



BUILDING A LOTR TOURNAMENT ARMY, PART 2 – FROM THEME TO LIST

By Frank Brown and Brent Sinclair

This is the second of a series of short articles about our preparation for the 2009 Adepticon LOTR Team Tournament. In the first article, the “Ring”ers – that’s us – explained how we had come up with our theme for the 2009 Adepticon LOTR Team Tournament. We decided that we would use the armies of Mordor from Minas Morgul and the Morannon that invaded Gondor to base our tournament forces on. Now it’s time to move forward from that theme towards building our armies for the tournament.

Building a list from a theme is where the rubber hits the road in army building. So many issues have to be considered. First, we want to build our army to resemble, as closely as possible, the armies portrayed by Tolkien in his books, and by Peter Jackson and his creative team in the movies. Second, our lists must be legal under both The Legions of Middle Earth expansion rules for tournament gaming, and the list building rules for Adepticon LOTR events. Third, our lists must be appropriate under our own personal list building criteria, which we’ll talk about below. Fourth, the list must be practical in terms of the models we have and have either painted to a tournament standard, or can do so before the event. Fifth, they must be logistically feasible –

able to be transported safely and able to fit on whatever display we come up with. These considerations are not always easy to balance. Many of them, in fact, are somewhat conflicting. As is often the case, we’ll have to make some compromises along the way, but we have a set of goals, if followed faithfully, should give us competitive, interesting, attractive and well-themed armies for the event.

THE ARMIES OF MORDOR IN TOLKIEN AND THE MOVIES

In the first article we cited at length the portions of The Lord of the Rings that identified the armies of Mordor. However, beyond what we quoted, Tolkien also gives more description of the makeup of these armies.

In THE TWO TOWERS, Frodo and Sam watch the army of Minas Morgul march out of the fortress as they are climbing the pass of Cirith Ungol

*All that host was clad in sable,
dark as the night. Against the wan walls
and the luminous pavement of the road
Frodo could see them, small black
figures in endless rank upon rank,
marching swiftly and silently, passing
outwards in an endless stream. Before
them went a great cavalry of horsemen*

moving like ordered shadows, and at their head was one greater than all the rest: A Rider, all black, save that on his hooded head he had a helm like a crown that flickered with a perilous light. ["The Stairs of Cirith Ungol"]

In THE RETURN OF THE KING there are several accounts of combat involving the armies of the Morannon and Minas Morgul. Among the things we learn in reviewing ROTK are –

- The Army of Minas Morgul joined with a Haradrim Army prior to marching on the city of Minas Tirith ["The Siege of Gondor"]
- The Army of the Morannon that overran Cair Andros was composed of "orcs and strange-looking men from the east, bearing axes. . ." [same]
- The combined armies of Mordor were fairly short on cavalry, but heavy on siege equipment [same]
- The Mordor armies included a huge variety of troops and beasts, including allies – orcs, Haradrim, Mumaks, mountain trolls, half-troll looking Southrons (Mahud), Easterlings, and Variags of Khand ["The Battle of the Pelennor Fields"]

Because of some gaps in Tolkien's descriptions, Peter Jackson's team developed a lot of artistic and dramatic concepts about the armies of Mordor. We love the movies, and the visions of the Mordor armies as portrayed in The Return of the King will heavily influence our choices. Among the things we saw in the movies –

- Morannon Orcs – the heavy infantry that marched out of Minas Morgul was Morannon orcs in GW figure terms
- Mordor Uruks – these were prominent in the assault on Osgiliath
- Orcs with pretty much every kind of weapon imaginable, especially spears, pikes and bows
- Wargs and warg riders
- Massive Trolls, described by Tolkien as mountain trolls

In a few areas, the books and movies differ. For these, we have to decide which version we will go with. Although we are Tolkien freaks, the compelling drama of the movie will be given equal consideration in our choices.

The movies do not depict the Army of the Morannon that marched on Gondor. Instead, we see an Army of the Black Gate after the Free People's victory on Pelennor Fields. We'll have to assume that the Army of the Morannon resembled the Minas Morgul army in most respects.

THE LEGIONS LISTS

When we picked our theme for this year, we did so knowing full well a difficult challenge ahead of us. It's a challenge that all Mordor players face. The simple fact is that the Mordor lists in Legions are heavily balkanized, for some reasons that are obvious and many that are not. It is not possible to construct, under Legions, armies that look like the Minas Morgul army of *"The Return of the King"* movie using GW's Minas Morgul list! For example, as we've just pointed out, the Minas Morgul army in the movie was heavily comprised of

what GW calls “Morannon Orcs” and Mordor Uruks. But neither of these is found in the GW Minas Morgul list.

We would love to have constructed our armies from a single list each – that would have given us more freedom to select the mix of heroes and warriors ourselves – but alas that is not possible. Frank decided early on that the Minas Morgul army he commanded on the field was going to resemble the army depicted in both the books and the movie. But the 350 point cap for each player’s force, and the Legions requirement that one hero be selected for each force used in an army list, meant that to do so, Frank would have to use some troops from Brent’s list in his field army, and vice-versa. Not our preference, but not a major problem. Last year, we played with integrated forces where we each commanded contingents built with forces from each of our lists, and we will have to do so again. That’s perfectly legal and appropriate under the rules, so long as each player’s part of the overall list meets the Adepticon requirements.

To get all of the hero and troop types we wanted, we realized that we need to draw from four lists: Barad-dur, The Black Gate, Minas Morgul, and the Ringwraiths.

THE “RING”ERS CRITERIA

Next, we looked at our own criteria for building lists. First and foremost, these had to be lists that would be fun to play, and fun to play against. We are excited about a recreation of these armies from the books, and we want our armies to have a visual “oomph” that our fellow gamers will recognize and appreciate.

Second, we wanted armies that looked like real armies – a mix of different troop types, good ratios of melee infantry, archery, cavalry, heroes, elites, non-elites. Not just a power-gaming list of the best troop type available, but an army composed of units that work in synergy.

Third, we want an army that is strong. Make no mistake, we love the lore, we love the camaraderie and the competition, but we want to win. We want to do it the right way, though, and it has to be done consistent with our other goals. So we don’t build the nastiest army we can come up with. If we could build an army that couldn’t be beaten, we wouldn’t. We want to build an army that is themed, looks like a real army, and gives us flexibility and strengths, yet has some areas of vulnerability. One that can win, and can be beaten. We want to win with our skills as generals, not as list builders, and if our opponents are better generals, so be it.

BUILDING MANAGEABLE LISTS

Putting all this together and looking at our list of available figures, we have come to some preliminary conclusions about our army for our lists.

First, our overall commander will be the Witch-King of Angmar. He will be mounted, either on a dark steed as he was leading the army of Minas Morgul out and in entering the gates of Minas Tirith, or on a fellbeast as he also appears in the Battle of Pelennor Fields. We’ll have to decide how much might, will and fate to give him. Whatever our choice, it must be enough to make him an effective army commander, and a champion if need be.

Second, as in THE TWO TOWERS, a small force of mounted humans – Morgul Knights – will accompany the Witch-King. We aren't going to use Black Numenorian infantry as they don't specifically appear in either the books or the movie, although we will have to paint a few as dismounts.

Third, reflecting the appearance of the army in ROTK, Morannon Orcs and Mordor Uruks will be our main infantry assault force.

Fourth, the main heavy infantry will be supported by spears, proxying for the pikes the orcs used in the movie.

Our armies will have either trackers, orc archers, or both. The feasibility of using a mix is uncertain – we may be forced to go all or nothing with either trackers or archers.

To troll or not to troll? We are preparing lists either way.

Finally, do we ally with the other cultures that supported Mordor during the war, such as the Haradrim, Mahud, Easterlings, and Khandish soldiers? We'd like to, but the need for multiple Mordor lists eliminates that possibility. We've decided to go with strictly Mordor lists to insure an adequate army size.

So, here are rough versions of a couple of our list options:

Witch-King on Fell Beast (3/20/3)	Witch King, Dark Steed (3/14/2)
Black Numenorian Marshall mtd	Black Numenorean Marshall, mtd
Morannon Orc Captain	Morannon Orc Captain, shield
Either Mordor Uruk Captain or Orc Drummer	2 Morgul Knights
4 Morgul Knights	1 Mordor Troll
2 Warg Riders	11 Morannon Orc, shields
2 Orcs Trackers on Warg	8 Mordor Uruk-Hai, shields or 2-handed
10 Morannon Orcs (shields & some spears)	15 Mordor Orcs, spears
4 Mordor Uruks (shields or 2-handed)	12 Mordor Orc Trackers
12 Orc spears	
12 Orc Trackers	

Want to see the final version of our list? See us at Adepticon!



A few of Brent's Morannon Orcs from the 2008 Las Vegas Grand Tournament

About the Authors: The “Ring”ers name was adopted as our annual team name prior to the first Adepticon LOTR Team Tournament in 2007. Frank had been an active LOTR Strategy Battle Game player since 2002, and jumped at the chance to compete in the 2007 tournament circuit. But he needed a teammate, since he would be traveling in from Florida and none of his gaming buddies from the Sunshine State were playing in the LOTR event. Jamie Welling, the event’s creator and coordinator, put Frank in touch with Brent. Brent was new to miniature gaming and the LOTR Strategy Battle Game, but had worked hard to develop his painting and gaming skill, and was looking forward to playing in his first national tournament. We hit it off immediately and formed a team. We needed a name, and “Two Random ‘Ring’ers” was the best we could come up with. We had mixed results in the tournament, but we had a blast playing together and it became clear to both of us that we’d like to form a permanent team.

This year is the event’s third year, and our third playing in it. Adepticon has quickly become a premier gaming event for LOTR just as it is for the other GW games, and we are excited at the opportunity to play together again. Last year, a set of bizarre circumstances including the American Airlines shutdown kept Frank from arriving until after the tournament started. So this year we’re hoping that we get a full day playing together! And we are hoping we can get another strong performance as good as our 2nd Overall and Best General finish in 2008, which helped us on our way to finishing first and second in the GW National Circuit.