way, right? Now I get to roll out the Cannon Tower. Now this is a serious piece of kit. It needs two Orbs to be cast, but only costs 70 Power, and that seems like a bargain. In cardland, we're always looking for cards to cast that are Efficient – that is to say, they do what they do with the best value to cost ratio. Don't worry, we'll talk more about this in future weeks. For now, let's kick some more ass!

With the fortifications neatly turned around to our advantage, and the ramparts manned like a scene out of Helm's Deep, it's time to wheel out our next new card, the Fire Stalker. OK, now this is starting to look pretty deep. As I look at the card, there's a ton of stuff to consider. At 70 Power, and requiring 2 Orbs, it's just like the Cannon Tower. It's a lot smaller than that though, so what's the upside? Well, for one thing, the Cannon Tower doesn't actually go anywhere, being, you know, a tower. Fire Stalkers look like they can shift plenty. Then there's all those Abilities. Swift, Unstable Ember, Siege, Inner Fire. That's four Abilities on just one card. I get the feeling that BattleForge is going to get really, really deep. Good, that's what we want, plenty of strategic space to explore. As I expected, these special abilities have a cost, and a Recast Time, so we won't be using them willy-nilly. Our guide recommends Inner Fire, so who are we to argue? Yep, that took down the towers handily. Onward.

I've got to say, by now my marauding horde actually feels like a proper army. I've got my dinosaur Fire Stalkers spitting flame everywhere, I've got my footsoldier Northguards who are remarkably stout all in all (I'd have fled ages ago), my favorite Master Archers with their endless hail of pointed termination, and the ever-present reset button of Eruption. And now come more guys, and more guys, and...

My army.

It died.

Completely. Horribly.

Where did I go wrong?







**Basically**, I moved everyone in a lump, and got comprehensively ambushed. I panicked, didn't have time to regroup, and some very nasty enemy units utterly destroyed me en route to the Bandit Chief. OK, now I'm mad, but as the saying goes, don't get mad get even, and that means rebuilding my army a safe distance away. In TCGs it's rare that you get a second chance to rebuild from utter annihilation unless it's in the next game, and I'm sure that BattleForge won't be so forgiving once we're into the main campaign. As for you lot, you dedicated RTS types, I know exactly what to expect. Wow I'm bad at this!!!

**Still**, taking advantage of the opportunity I've been given, I build a serious, SERIOUS force this time, and there's going to be no mercy shown. It may look as if that Bandit Chief is a big deal, sitting there with his mysterious Leader Immunities and 10,000 Hit Points. Thing is, though, one thing you quickly learn in TCGs is that apparent threats and real threats aren't always the same thing, and confusing the two is a sure route to multiple losses. Here., the Chief is the least of our worries. The guy we want to worry about is the healer. Kill him. Kill him dead. Healers are bad news if they're not ours, and this guy is so not on our side it isn't even funny.

**My** army (mark two) swarms all over the healer, making short work of him. All my units seem to be contributing to the general mayhem, and it isn't long before the Bandit Chief is fighting a losing battle against overwhelming odds. Now that's the kind of fairness I like. One of you, and lots of me!

**'Congratulations!** You are Victorious!' intones our guide, and despite the fact that I'm not entirely sure I've done much to deserve her praise, I can't help feeling a measure of satisfaction. That pleasure gets amplified as I receive the fruits of my labours, including a tasty upgrade to my new-best-friend Eruption.

**Wow**, there's a lot to learn, and I can't wait to get started. Into the Sandbox I think, and next time we'll take a look at the Frost, Fire, Nature and Shadow, and see what they have to offer. Until then, thanks for reading, and enjoy the game!

*Rich*