

Hardcore Hobbit: Dealing with Monsters

By DCHL Rob (aka Master Elrond)

Not so very long ago in the Hobbit Strategy Battle Game (SBG) competitive environment, Monsters use to be the butt of every joke. These days, they more often have the last laugh. Let's be honest. Monsters can be a huge pain to deal with. For older players especially, that are used to monster being over-costed and underpowered paperweights, the adjustment can be a bit painful. But fear not. Monsters are not broken. They just can now make back their points, and that has changed the game. And so it's time to teach us old dogs some new tricks. The tactics of the heyday of the Lord of the Rings SBG no longer apply.



So what is it exactly that makes Monsters so strong? Well let's take a look at some of their strengths:



Terror: This is nothing new, but just as annoying as ever. Being terror causers, Monsters can throw a serious wrench in a persons plan. There is nothing more frustrating than having eight Orcs fail to charge a Monster in a Single phase. This often gives Monsters the ability to choose the fights *THEY* want, rather than the other way around.

They've Got it Where It Counts: For those of you who just thought of something unthinkable, I hope you end up in one of Bert's sacks. I mean, um... wait... oh forget it. What I mean is that Monsters have very high stats where it counts, namely Fight, Strength, Defense and Attacks. Most monsters have 6's in all the right places, or even 7's. This usually means that if they roll a 6 on the Duel roll, they win. And when they do, they usually kill what they touch (usually only needing 4's or better). If they do happen to lose (or if you shoot at them), chances are you are wounding them on 6's or worse, making them quite durable. Especially since they have multiple wounds.

The Dreaded Brutal Power Attacks: This is by far the biggest change for Monsters between the Lord of the Rings and Hobbit SBG. It used to be that a conga line of goblins could tie up your fearsome 400 point model all game long, as they had no way to kill more than one model or free themselves up. No longer. These days, Monsters come packed with Brutal Power Attacks: Rend, Hurl and Barge (and others on a case by case, such as the Cave Drake's Gaping Maw or Beorn's Love Hug). Rending allows the Monster



to wound against an opponents Strength rather than Defense (sorry Mr. Hero); Barge allows them to push models out of the way and charge again (no dice Hobbit limbo party); and the most dreaded of all, Hurl, allows a Monster to pick up the model they were fighting and throw it D6 (plus difference in Strength) inches. The hurled model takes a Strength 6 hit, and a further Strength 3 hit for every model it happens to impact along the way (all of which also take a Strength 3 hit). To add insult to injury, all models thrown or passed over are knocked down. Bowling for Cavalry indeed.

So you can no longer trap them for long, avoiding them can be difficult if they can use your friendly dwarf as a bowling ball right down your battle line, and even high defense units/heroes designed to pin them will get Rended into a frothy red paste.

I know what you are thinking. What can men do against such reckless hate? Well, in the words of Aragorn, "there is always hope." Monsters are not invulnerable. They do have weaknesses. Let's go over a few of those.

"There is always hope."

Mobility: Generally, most Monsters are no faster than your average infantry model. Obviously, there are exceptions to this rule, like Eagles. But generally they are not particularly fast. This can be used to your advantage.

Cost: Monsters might be brutal, but they are not cheap. Your average Mordor Troll costs the same amount as eleven Morannon Orcs with Spears and Shields. So it's a small mercy that when these show up, it means the army around them will be much smaller. And let's not pretend that chewing through eleven Morannon Orcs is a walk in the park either.

Large Base Size: Monsters come on a large base. This makes them less nimble than other troop types (again, Eagles aside). They might not fit through tight terrain. They can't plug gaps in the battle line as well as your standard 25mm infantry, often finding themselves stuck behind the ranks. And they are much easier to trap in any given combat (three infantry is all you need in open ground).



So, what exactly *IS* the best way to deal with Monsters? Well, there is no single answer to that question. Different armies will have to use different methods, depending on their specific tools. Ultimately it comes down to minimizing the impact of their strengths on the game, while exploiting their weaknesses.

"Servant of Morgoth, Go Back to the shadow from Whence you Came!"

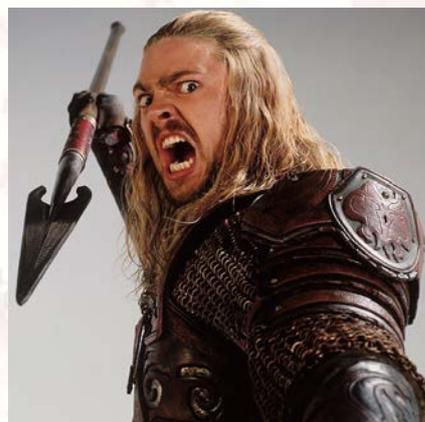
(Magic): First and foremost, Magic is a great way to deal with Monsters. There is no way around it. As we saw, Monsters have quite impressive stat lines. But that means next to nothing if your Monster is Transfixed/Immobilized. Likewise, a Monster can be thrown back by a Sorcerous Blast the same as any model. If you time it right, and get the right angle, you could even cause some collateral damage along the way and

set up the now prone model to be charged by the rest of your force. If your army has a lot of Terror causers, Drain Courage could leave the opponents Monsters (which are generally not the bravest to begin with) whimpering in the corner... a nice change from ravaging in your backfield. Likewise, a Wizard with Aura of Dismay could create a 'no fly zone' protecting your troops from enemy Monster charges.



“Bring it Down! Bring it Down!” (Shooting): There is a reason armies were given a 33% percent bow limit (or better) in the Hobbit SBG. Put it to use! Trolls ruining your day? Then knock arrows and let fly. Now I know what people are thinking. Monsters have such a high defense, that archers will need 6’s at best to hurt them. Absolutely. But this is a dice game, and 6’s do happen. I mean, there’s a six on every die, so you’re bound to roll a few. That means that twelve Archers (assuming an average 36 model army) can be a real threat (remember, non character monsters have no Fate). If these are Elves, then you are likely hitting on 3’s, meaning one or two 6’s a turn. Over two or three turns of shooting, the Monster is a pin cushion. If you do not have elves, then chances are you have more archers anyway. Now obviously, your opponent may have more than one Monster. And if you do not have access to S3 bowfire, you may need to roll a 6+ followed by a 4+ to wound a Troll [Elrond: not so easy... trust me I’m an Elf]. I never said it was a perfect strategy. But fighting one Troll is a lot easier than fighting two. Furthermore, traditional bows are not the only missile weapons available. In fact, an underrated but highly effective Monster hunting platform is the Throwing Spear. With an 8” range, you can shoot Monsters while staying out of their charge range. For this reason, Rohan Royal Knights with Throwing Spears are among the best anti-monster tools. They have the mobility to prevent engagement, can throw their spears all day (remember Hobbit SBG games end based on casualties, not turn limit), and when they do have to commit to a fight they can do it on their terms and won’t be frightened (being Bodyguard as well). Finally, there is always the trusty Siege Weapon. A Gondorian Avenger Bolt Thrower can make a mess of enemy monsters.

“Eomer, take your Eored down the Left Flank!” (Outmaneuvering): Monsters might be hard, but as we see they are not always fast. This means you can outmaneuver them with the more mobile elements of your army. This means that



isolating monsters is one of the most effective methods of dealing with them. Send a handful of guys against one and you can trap him and bring him down. [Elrond: if the fickle dice gods be with you] Against an all monster army you can isolate them fairly easily. Likewise, objective based games force an all monster army to split up their forces in order to win; this plays right into your isolation plan! If they have just one or two monsters, you should be able to almost ignore them in objective games. Even a Mumak can't clear all the objectives!

Cavalry with bows can dance around and shoot, never quite engaging and forcing a fight (surrounding the beast in the process). If you isolate them and they win the fight and Hurl you, there is less of a chance for collateral damage to your forces. If they Barge, they leave the objective and are out of position. If they Rend, well you just lost a single model. And if you win you get to exact some sweet revenge.

“Do what you will; but I will hinder it!” (Heroic Strike):

Fighting a Monster in combat is not a pleasant experience. But in the end, you won't be able to avoid it forever (no matter how many bows you pack). So the best you can do is try to dictate the terms of engagement.

On first glance, many will think that throwing their best hero into the fray is the best bet. It can be (if you are

packing Gil-Galad for example), but it's risky. First, many Monsters outfight even your best Heroes. Second, if it doesn't work and your bigshot hero (and likely force leader) loses the fight, then Rend just might make short work of them. Luckily, there is another way. The same evil masterminds that created Brutal Power Attacks, also gave us the thrice blessed Heroic Strike action. Though it costs a might, this tool turns even humble captains into amateur Monster slayers. Use it. But be careful, this can be tricky. In order for it to work, you are dependent on a good dice roll (Heroic Strike elevates the models Fight value by D6). But when the times get tough, it's a risk worth taking. My favorite is to take a cheap hero (like Beregond for example, or a Ranger of the North), buff them with Heroic Strike, and use them to lead the attack. If you lose the fight, then that Hero will probably die. But all you did was sacrifice a 20-25 point model (and if unlucky a few of his comrades he was thrown through).



You cannot avoid casualties when fighting Monsters, so make sure they are models you don't mind losing. Even if you win the fight, there is no guarantee your S3 or S4 models will take the beast down (even if Trapped). [That's why the GW gods gave us axes! For the love of all that's bearded, use that piercing strike!] But that's not the point. That gives you another shot at it, and another turn the Monster is caught and isolated in a specific fight as opposed to rampaging through the lines. Even if they end up barging (and on that point, don't give them a good Barge lane if possible), they cannot do another Brutal Power Attack and hurl your models. All that aside, if you *ARE* lucky enough to have Gil-Galad, Thranduil (BotFA version) or a combat specialist like Elrond (again BotFA version), then by all means go hunting!

“But my Lord, it would take Thousands to Storm the Keep... Tens of Thousands!” (Attrition): Some armies have the means to simply swarm a Monster and win the war of attrition. In particular, armies like Goblins have the numbers to throw several models into a fight, expecting casualties and not quite caring. Goblintown is especially adept at this, since all models can support each other. Furthermore, many have Axes (for Piercing Strike), swords (for feinting [Elrond: and who cares if they go down to F1?]) or carry two-handed weapons (for +1 on their rolls to wound). Sure, at a Fight of 2, they will not win tied fights. But if you can get 8 dice to the Monsters 2 or 3, the chances of naturally out-rolling them becomes high. If you lose, then models will die. But with that many dice (especially if the Monster is Trapped), you usually only have to win the fight once.

“Break the Damn! Release the River!” (Other Monsters): Not much to say here. Sometimes you just have to fight fire with fire. If Trolls are ruining your day, bring an Ent. Two can play at that game.



Well that's it. Happy hunting!

-DCHL Rob (aka Master Elrond)