

Amon Sûl – Encounter at Weather Top

“What if” is a popular mental game with wargamers in general. Many historical games are based around interesting ideas that never quite happened: what if World War Two went on for another year; what if the Prussians arrived late at Waterloo; what if the western Roman Empire hadn't fallen when it did. These are all concepts that have been played out in games at shows and even on club nights throughout the country: I've certainly seen plenty of non-historical opponents using various ancient rules over the years purely on the basis that “it says in the rules anything from Army list three at a thousand points”. This is justification in many peoples' eyes and – if it makes for a fun game – I for one don't have much of a problem.

It becomes a little oxymoronic, perhaps, with a non-historical, fantasy based game. How can one have a scenario that didn't actually happen based around a subject that, er... never actually happened anyway? Well, one area I would consider this in is *The Lord of the Rings*. It is such a very well known book and the films – which do bare a passing resemblance to the books – are now even better known. So constructing a scenario that is, effectively, a “what if” based on Tolkien's masterpiece intrigued me as a concept.

My sarcasm at Peter Jackson's work aside, the films of the *Lord of the Rings* do differ significantly from the book, obviously, and I have to say, I did put a lot of thought into considering whether I wanted to be involved with muddying the waters any further than he already has. But, I suppose if it's good enough for the director and writer of the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy to insert jokes about dwarves standing on boxes and have elves skateboarding down the stairs, I figured “how much damage can I do?”.

So the Warlords *Lord of the Rings* participation game at this years Salute has a scenario based around just such a “what if”.

The game background

In the story, the four hobbits meet Strider (Aragorn) at the Prancing Pony at Bree and – under his guidance – make their way cross country to Rivendell. On the way they are beset by five of the nine Nazgûl, Ring Wraiths of Mordor. I'm sure those with even a passing interest in the work remember that part (even Jackson got that part mostly right). The trip from the Inn at Bree to Amon Sûl (*'The Hill of Winds'* or Weather Top) – the hilltop remains of an ancient fortress – took seven days, including a large sweep by the travellers to the north of the main road.

While the four companions and their guide worked their way north through the Chetwood and then east through the marshes, finally approaching Amon Sûl to their south via this circuitous route, they were being pursued by the nine Ringwraiths, led by the Lord of the Nazgûl himself. The Nazgûl had split into two parties – five in one group and four in another, but the reason for this was that the Nine had met Gandalf on Amon Sûl three nights previously, fought with him and they had then separated to pursue the wizard.

Meanwhile, the four hobbits were also being actively sought by other agents of Elrond's house, including the Elf Lord Glorfindel, who met them some ten days later (and not Arwen who – despite what the film portrays – was back at her dad's house making flags or something...).

What if the four halflings and Aragorn had got a move on and made Weather Top a few days early. What if Gandalf was delayed or – having been pursued by the wraiths – met up with Glorfindel and returned to the excellent vantage point of Amon Sûl to observe the road and watch for their friends?

The game postulates just this scenario. Gandalf the Grey and Glorfindel the Elf Lord have met the four hobbits and Aragorn on the Hill of Winds and have taken up a defensive position within the ruins. The Nazgûl will

make their attack from all directions – not all of them initially but calling upon their full force during the game, if they can.

Other points of note.

The ruins

The remains of the tower at Weather top are around three thousand years old and they have been in ruin for around half of that time. I have built the model work for the game to represent a circle of stones as the foundations of the tower itself with some element of some surrounding wall. I imagine it to be somewhat similar to the remains at Hadrian's Wall rather than the rather more extensive architecture pictured in the film (and reproduced by Games Workshop).

Glorfindel

In Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, it is – as I said above – Glorfindel that meets Frodo and his companions. Exactly who Glorfindel is, however, is slightly problematic. Glorfindel was the name of an Elf Lord of the First Age thousands of years earlier and it's tempting to think that this is the same fellow (his kind being immortal, after all). The problem is that the first Glorfindel was killed and – while there is a precedent of rebirth in Middle-earth – it is more likely that the Glorfindel in the Third Age is a different Elf Lord (even though both the physical description and the character's name are, effectively identical: and that's just as rare in Tolkien's work as rebirth!).

Anyway, what we do know about the Glorfindel in the *Lord of the Rings* is that he has met the Lord of the Nazgûl before. Over a thousand years previously, Glorfindel had led the forces of Rivendell in support of the Dunedain on the plains westward towards Lake Evendim, to the north of the Shire. Their combined armies were fighting the Witch King of Angmar and his troops. After a long chase, the Witch-king himself fled into the night, and Glorfindel famously prophesied that he would 'not fall by the hand of man', as later proved true in the War of the Ring itself. So Glorfindel and the Lord of the Nazgûl are old enemies.

The Wraiths – who's who?

Although the Nine Ringwraiths are major characters in the story, only one of them is actually named – and only in the background works. All were originally kings of men corrupted by the power of Sauron's rings, but - aside from the Lord of the Nazgûl himself who is only ever given a title - Khamûl the Black Easterner is the only Nazgûl definitely named.

One other named character that might be a Nazgûl is Gothmog. As second-in-command to the Lord of the Nazgûl himself at the siege of Minas Tirith, he clearly had very great authority over Sauron's forces, and this might lead some readers to think that Gothmog was also one of the Nazgûl. Others have speculated that Gothmog might have been a Man. The Lieutenant of Barad-dûr was a Man (a descendant of the Black Númenóreans, but not one with a very big mouth, despite the films...), so it seems perfectly plausible that the Lieutenant of Morgul might come from the same race. I've got to say that the idea of Gothmog being an Orc – as portrayed in the film - seems pretty stupid. I can't imagine leaving the command of tens of thousands of troops, including human allies, in the hands (claws!?) of an Orc, no matter how smart he was.

Anyway, for the purposes of the game, the three Nazgûl players will be using these three characters: The Witch King, Gothmog - Lieutenant of Minas Morgul - and Khamûl the Black Easterner.

The three players commanding the forces of good will have Gandalf, Aragorn and Glorfindel as their main characters. Minor characters – using an adaptation of the Star Wars Epic Duels system by Warlords member Peter Merritt – will be other Nazgûl and the four halflings (plus Bill the pony!) respectively.

In conclusion

The objective of all of the Lord of the Rings based gaming at Salute by the Warlords this year was just, of course, to raise the profile of the 'period'. Lord of the Rings is sliding somewhat in popularity of some fronts – after all the films are been and seen and the revues are just last year's chip wrappers, right? Well, not from my perspective.

Tolkien's masterpiece is what got me back into wargaming as a youth and has always been a major interest for me, irrespective of the waxing and waning of its impact with the general population – or the gaming hobby, for that matter. I'm just happy to be involved with doing something that – from the perspective of an amateur gamer (as part of an amateur, not for profit organisation like the Warlords, it has to be said [for the record]) – promotes Tolkien's work and Lord of the Rings gaming in general.

My recommendation is this: go out and buy figures while you can – while manufacturers still have the licence, the audience and the inclination to make them! Then use them to enjoy gaming in the world that Tolkien created: I have for the last 33 years.

John Treadaway
Warlords