Combat Tips

Ah yes...the heart of the game. However you want to win the game, you have to excel in combat. Check out these quick-hitting tips on the fine art of Age of Empires war:

tip: Out of stone? If you have plenty of wood, use houses instead of walls to keep the enemy at bay.

tip: Delete excess units. If you're bumping against the 50-unit limit, highlight a bunch of Villagers (or other undesirables) and press the Delete key. Buh-bye.

tip: Scout ahead. Send a cheap, expendable Scout from your Stables to wander about the world at the beginning of a game. And do the same thing before you undertake any significant encounter. A Scout can show you what kind of defenses your opponent has erected.

tip: Micromanage the battle. The successful commander will get his mouse hand dirty in battle. In a massive battle, keep your eyes open for opportunities like unprotected Siege Weapons, or groups of Archers that can be taken out with a Catapult volley.

tip: Protect your Siege Weapons! This is critical--Catapults and Ballistas are powerful against enemy fortifications, but they don't have much in the way of hit points. Protect them with Infantry units such as Hoplites or Phalanxes, whose slow speed makes them ideal for running siege escort. And sending an advance wave of Elephants also helps.

tip: Use the high ground to your advantage. In Age of Empires, a unit that is on higher ground receives a 25 percent chance that it will do triple damage on its attack. Where possible, position units, particularly Siegecraft and archery units, on higher terrain. Triple damage is nothing to sneeze at.

tip: Engage in naval combat. If used properly, War Ships can tip the scale of war in your favor. First off, *never* try to attack enemy ships that are a level higher than yours--it's just a waste of your time and resources. Second, make sure your ships are a little bit away from land; this will protect them from being attacked by hand-to-hand combat units. And in ship-to-ship battle, the same principle applies as on land: gang up on one unit at a time for maximum destructive efficiency.

tip: Build near the battle. Construct Barracks or Archery Ranges or Academies wherever the battle rages. This way, all you have to worry about is cranking out units, not moving them into position. Of course, these front-line buildings are costly and will be in extreme danger.

Offense!

tip: Gang up on the attack. This principle goes back to the days of C&C and Warcraft. If you have a large group of attacking units, gang up on one or two enemies instead of fighting several one-on-one battles. If you take four Hoplites and mass them against one enemy unit at a time, you'll fare much better.

tip: Use sacrificial distraction. This works only on a resource-rich map or in a Deathmatch contest. Mass up ten powerful units, send them at your opponent's front, and leave them be. While they're busy fighting off this attack, spring another attack on them from a different direction. This is one of the most effective ways to break through enemy lines.

tip: Group your units. This is the best possible way to coordinate an attack with multiple unit types. This way you can easily send your cavalry units after opponents' Catapults, your infantry after their infantry, and your Catapults after enemy Towers.

tip: Humans tend to concentrate on development early in a game. Knowing that, if you can get some units into the enemy camp, you can wreak some serious damage.

tip: Is your opponent protected by the trees? Flatten him with your Catapult. Use his Attack Ground command to break through the forests.

tip: Take out a Wonder. This is undoubtedly one of the hardest things to do. Your best bet is to attack a Wonder before it has been completed; at that point, there usually won't be as

much defense. To get to a Wonder, you've got to use Siege Weapons (or War Ships, if the Wonder builder is dumb enough to build it near the sea). Taking some Villagers and building a couple of siege workshops right near the enemy encampment is a great way of continuously striking. Make sure that your Siegecraft are defended, though. An alternate way of taking out a Wonder or a Wonder-in-progress is to use a herd of War Elephants, which can take and inflict a load of damage before they die. One other tactic to use against a Wonder-in-progress is to take out all the Villagers working on the project, grinding production to a halt, and allowing you to catch up a bit.

tip: Build amid the enemy. One of the best ways to knock out your opponents is to hit them with an attack force, and then send some Villagers in to quickly construct a Stable, Academy, Archery Range, and Tower on the fringe of your enemy's base camp. This way you can be building units right on the front line, instead of waiting for them to get to your opponents.

tip: Argh--Elephants! War Elephants are surprisingly slow, but don't underestimate the psychological effect they'll have on your opponents. Most people won't react too well to a wave of five War Elephants, and will focus their efforts on hastily eliminating these beasts. Use this to your advantage.

Defense!

tip: Catapults first. When you see approaching Catapults, concentrate on them immediately--they'll do more structural damage to your base (and Wonder) than anything else.

tip: Because you usually start the game with some stone, use one Villager to build a Guard Tower near your center point right after you get your wood and food production going. This way you'll have a little extra protection against attacks on your Town Center.

tip: Build a defending wall quickly. This way you can cut off one of your opponents from easily attacking one of your flanks. (For this reason, don't neglect stone-collecting early in the game; you'll need it to research wall and Tower improvements.) As you develop, keep expanding your wall perimeter. In this way, you can build a tiered defense of your base. This especially works if you're building a Wonder. And don't be afraid to double and triple those walls--it'll take that much longer for your opponents to crack through.

tip: Make a grand entrance. If you're playing a defensive game, build your walls in a way that funnels the defender into a heavily fortified portion of your base camp. Use a V design for your walls, with more Towers closer to the entrance of your base.

tip: Build 'em and leave 'em. It's especially important in multiplayer games that sections of your base can be defended for short periods of time without your active participation. Use walls, Towers, and ranged weaponry to set up a perimeter that can be left on autopilot while you're off attacking someone else.

tip: Use your navy. If you have powerful ships, set up as many Docks as you can, position your ships offshore so no one can reach them, and open fire. Even if the lake near you is only four squares wide, build a Dock and some War Ships. It'll help your defense.

tip: Walls just ain't enough. You have to put something behind the walls that will deter enemy units from cracking through them. Guard Towers work pretty well, and they can soak up some serious damage. Plus they don't count against your population limit. Also good are archer units, and Catapults--if possible get defending units up to a higher altitude so they can take advantage of the triple damage rule.

tip: How do you fight Elephants? This is a good question--Elephants have such a high hit-point total that a group of them can be dangerous. To fight a herd of pachyderms you need a two-tiered defense: ranged fire that can wear them down as they approach, and tough infantry or Stable units. If you're fortunate enough to have Elephants of your own, use them. If not, use your Heavy Cavalry (in the absence of Elephants, you did upgrade, didn't you?) to gang-tackle them.