Compiled Arda RulesET - Minion

Based on “Middle Earth: The Arda Game” by Joe Bisz and Eric Dané  
and  
“DARK ARDA” by Goblin King

# Concept

The Arda Game is a variant of the Middle Earth CCG designed for two or more players. Its key difference from the original rules is that all players play from a shared set of specialized decks, rather than their own individual decks. Players still control their own parties and play resources and hazards from their own hands, but all cards are initially drawn from a shared pool of cards.

A full Arda deck is substantially larger than a standard MECCG deck, always containing several hundred cards, and potentially having over one thousand. The deck designers can craft this deck to cater to a specific gaming experience or scenario, and while a single Arda deck should be limited to only one alignment, there is no hard rule specifying what alignment that must be. This means the Arda deck could be aligned to Hero, Minion, or even (theoretically) Fallen-Wizard or Balrog cards.

Because of the substantial number of cards available for use among the players, it is unlikely that all cards will appear in a given game. This offers an experience driven by improvisation, as well as a fairly level playing field and significant replayability. Furthermore, because players are not required to supply their own decks, the Arda Game is ideal for a casual or spontaneous group.

No summary of the game flow is provided, as basic understanding of the rules of MECCG is assumed. The official Arda rules document should be used as a guide if necessary.

# Overall Goals

This version of MECCG has two goals. Even though they are listed in sequence, they are of equal importance.

1. DARK ARDA must teach most of the rules of a regular Middle Earth Lidless Eye game. For this reason many exception rules are avoided and there is no special card text. Rules and existing errata are used on cards as much as possible.
2. DARK ARDA must be fun and in the spirit of Tolkien’s work. The game would be diminished greatly if some cards were not included in it.

To illustrate how balance is achieved between these two goals, consider the three Ringwraith mode cards that allow them to travel around the map (Heralded Lord, Black Rider, and Fell Rider). If strictly following the rules, three copies of each of those mode cards would be shuffled into the huge deck. Most players would never have access to them or the ability to shift their Ringwraith into one of those modes. That doesn’t sound like much fun or in keeping with the spirit of this fine game, so instead, each Ringwraith begins the game with a copy of each of the mode cards. They are able to assume one of these modes during the organization phase if located at a Darkhaven. If they want to switch into another mode, they must first travel back to a Darkhaven to do so. This rule change allows players to still get a sense of how the regular game is played, but the enjoyment of the game is upheld.

# Game Format

DARK ARDA is a MECCG game for 2 to 9 players! Each player is assigned the role of one of the nine rulers of mortal men who were corrupted by a ring gift from Sauron and are now his undead servants.

This version of the game consists of several decks: a Character Deck containing Minions and Minion Agent cards, a Marshalling Points Deck containing cards that give you victory points in this game, a Minor MP Deck lets you add an extra point or two while playing your larger victory point cards, a Ring Deck that represents all the various kinds of magic rings that can be tested, a Minor Item Deck, and finally a Play Deck, which includes Minion Resource cards, Hazard Event cards and Hazard Creature cards. A Minion Location Deck is also used when playing DARK ARDA.

**Resource Cards:** The majority of the minion resources will come from Middle Earth: The Lidless Eye; however, minion resource cards from sets like The White Hand and The Balrog may also be included. One notable series of cards that should not be included are the Ringwraith Unleashed cards. Some of the Unleashed cards are powerful, while others are useless in the Arda environment. Additionally, the odds of seeing a card you need are small, so the decision was made not to include them. A few abilities from the Unleashed cards can be allowed in the game for larger player counts, which will be explained later.

**Hazards:** The hazard creature cards may come from all sets, including Middle Earth: The Wizards and Middle Earth: The Dragons. The hazard strategies included in the Play Deck should be chosen to offer a varied gameplay to the players; consider including unique dragon cards, drakes, men, elves, dwarves, Maiar, spiders, and spawn. Most of the hazard event cards will come from ME: Lidless Eye or later. When constructing the Play Deck, it may be beneficial to avoid roadblock, as it tends to slow down the action. However, any decision regarding card inclusions is ultimately left to the Arda deck builder and the play group.

# Arda Deck Construction

As mentioned above, a complete Arda deck is composed of multiple distinct, specialized decks.

* **Play Deck:** All hazards and any non-MP resources (events).
* **Marshalling Points (MP) Deck:** Resources that potentially offer MP (items, allies, factions, certain events).
* **Minor MP Deck:** Items, factions, resource events and allies that are only worth a point each. These are in their own deck so they don’t clutter up your hand and they can also make the game move more quickly.
* **Character Deck:** A single copy of all unique Minion characters, and up to three copies of all non-unique Minion characters.
* **Minor Item Deck:** A selection of minor items, containing up to three of each non-unique minor item and one of each unique minor item. This should also include permanent events that can be played like minor items with starting companies, such as Whispers of Rings.
* **Ring Deck:** All “Special Item” rings (to replace tested Gold Ring Items); untested “Gold Ring Item” rings should be in the MP Deck instead. When an untested ring is tested, the testing player draws four cards from this deck and may choose to play a single ring from those four cards with a type matching the roll. Any unplayed Ring cards drawn are discarded.
* **Site Deck:** Each player should provide a site deck if possible, containing one each of the Minion sites (Under-deeps sites may be included if desired, but are not required). If each player does not have their own site deck, then one shared site deck may be used, with players individually keeping track of the sites they’ve visited and tapped.
* **Haven Deck:** Darkhavens for players to use as needed (at least nine of each is ideal).
* **Avatar Deck:** One copy of each of the nine Ringwraiths, and nine copies each of Heralded Lord, Black Rider, and Fell Rider.

For convenience, each deck can be sleeved in a different color. Each Ringwraith and trio of mode cards should be sleeved in a different color or pattern from the others for easy distinction (four copies each of nine colors/designs).

The Character deck, the Minor MP deck and Minor Item decks are used to provide a shared pool of cards for all players to draw and play from. To accomplish that, four cards from each deck are placed face up in the center of the table for anyone to use, maintaining a left-to-right ordering to indicate the newest and oldest cards drawn. When a card is played from one of these pools, the cards to the left of it slide down to fill the gap. When the pool is replenished from the deck, cards are added one by one from the rightmost empty space to the leftmost until there are four cards in the pool again.

The Play Deck, MP Deck, and Ring Deck remain in single face down piles, with cards being drawn from the tops of each when needed. The Site and Haven decks can be face up, and may be searched as needed. The Avatar deck is used primarily during game setup, but unused Ringwraiths in the deck may be played as followers over the course of the game as well.

# Game Setup

DARK ARDA is begun in a slightly different order than other Arda games.

1. **Select Ringwraiths**

All players roll dice to determine who is first to select the Ringwraith he or she is playing. Players should sit at the table in order of lowest roll to highest roll going clockwise. Once all the players are seated, the person that rolled the highest will select his Ringwraith first. Proceed counterclockwise so that the person who rolled lowest selects last. Once each player has had an opportunity to select their Ringwraith, the Ringwraiths with printed abilities to have Ringwraith followers get to make their selection. The Witch King makes his pick first, followed by Khamul. and then back to the Witch King, if there are still selections available. If Uvatha is still available, any other player may claim him as a Ringwraith follower. Any remaining Ringwraiths are set aside in the event they can be played later in the game as followers.

1. **Distribute the Draft and Build Starting Companies**

Sort the Character Draft deck into three piles: the first containing Minion or Minion Agents with 7 Mind or greater; the second containing Minion or Minion Agents with 6 Mind; and the last pile containing all the remaining cards.

Each player is dealt one card from the first (7+ Mind) pile (there are a total of nine in the game). If there are four or fewer players, each player can be given two of these characters instead. Each player is given two cards from the second (6 Mind) pile (three if there are four or fewer players). The remaining cards from the first two piles are then shuffled into the last pile, and cards are dealt to each player until everyone has twelve characters total. Each player then forms their starting companies from their individual character pools, respecting the normal Minion starting company limitations of six characters and 20 total Mind.

1. **Draft Minor Items**

Once the draft pool is distributed, the player that selected his or her Ringwraith avatar last is designated the first player. That person will get first choice at selecting cards from the Minor Item deck and will be moving first. If you are playing with a group of 5 to 7 players, two players will be going first simultaneously. If there are 8 to 9 players, thee player simultaneously move first. This is explained in the original ARDA rules.

The first player is given first chance to pick all starting items/events for his company (or companies) from the Minor Item Deck. Selection continues in clockwise order until all players have made picks from what is available. All unselected minor items and permanent events are then shuffled into the Minor Item deck.

Draw four minor item cards from the Minor Item Deck and place them face up in a row on the table. Any player may play a card from this pool (as though from their hand) any time they could play a minor item.

1. **Verify Starting Parties:** All starting parties should be checked before the game begins to make sure they are legal. Players who make a mistake in drafting must adjust their starting companies using their draft pool cards.

Some Lidless Eye rules restricting racial traits in starting companies are in effect; that is, unless at a Darkhaven, Trolls and Orcs cannot be in the same company as an Elf, Dwarf or Dunadan character. However, the Lidless Eye restriction on starting with Minion Agents is NOT used in DARK ARDA. Minion Agents at the start of the game are played just as if they are Minions, and they do not have to start at their home site or by way of a special card when they are included in a starting company. The standard Minion Agent rules too greatly limit the playability of a large number of characters in the character pool, and therefore are not used in this variant.

Other restrictions on company composition in the Lidless Eye rules are in effect. This means an Orc and a Troll character with the Leader trait cannot be together in a company without using Orders from Lugburz on the Orc.

1. **Create the Character Deck**

Once all starting parties have been verified as valid, all undrafted character cards (ones that were dealt out but not included in starting companies) are shuffled together and placed in a Character Deck. Draw four character cards from the Character Deck and place them face up in a row on the table. As with minor items, any player may play a card from this pool of cards (as though from their hand), but not until every player has completed a resource turn.

1. **Draw Starting Hands**

DARK ARDA is played with each player controlling two hands, each made up of different types of cards. The first hand contains eight cards from the Play Deck and is called your Play Hand. If you are playing a Ringwraith who selected Ringwraith followers in Step 1, draw one fewer card in your Player Hand for each Ringwraith follower you selected.

The other hand contains cards from the Marshalling Point Deck. It is called your Treasure Hand or MP Hand. Each player draws 9 treasure cards and you may keep up to 5 of them. If you selected Whispers of Rings instead of a minor item in Step 3, you can draw from the Ring Deck instead of the Marshalling Point Deck to create your opening Treasure Hand. (See the special rules below for Ringwraith follower and Whispers of Rings.)

1. **Set up Ring Deck and Minor MP Deck**

These decks are placed around the central area. The minor MP Deck begins with the top 4 cards turned face-up, any player can play any of the face up cards that they can during their site phase (many on a site that is already tapped!) and claim the points. The cards in the ring deck do not begin the game face up. When a ring is tested and the dice are rolled, the top 4 cards are flipped over. The tester of the ring can claim any one of the rings that was revealed by the test.

Everyone is now ready to begin playing!

# Special Rules During Play

**Unused General Influence Rule**

The Council of Elrond has a rule that says Minion Players have 25 general influence at the start of the game. Five of that general influence can never be used to control any characters, but the other 20 influence is. This rule remains in effect while playing DARK ARDA. Don’t forget the 5 unused general influence when calculating results of hazard cards like Muster Disperses.

**Simultaneous Turns Rule**

For information on how to run the game with two or three active players simultaneously, see pages 5 and 6 of the regular ARDA rules.

**Permanently in Play Cards**

At the beginning of the game, two Minion Resource cards are considered in play for the whole game. They are Tokens To Show (from ME: Against the Shadow) and Prone to Violence (from ME: The Balrog). Tokens To Show means that MP items can be stored at a Dark Haven on the turn the company arrived there instead of waiting for the Organization Phase of the next turn. Prone To Violence means that any non-Ringwraith minion company may attack any other non-Ringwraith minion company. Ringwraith do not engage in Company vs. Company Combat (CvCC) at all in Dark Arda.

**Ringwraith Mode Rule**

Unless a Ringwraith is traveling between two Darkhavens or is returning to the Darkhaven printed on a site card (i.e., starter movement), the Ringwraith must be in one of three modes in order to travel. Fell Rider mode is overt. Heralded Lord and Black Rider are both covert.

There is no regional movement for the Ringwraiths themselves. In order to travel to a non-Darkhaven site, the Ringwraith must start at the nearest Darkhaven listed on the location’s card. Ringwraiths are the most difficult characters to move around the board.

However, each player receives a copy of each of the three mode cards which can be played and reused throughout the game. Changing into a mode is done during the Organization Phase and requires being at a Darkhaven.

**Minion Agent Rule**

Minion Agent cards are played as if they were Minion cards or characters in DARK ARDA. They can be part of any starting company without the use of a special card. They can be brought into play at Darkhavens. These are all exceptions to printed Lidless Eye rules, in order to increase the character card pool and to make Agent cards more fun to play.

Agent Minion cards can never played as hazard agents.

**Whispers of Rings and the Ring Deck**

In DARK ARDA, rings are very important things. They should also be very fun things to chase after. For these reasons, the minion resource card Whispers of Rings should be included in the Minor Item Deck.

Whispers of Rings is a permanent event available instead of minor item at the beginning of the game that allows the player who chooses it to play up to two ring items underneath it. During the setup of the game, players who select Whispers of Rings instead of a minor item may draw 2 cards from the Ring Deck and 3 cards from the Marshalling Point Deck (instead of the normal 5 cards from the Marshalling Point Deck) to form their Treasure Hand. Both of those drawn ring cards may immediately be played under the Whispers of Rings card on the first turn. However, this player does not refill his Marshalling Points hand as normal until the end of his or her first turn as an active player.

**The Ring Deck**

During the normal course of play, players will acquire rings from the Marshalling Points Deck that they will wish to test. Once a player tests a ring, that player makes a roll, then turns over the top four cards of the Ring Deck. He or she may exchange the tested ring for any one of the revealed cards that matches the roll. If the testing player also has a Whisper of Rings card in play, he can check those saved rings for a match as well. If there are no matches, the tested ring is discarded. After resolving a ring test, the cards from the Ring Deck which were not selected are discarded. If the Ring Deck runs out of cards, all of the discarded cards are immediately reshuffled to create a new Ring Deck.

The unselected cards under a Whispers of Rings card are not discarded. They remain there unless brought into play. They can be replaced by new ring cards after one is brought into play.

**Resource Events in the Minor Item Deck**

There are two Minion resource events that are part of the Minor Item Deck: Whispers of Rings and Orders from Lugburz. These two events can be taken instead of a minor item at the beginning of the game. They can also be claimed instead of a minor item when they are revealed from the Minor Item Deck.

Whispers of Rings claimed as a minor item (by tapping a character at a site where a minor item is playable) is immediately put into play unattached to a character. The player can then choose to draw from the Ring Deck when they would normally draw from the Marshalling Points Deck and place the ring or rings drawn under the Whisper card. That player does not refill his or her Treasure Hand to five cards until after his or her next turn.

Orders from Lugburz claimed as a minor item is immediately put into play unattached to a character. The player may immediately use it to get around the leader restriction to a company (using We Have Come to Kill to play a second Orc leader into a company), or the player may draft a character during their next turn ignoring the leader restriction.

**Drop and Draw Rule**

At the end of each players turn, each player can drop one card FROM EACH of his hands (i.e. both a resource/hazard card AND a treasure card. This card cycling will help increase the number of cards you see in a game and also assists more complicated resource or hazard strategies.

**Sudden Call Rule**

Finally, each player is considered to have a copy of Sudden Call in their hand. This card remains in everyone’s hand until one player uses it to start the last turn.

Put another way, the card Sudden Call is no longer required to call the Audience with Sauron.

# Winning the Game

There are three ways to win an Arda game.

* All Ringwraiths but your own are eliminated.
* You move The One Ring to Barad-dur.
* The Audience with Sauron is called and you have the most Marshalling Points.

The Audience with Sauron is never called automatically, as it is unlikely that the Play Deck will be exhausted over the course of the game. (If any deck IS exhausted, simply shuffle its discard pile and place the shuffled pile face down to form a new deck to draw from.) Instead, any player with 25 or more MP may call the Audience with Sauron. Every other player gets one final turn, and then each player’s MP are totaled as per the standard rules (including double MP for sources that no other player has, and restricting any one source to providing no more than half the player’s total MP). Once the totals are counted, whichever player has the highest amount of MP wins the game.

# Cards that Should Not Be Included

* Sudden Call, as justified in the “Special Rules During Play” section.
* Any <Ringwraith Name> Unleashed card, as justified in the “Game Format” section.
* Any card that whose sole purpose is to search and draw/play another card from the deck or sideboard.
* Any card with the Hero, Fallen-Wizard/Stage, or Balrog alignment.
* Any event that requires an Agent.
* Any card that references or modifies company vs. company combat (as such combat can only occur between companies of differing alignments, and all companies in this variant are Minion companies).
* Any card that allows the player to play as Sauron or interacts with a Sauron player, such as:
  + The Lidless Eye
  + Sauron
  + Eye Never Sleeping
  + Powers Too Dark and Terrible
  + The Dark Power
  + The Great Eye
* The following cards listed in the Lidless Eye rulebook, due to having no effect on or being too powerful against Ringwraith companies:
  + Bane of the Ithil-stone
  + Foul Fumes
  + Mûmak
  + The Nazgûl are Abroad
  + Worn and Famished
  + The Black Enemy’s Wrath
  + In the Heart of His Realm
  + Mordor in Arms

# Cards That Are Discouraged From Being Included

* Any Nazgul hazard, since they are all manifestations of cards that are likely always in play, and therefore would see very limited use.
* The following cards listed in the Lidless Eye rulebook, due to representing too much intentional action by Sauron against his own agents, or to being too closely tied thematically to heroes rather than minions:
  + Eye of Sauron
  + Morgul-knife
  + The Pale Sword
  + Rogrog
  + Black Breath
  + Gothmog
  + Many Sorrows Befall
  + Aware of Their Ways
  + Eyes of the Shadow
  + In Great Wrath
  + Long Dark Reach
  + Out of the Black Sky
  + Revealed to All Watchers
  + Wraith-lord

Recommendations for Casual Play: These are suggestions on how to level the playing field depending on the number of players you have in the game.

Two Players Recommendation: When there are only two people playing, one avatar should be the Witch King and the other avatar should be Khamul. Khamul should be allowed to claim Uvatha and one other Ringwraith follower. This way both players starts the game with three Ringwraiths in play.

Three Player Recommendation: When there are three players, one person’s avatar should be the Witch King, a second should be Khamul with a Ringwraith follower and the third player should automatically get any Ringwraith of choice AND also get Uvatha as a follower. In this way, all three players begin play with their avatar having Ringwraith followers in play (a total of seven).

Four Player Recommendation: When there are four players, nobody gets to choose the Witch King or Khamul as their avatar and Uvatha also loses his ability to join a player automatically. Ringwraith followers can only be played by drawing and playing cards from the Main Deck that allow it to happen (They Ride Together).

Five Player Recommendation: Same as four players or you can mix it up!

Six Player Recommendation: This is the perfect sized game for everyone to get their maximum benefits. Witch King and Khamul get followers and each other player get a Ring Wraith avatar with a printed power.

Seven Player Recommendation: Witch King avatar receives Khamul and Uvatha as his followers.

Eight Player Recommendation: Witch King gets Uvatha or Khamul as his only follower. The player that chooses to play either Khamul or Uvatha as a Ringwraith avatar also gains the ability on the card Khamul Unleashed or Uvatha Unleashed as though it was printed on the Ringwraith card.

Nine Player Recommendation: If there are Nine Players, the Which King player, the Khamul player, and the Uvatha player, all gain the ability printed on their respective Unleashed cards.