

Hardcore Hobbit: Keys to Success in a Competitive Environment

By DCHL Rob (aka Lord Elrond)

Introduction: No more Mr. Nice Elf

There are many ways to enjoy the Hobbit Strategy Battle Game (SBG). For some, recreating the long journeys and epic battles from the Lord of the Rings/The Hobbit films represents the most rewarding way to put your mound of plastic soldiers to good use. For others, casual games among friends are just what the doctor ordered to blow off some steam after that (perpetually overlong) workweek.

Increasingly, however, many players are finding a taste for a particular format: competitive Hobbit. Whether through organized leagues or the rapidly expanding tournament scene, playing the SBG in a competitive format can be great fun. But while many are finding the taste for competition, they often struggle to make the transition from casual to competitive gaming.

In competitive SBG, there is only one objective: to win. And by the largest margin possible. That may sound brutal; and it can be. But that does not mean it can't be enjoyable. It just requires a different way of approaching the game. Luckily, the DC Hobbit League crew is here with some wisdom of the Eldar to bring you up to speed! Just sit back and remember that you are playing one of the most balanced game systems for competitive play! So anyone can win with the right strategy and planning.

Welcome to Hardcore Hobbit!



Part I: Return to your Posts and Prepare for Battle!

In a game that revolves around throwing dice to achieve effects, the best-laid plan can fall apart shockingly quickly. The key is to minimize the potentially corrosive effect of a bad roll of the dice by bringing the right tools to the battle. Let's call that risk mitigation.

For this reason, the pre-tournament preparation phase is at least as important as the actual games you play. One could break down tournament preparation into two categories: intelligence gathering and mustering your forces.

Phase 1: Intelligence Gathering

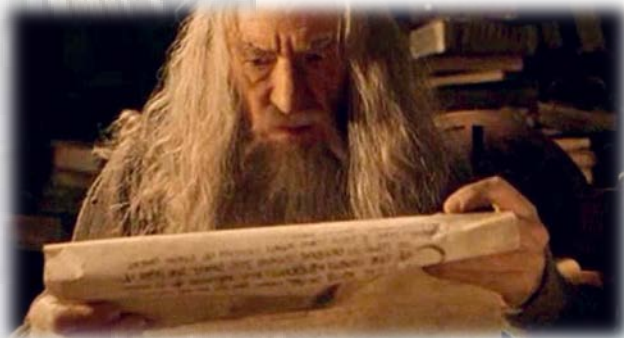
The first category is exactly what it sounds like. To be successful at a tournament, you need to take some time and do your homework. How well you prepare in this first step will directly influence the second phase (list building). It is crucial that you carefully study the tournament format and scenarios that you will be playing. Things to focus on are: victory conditions, objectives, and deployment restrictions.



Victory conditions tend to be simple. In most competitive Hobbit SBG games, the sole victory condition is to reduce your opponent to 25% of his starting number of models (which immediately ends the game at the end of the turn). Based on this alone, it is clear that the goal is to kill more models than you lose [Lord Elrond: I know, easier said than done...].

But while ‘quartering’ your opponent might technically hand you the win, it means nothing if that win came without scoring points for securing objectives. Therefore, what is more important is to carefully study what these objectives are, and make sure you have the means to achieve them (and prevent your opponent from doing so). Generally, for scenarios based on the ones in the Hobbit SBG rulebook, primary objectives include securing points for wounding/killing the enemy force leader, eliminating enemy banners (preferably while yours are still alive), and breaking the opponent’s force (again, if possible, without breaking yourself). In other games, secondary objectives are more varied. Some involve claiming objectives on the battlefield (Domination), or securing and holding different parts of the game board (High Ground). Whatever these are, study them carefully.

The second part of “intelligence gathering” is a bit broader in scope. In short, become intimately familiar with all the various armies and units in the game. It’s not good enough to know your own force. You have to know *everyone’s* force. What do their heroes do? What is the scariest unit on the other side of the field? What do you have under your command to counter it? The last thing you want in a tournament game is to be caught off guard. And because there is no rest for the wicked, make sure to also read all current Hobbit SBG FAQ’s (available for free on the Games Workshop website). Did you know that Glorfindel now causes Terror, that Woses Warriors can now move six inches, or that Faramir is a Woodland Creature? Well, you should have.



Phase Two: Mustering the Forces



All of the above feeds directly into the decision making process of part two: list building. Over the years I have seen a lot of people do this wrong. My first piece of advice to the aspiring conqueror is this. Do not bring the best *Units*. Bring the best *List*.

Many players think that simply bringing Sauron and a Balrog to a game will guarantee them a good placement in a tournament. Fortunately, this is almost never the case. Playing with a 'powerful' list you don't understand might win you some casual games, but rarely a tournament. Much scarier is the player that brings a seemingly underpowered list that is almost an extension of their own body, a list that they know every nuance of, and wield with a confidence and grace that might catch you entirely off guard.

This is not to say that experience can make up for models or units that are just plain bad. At some point you just have to accept that 20 Wood Elf Sentinels doesn't work. But just playing strong models also doesn't work in this game either. You need a combination of skill and the right models in combination.

So, what actually makes a good tournament list? Here is my personal checklist of elements that make for a good force:

- 1) ***The Muscle:*** Your army needs to have something that can do the killing. This can either be a very good hero (like a Boromir or Shagrat), or alternately a Monster or particularly hard-hitting unit (like Trolls and Half Trolls). The point is that when the majority of the field will be comprised of Defense 6 troops, you need something capable of removing the opponent's models and challenging their own muscle.
- 2) ***The Phalanx/Meatbag:*** Your army needs to have a unit that can 'hold the line.' Games of Hobbit SBG invariably end up in clashes of shield walls. Usually this means a line of D6 (preferably Shielded) or higher troops supported by more specialist Spear wielding elements. The purpose of this unit is to secure an objective, protect vulnerable models in the backfield,



prevent your opponent from enveloping your force or simply tie up your opponent's army in the middle of the field. Usually these units are going to be hardy but only moderately priced line troops. This has the added benefit of raising your break point. If the Muscle is the meat of your force, this is your potatoes.

- 3) **The Ranged Threat:** Now obviously this refers to bow armed troops (you have a 33% bow limit, use it!), but can also be covered by magic or cavalry. This has a triple purpose. First, your army often needs a compelling reason to force your opponent to come to you. This way the opponent cannot safely hunker down and wait you out. Second, you need a way to soften up the opponent before crashing lines to give yourself the edge, or alternately threatening their high cost/hard hitting units (monsters being a prime example) without the risk of close combat. Third, you want the option of a counter battery. That is to say, if your opponent wants to simply hunker back and shoot *YOU*, make sure you can answer in kind.



- 4) **The Mobility:** Though naturally cavalry fit this role well, any high mobility troop can fill this purpose (think high speed infantry like Mauhur's Uruk Hai Marauder Scouts, Elves with Woodland Creature that can ignore terrain, etc). The purpose of this unit is to be a troubleshooter. Is your phalanx buckling in a certain place? Quickly reinforce it. Need to rapidly redeploy to meet a new threat? Or did a weakness open up on the opponent's flank? Swing around and apply pressure. And finally, once the ranks thin, this unit is sent to grab objectives in the late game.

- 5) **The Must-Haves:** The first part of this is simple. If the tournament scenarios give points for having banners, then you better have one (or two). But this gets more nuanced in specific army lists and certain troop combinations. For example, if you are running Mirkwood Palace Guard, then Thranduil is a must-have. Likewise, if your army simply crumbles on courage, then a War Horn might be a must-have. The point is, if your army has to have it to work, then by all means don't leave home without it!



- 6) **The Wild Card:** Any good opponent will expect you to have the above things, and likely bring their own. This slot is reserved for something a bit unexpected. Something the opponent will not plan for, or will spend too much time on in the game. For good armies, this is often something like a Wizard and for Evil, it could be a Shade. (By way of warning though, do not just pick

something different because it is different. Make sure it actually has a purpose.)



Now, obviously not all armies have access to all of these things (Goblin Town has no ranged threat, for example). Other armies can comfortably use units that wear more than one hat (arguably an Uruk Hai Pike-block can act as both Phalanx and Muscle). Some armies can mitigate weaknesses in one area through the use of Allies depending on the tournament. Other armies simply have to sacrifice one element and so focus on giving redundancy to another. Dwarves for example are not known for their mobility but good luck chewing through two Dwarven Shield walls. Ultimately this list is not dogma, more like guidelines. The point is that a well-played and versatile list will do better than a ham fisted and single minded one. A list comprising five Mordor Trolls might put the fear of Morgoth into your opponent at first glance. But a list with two Mordor Trolls, 24 Morannon Orcs with Spears and Shields and four Morgul Knights for the same cost will give you more options on the battlefield.

Last but not least, practice makes perfect. No amount of tips will make you a tournament pro. In the end, there is no substitute for experience, which only comes with playing your list over and over!

Part II: Ride now for Wrath, Ride now for Ruin, and the Red Dawn!

So we have come to it at last, the
great battle of our time
*[Lord Elrond: Well that's a bit
dramatic, don't you think Gandalf?].*

Your army is fine-tuned and ready
to rock. Your dice are sorted by
color (or whatever other
superstition you might have) and
you made flash cards to track your
M/W/F. You got a good night's



sleep and ate a healthy breakfast... Who am I kidding, you stayed up way too late basing those last ten Wargs and had McDonalds on your way to the venue.

Whatever, irrelevant. Because now you actually have to put some foot to some ass. This part is a little bit less clinical than the last, as new two games are quite the same. But here are some general tips nonetheless.

Deployment is Crucial: Games are often won or lost in the Deployment phase, so think carefully about how you choose to deploy your army. There is nothing worse than trying to claw back from a poor deployment—Heroes find themselves out of position, Archers have no shots, Cavalry gets mired in difficult terrain. And being forced to correct deployment errors in-game could cost you precious might too early in the game (if you lose priority and need to Heroic Move, or else see your line collapse too quickly). Practice different deployments in the lead up to the tournament until you become very good at knowing exactly ‘*how*’ your army needs to start the game.

Taking that one step further, be careful to know what *order* to deploy in. In the Hobbit SBG, deployment happens one warband at a time, and is determined by dice roll (1-3 being within 12” or the center, 4+ meaning anywhere). Say you have one warband that is armed with bows and spears, meant to support a second warband armed with shields. You roll first for the archers (scoring a 5) and decide to put them in your backfield. Marvelous, that’s where they wanted to be! Until your shield warband rolls a 2, and has to start 12” away from them. This means you have to spend two turns (not shooting) to move into position behind your shield wall (which has to either back up or wait for you). Now the opponent dictates the movement phase, and thus the game. Instead deploy the shields first, and if they roll a 1-3 placing them approximately 11” from the center line, then whatever you roll for the spear archers is unimportant. Sounds obvious but I have seen this mistake more often than one might think (hell, I’ve done it myself!).

Finally, it is a good idea to start by deploying some of your smaller (or more mobile) warbands first in order to force your opponent to show where he is going first (and thus getting insight into his strategy). Independent characters like Rangers of the North are perfect for this since it is a single unit that says nothing for where your force is going.



Control the Initiative: Throughout the game, the best thing you can do is to dictate the terms of engagement and keep the opponent reacting to you rather than the opposite. By far, the most important phase of the game is the movement phase. And you need to own it. How you build your army will determine what this looks like in practice. If you have an aggressive army, make sure that you take the initiative early and apply constant pressure on the opponent (especially if they deployed poorly as above). Facing an elven gunline that does not want to engage with your Orcs or

Easterlings? Deploy as far forward as possible and get in their face immediately with Heroic March or a Drummer. Also, use Heroic Fights to butcher through to get to their support units like Shamans. Give the opponent one turn to do what they want. Then put them on the back foot so that you can play your game... and they cannot play theirs.

The same applies to a defensive army. Use precious time shooting to assassinate key heroes before battle lines are met, or whittle away weak defense troops as you back up and fire.

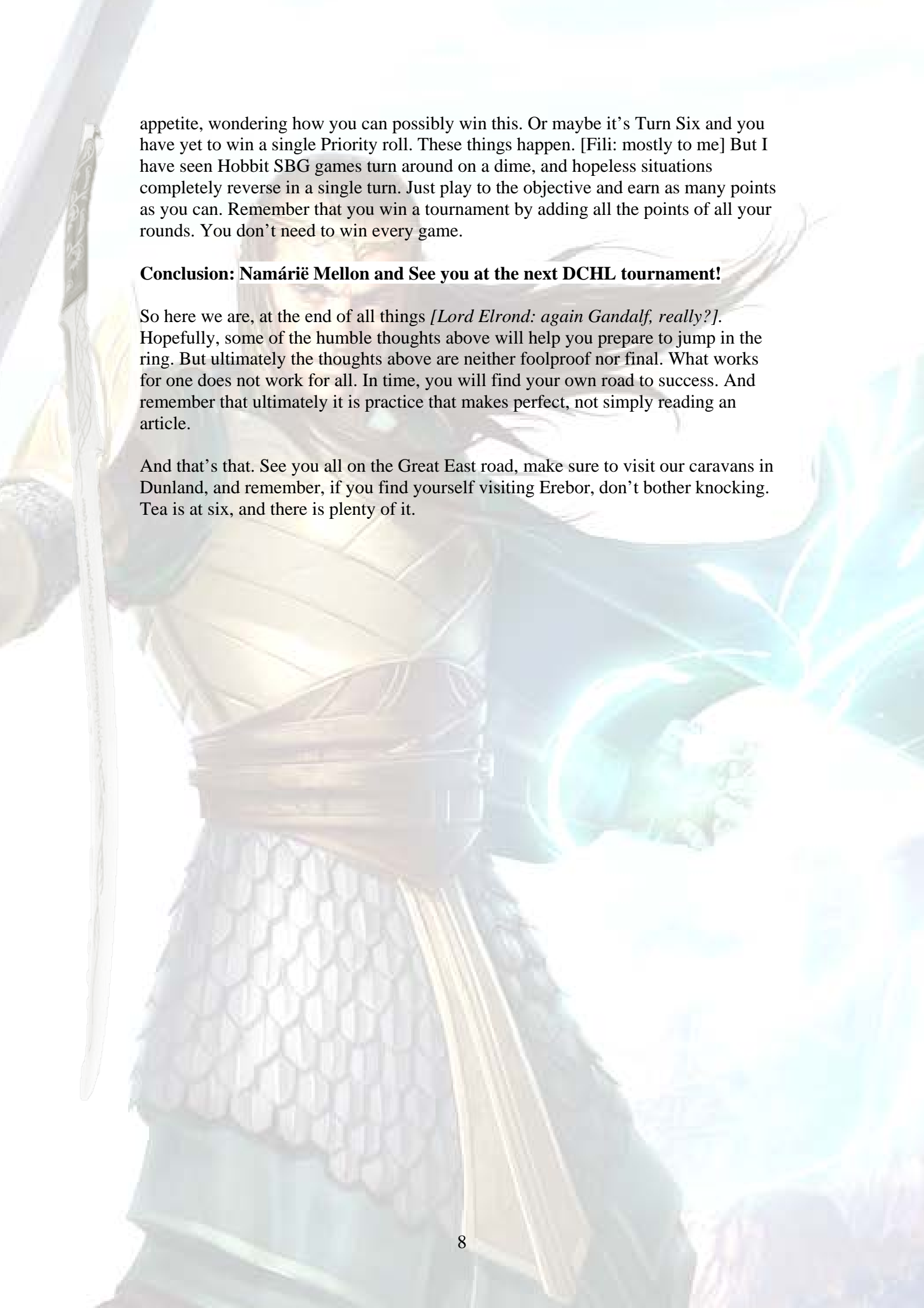
Learn How Best to Use Might: Might is the most precious resource in your army. This is partially because it can have the largest impact the game by swinging important moments in a different direction, and partially because it is finite. People often say that the Hobbit SBG is easy to learn, but hard to master. Nowhere is this truer than when learning how and when (and with whom) to use your stores of might. New players often make the mistake of either blowing their might too early, or alternately preserving it for too long. The key (in addition to knowing your army very well as discussed in Part 1) is to learn how to take calculated risks. For example, your hero is in a fight with some normal line troops and rolls a 5. Your opponent gets that lucky six. You have a higher fight and can win the tie; but should you? Say your D7 hero is facing 2 S3 hits. That means your opponent has to roll a 6 to wound your character (after which they would presumably have Fate to avoid the harm). Is it worth spending 33-50% of their might for the remote chance they could get hurt? Probably not. Now say you already spent a might and this is a Heroic Fight. Again that will depend. Is it worth TWO might to move again? There is no one size fits all answer. It comes down to calculating the risk/reward and acting on instinct. Some times are more obvious than others. But here are some general guidelines:



- Heroes leading Cavalry should probably reserve Might to call a Heroic Move for Charging or counter charges once stuck in combat.
- Your non-combat heroes should use might for Heroic Moves and March for the main force
- Your combat Heroes should spend might on Heroic Fights and Heroic Strikes
- Your Shooting Heroes should spend Might when rolling to Wound (not rolling to Hit since there is still a possibility of failure)
- Your Magical Heroes should save Might for Channelling and casting
- Your leader should probably keep some might back which could mean the difference between getting wounded (and giving up objective points) or not,

And now, the final piece of advice...

Don't Panic, and Don't Give Up: It is far too easy to get discouraged during a game of the Hobbit SBG. Sometimes things just do not seem to be going your way. (maybe you did not make the required sacrifice to the dice gods). Or maybe you showed up to the game table, saw your opponents Army of Cheese , Filth and Doom and lost your



appetite, wondering how you can possibly win this. Or maybe it's Turn Six and you have yet to win a single Priority roll. These things happen. [Fili: mostly to me] But I have seen Hobbit SBG games turn around on a dime, and hopeless situations completely reverse in a single turn. Just play to the objective and earn as many points as you can. Remember that you win a tournament by adding all the points of all your rounds. You don't need to win every game.

Conclusion: Namárië Mellon and See you at the next DCHL tournament!

So here we are, at the end of all things [*Lord Elrond: again Gandalf, really?*]. Hopefully, some of the humble thoughts above will help you prepare to jump in the ring. But ultimately the thoughts above are neither foolproof nor final. What works for one does not work for all. In time, you will find your own road to success. And remember that ultimately it is practice that makes perfect, not simply reading an article.

And that's that. See you all on the Great East road, make sure to visit our caravans in Dunland, and remember, if you find yourself visiting Erebor, don't bother knocking. Tea is at six, and there is plenty of it.