

The Lord of the Rings Strategy Battle Game

– Online Community –

The Community has been marked by three or four events in the period since the release of the last edition of the Tengwar Beacon. The first is the One Ring Awards, which are covered in detail in their own specific article. Also on *The One Ring* was the discussion of whether the site should be “diversified” to include other games systems, although there is an 80%+ agreement that it should remain a “Special Interest Group” with LotR as its centrepiece. Among others, Clarkmonster’s argument to maintain the site’s current position was reasoned as follows:

“...this site should let Middle-earth be its defining element... The SBG should be our centerpiece... For the few years that I’ve been coming here, there has been a constant warding against the influence of other art styles and rule similarities into the LotR SBG. I fear the addition of other game systems would dilute the site and could easily weaken that barrier. ‘Warhammer-creep’ both in miniatures and house rules could become a larger problem than it already is. I believe in doing one thing very well, instead of many things so-so.”

Valpas of *The One Ring* supported the idea of the site as a “little giant” focused on a single game among the many miniature wargames, rather than diversifying and becoming nothing more than “a large dwarf”. The question of the LotR Online Community’s identity is particularly pertinent at this time: November was the anniversary of the closure of the official GW forum. In November 2005, this had 2700 posts per day; by November 2006, this had increased to 3000 posts, with a growing count of well over 300000 registered users. (The front page of the site on 14th November – the day before its closure – is pictured right).



The screenshot shows the Games Workshop Message Board interface. At the top, it says "GAMES WORKSHOP MESSAGE BOARD" with navigation links for "POST ARTICLE" and "HELP?". Below that, it displays "GAMES WORKSHOP : The Lord of the Rings" and "TOPICS: 0 - 25 of 334". There are navigation buttons for "FIRST PAGE", "PREVIOUS", "NEXT", and "LAST PAGE". A search bar is visible. The main content area lists several forum threads with their titles, dates, and reply counts. Some threads are marked with a "New" icon. The threads listed include: "New Sneak Peaks - Ruin of Arnor cover and more" (40 Replies), "servantofthewhitehand" (11/12/2006 15:46), "LOME FAO Clarification" (0 Replies), "Message Board Closure Notice" (0 Replies), "FAOs Errata" (0 Replies), "Not done one of these for a while, so..." (99 Replies), "Read This First - Please!" (8 Replies), "Exploring Middle-earth e-Book - sneak peek" (14 Replies), "FORUMS ARE GONE! FORUMS ARE FROGGIN GONE!" (6 Replies), "TIME!" (3 Replies), "My Site - BBaHR and Fansite List" (4 Replies), "GW replica forum" (2 Replies), "How big is this Forum?" (3 Replies), "As our doom draws closer, look back on heroic deeds of others to give us strength" (2 Replies), "2007 US Tournament Series" (3 Replies), and "MoM, now what?" (6 Replies).

The parallel did not go unnoticed when this was very nearly repeated by *The Last Alliance*. In early November of this year, the announcement of a possible closure due to costs sent members of all the LotR SBG sites into disarray. Fortunately, within a few days Mithaearon announced that “the next three hosting bills have been paid for by everyone’s kind donations,” and PaulF commented that it had not been fully realised “just how much support was out there for the site.”

With all of this, it is now appropriate to move onto:

A Brief History of The Last Alliance

There has been a fan-based online community for The Lord of the Rings SBG almost since the game’s release, with the two oldest sites dating back to 2002. Although *The Last Alliance* website officially went live on 1st February 2003 (the year following *The One Ring*’s founding), “the history of it dates back a year before”.

Mithaearon's Lord of the Rings Battle Game Site was founded on 19th February 2002, and within the first month this site had sections on painting, scenarios, and rules, as well as galleries and a community section. At this time, the articles and site themes of Weathertop, Bree and the Prancing Pony were evident, drawing on the *Fellowship of the Ring* edition of the game at the time. More is said of this pre-history elsewhere – and how this later developed into the site that would become The Last Alliance.

The Last Alliance was from its outset a community site which produced its own hobby articles. Articles had been received from its members in its previous incarnation, and hobby competitions with prizes had also been run on Mithaearon's site, ushering in *The Two Towers* edition of the Games Workshop rules. In June 2003, the site was apparently covered by the Irish radio station 2FM. Between 2002 and 2004, Games Workshop itself reported on the activity of the community, in issues 282 and 300 of the magazine *White Dwarf*, referring to the article library as having a "huge wealth of material". The majority of these articles were of a higher standard than the articles released at present on the official Games Workshop site.

The site's importance to the wider Games Workshop Online Community grew following the closure of the official Games Workshop forum in November 2006. At this time, the website was estimated to have over 1000 articles for its 10100 members, ranging from basic painting guides to step-by-step terrain articles. Although PaulF notes there are "quite a few articles on TLA that I don't think would pass muster today", it has been recognised elsewhere that "some are genuine classics and should be preserved for future generations".



Onyx's rendition of Helm's Deep (2007) – TLA's "definitive article on the subject," yet still one of several articles on the Hornburg.

Still, one of the things the TLA moderators were doing was reviewing some of older articles to identify those that needed deleting. But at the same time, the site was expanding in other areas, such as competitions and two online campaigns. The site currently has over 5400 members.

Lorderkenbrand of *The One Ring* declared: "Their archive seems to cover almost all of the potential articles that could be made." It should be noted that this is merely a restatement of the phrase, "Everything that can be invented has been invented." TLA has been revamped before, and there is still plenty of room for reform. The site's look already looks improved, and with Mithaearon's plans of "exciting changes ahead" for the Article Submission process, it is clear that TLA will continue to improve in the future.

There is a plan for the next issue of the *Tengwar Beacon* to feature a "Last Alliance Showcase", in honour of the website's success. This is to be a themed showcase of dioramas and painted armies from the Wars of the Last Alliance (Second Age) – more information will be given in the threads discussing the magazine on the various sites.