



Review 9473: The Mines of Moria

By Jetro

Set: The Mines of Moria
Set number: 9473
No. of pieces: 776
Minifigs 9
Recommended retail price: 79,99€

For quite some time it has been my (not so) secret wish that LEGO® would make Lord of the Rings sets. I was immediately captivated by Tolkien's universe when I read The Lord of the Rings for the first time some 25 years ago and I quickly delved deeper into it. Reading everything written by Tolkien I could get my hands on. When I found out a film was in the making I was excited and wary at the same time. Excited, because the epic tale would make a great movie, but wary because films tend to be quite different from the books they are based on and because I was loath to lose (part of) the picture I had forged in my mind. Despite the many deviations and omissions compared to the book, the trilogy was a pleasure to watch and I am now looking forward to the upcoming film version of The Hobbit.

Back in 2001, when the Fellowship of the Ring was first screened, LEGO didn't jump on the bandwagon and it was only logical to assume that it would be very hard to do so years later. However, the filming of the Hobbit has blown new life into the Oscar winning movies from a decade ago, and this time LEGO has not only secured a licence for The Hobbit, but also for The Lord of the Rings. As is to be expected, the licence is related to the film and so the scenes depicted in the sets will be faithful to the film and not necessarily to the book. And again I was torn: LEGO LOTR is great news as it combines two areas of great interest to me personally, but how would it measure up to the film and to what extent would the compromises that inevitably need to be made affect the sets negatively?

There has been much rumour and speculation, from leaked catalogue images to "stolen" pictures at toy fairs, but on the whole the changes we have been able to see in the sets (from preliminary to final product) all appear to be for the better and now that the official sets are available it is time to take a closer look.



There are 7 sets in the LEGO® LOTR theme and they come with a large number of minifigs. Even so you need to get 4 sets if you want to have a complete fellowship and the other sets all contain interesting minifigs to complete the collection. Unfortunately there are only 2 ringwraiths in the series (out of 9 in the book/film), but they come with the beautiful new horses designed for this theme.

With the exception of the smallest set (Gandalf Arrives, 83 pieces, including Gandalf, Frodo and a horse drawn cart) all the sets centre around the battle scenes of the films: the attack of Shelob on Frodo and Sam, The “Uruk-Hai Army” which is a module that can be integrated into the “Battle of Helm’s Deep” set, the “Attack on Weathertop” and the “Mines of Moria”, with an exclusive set called “The Orc Forge” that is a kind of battle pack for the dark forces.

So let’s have a closer look at one of the sets to get a feel of the new LEGO LOTR theme.

The Chamber of Mazarbul

The set I will review in this article is 9473 - The Mines of Moria. Moria is the vast underground realm of the dwarves under the Misty Mountains, which the fellowship need to traverse. There are two iconic scenes in Khazad-dûm as it is otherwise known, one is the flight of the fellowship, down the crumbling stairs and over the narrow bridge and the other the fight in the chamber of Mazarbul on which this set centres.

The Mines of Moria contains four separate structures that form a playscene of the chamber: the doors, one of the walls with pillars, Balin’s tomb and a well.

As mentioned earlier, there are notable differences between the book and the film, and the scenes in the chamber of Mazarbul are no exception. Peter Jackson (director of the LOTR trilogy and of the upcoming The Hobbit) was looking for action and combined as many elements in the same place as possible. In the book, the chamber has two different stone doors, one on either end, and the fellowship go in one and out another. In the film there is only one way out and the doors are wooden. That helps to build up tension as the orcs tear down the doors and allows for a visually different note in the construction in the set. The doors are beautifully detailed on the inside (unfortunately the outside is rather dull) and the set contains a long axe to block the doors against the oncoming orcs. Surprisingly a section of the wall is prepared to crumble and a technic beam is attached to activate the mechanism. It makes the playscene livelier, but this doesn’t happen in the film or the book...

Another difference between the book and the film is the presence of the well. It is here that foolhardy Pippin manages to attract the attention of the orcs by accidentally tipping a dwarf skeleton into the well, together with the bucket and chain it got entangled with. There is a well in the book, but not in the chamber of Mazarbul and it is merely a stone Pippin throws in to gauge it’s depth, although Gandalf is equally angry at him for his foolishness. The LEGO version of the well has a nice octagonal shape, even though it is only 3 bricks deep, using just enough parts to make it look good and give it a mechanism, though I must say this one puzzles me somewhat.. Rather than depending on the skeleton to sit on the edge and only fall in when pushed, a sliding mechanism has been devised that covers the well. The skeleton is placed on top and when the slider is pulled from under it the skeleton drops into the well. What can I say? It works, and it’s probably more reliable for a small kid, but to me the mechanism is a



waste of parts. I love the well though.

Balin’s tomb has a mechanism. In the film the troll shatters part of the tomb with its hammer while attacking the fellowship. It would have been quite hard to recreate this in LEGO and the solution they have come up with is to make a removable lid and place a lever under the skeleton inside the tomb. It takes some practice and a rather strong blow to get any effect out of that mechanism, but the final result is quite nice. Neither Tolkien nor Peter Jackson give any information as to Balin being exceptionally tall. I mention this because the skeletons that come with the set are both minifig size, even though they represent dwarves. A missed opportunity, but not a serious problem.

The fourth element in the set has no less than 3 mechanisms which though nice had me baffled for a while. The element represents one of the walls of the chamber with two columns, the very ones Frodo and the troll play hide and seek around. In the central section of this wall there is a recess that contains a treasure chest which is placed on a slider that can be activated from the rear. The chest comes out and you have access to the jewels that are inside. Check book... no, check film.... no, ... ok... The other two mechanisms are designed to make the pillars collapse (one mechanism for each pillar). Checking... again no reference. These mechanisms provide the set with more action, but where do they come from? It appears they were deemed necessary to make the set more interesting. None of the mechanisms really inspire me, but I suppose a younger audience may appreciate them.

Playing the hero (or the villain)

An important feature of this set are the 9 minifigs it includes. I have already mentioned the two skeletons, so let’s have a closer look at the remaining figures. Four of them are members of the fellowship, Pippin, Gimli, Legolas and Boromir, and with the exception of Gimli who also turns up in the Battle of Helm’s Deep, they are all exclusive to this set. Of course a set centred on Moria without a dwarf would be inconceivable.

The remaining minifigures include two Moria orcs. I suppose they have such a clear, olive green skin because they don’t see a lot of sunlight in the mines, compared to their Mordor cousins who have a dark tan complexion.

Last but not least there is the Troll, the largest "minifig" LEGO® has made to date. A faithful LEGO representation of the one from the film. Both arms and hands are articulated (at the shoulder and wrist respectively), but the legs and head can't move. The Troll is very top heavy and the placement of the legs is such that you need to be careful when placing it or it will easily topple over. The hammer or club it uses as a weapon is nicely built, but there is really only one position for the troll to carry it: lifted up behind its head. In any other position the troll will fall over. As a nice extra, the claws of the troll are shaped in such a way as to be able to accommodate a 1x brick and it can carry a 1x8 brick between them.



Attention to detail

The level of detail in the structures is great and gives the set a very real feel. The dark tan details in front of the door, the use of the new brick-pattern brick, the shape of the columns, the decoration of the doors... Also, the wall section with the pillars is built up of three modules that click together, allowing you to place the independently if you would ever want to. It is a pity that there are no less than 34(!) stickers in this set, some of which are frankly unnecessary while other (the 1x4 tiles on the doors that get a sticker with a wood pattern) could have been replaced by the printed tile that has been included in other sets in this range. However, the marking above the door and on Balin's tomb give the set an extra feel of authenticity.

There is also a whole bag of weapons to be strewn on the floor of the chamber and a nice bone and extra skull, the book of Mazarbul as well as a second book... in short, a set full of details.



The journey continues

The first series of sets is a promising start for the LEGO Middle Earth theme, which in a few months will be expanded to include new sets for The Hobbit. I can only hope there will be a second wave of Lord of the Rings sets in 2013, and that it will fill some of the gaps that this first series has left: no female characters (Arwen, Galadriel and Eowyn come to mind) only two Nazgul, ... Middle Earth is a large place and there are still many stories to be told. Sauron and the cracks of Doom, the fell beasts the Nazgul ride, Faramir's hideout, to name but a few, but I am confident that this first series of sets is only the beginning of something that will become bigger and bigger.

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