

WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



GAMESYSTEMS
INC.

PO BOX 160129 Miami, FL 33116-0129

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WEST

11/93



WORDS FROM THE WOODS

Happy Birthday to us! Happy Birthday to us! Yes, it's here again. April 1st marks the beginning of our 12th year bringing you the biggest and the best in play-by-mail gaming. This year has really brought out the biggest and the best. ME-PBM is just rocketing across the country. More and more players are registering and more and more happy players are signing up for additional games. Moreover, we are extremely close to completing arrangements to offer ME-PBM to our fellow gamers in Europe! So, what are you waiting for? Join the fun!

For you new players in ME-PBM, please note that there have been excellent strategy articles which have appeared in WHISPERS and these back issues are still available. There have been strategy articles in issues for 8/91, 10/91, 11/91, 12/91, 1/92, and 2/92. Just let us know which ones you want!

One of the first ME-PBM grudge games is about to start. This is almost completely full of compuserve players who have come up with two teams of ten each and intend to battle to the death. GSI is providing five important neutrals to round out the game and the game promises a lot of excitement for all involved. If any of you have friends who would like to play in a grudge match and can field a team of ten players, please let us know and we will match you against other teams who would like to play. One of you play the Free Peoples and the other would play the Dark Servants. If you wish you can also divide up the neutrals between you. Oh, and by the way, help us to help you. Give us your four digit zip code extension so that we can help the post office in getting your mail to you just as soon as possible.

Another important event has transpired during the last few days. Spring has sprung! This may not mean much to some of you, but those positions who are playing in the northern regions of ME-PBM are shouting for joy. Now the production increases, and the hordes can come out to play! And thanks to those players who have begun sending in their own unique character sketches. We have scanned them, added them to your character portraits, and I hope you enjoy them! If you want your own character sketch added for one of your characters, just send it to us. There is a \$6.50 charge per each sketch for this service.

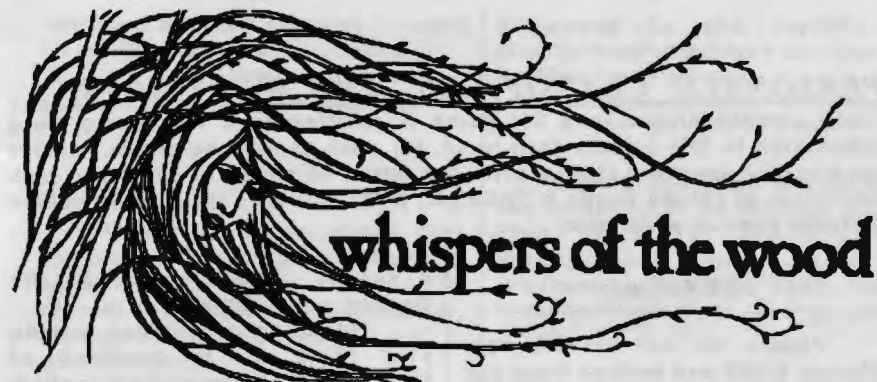
Three final notes regarding ME-PBM. We are still starting 3 week games, although these are tending to start a little slower than the regular 2 week games. If you need a little extra time, consider joining one of these games. If you are waiting for a 3 week game to start, get some of your friends to start with you. The game will start that much sooner! As you know, we have now been able to offer fax service for those players who wish to fax in their turns. Although there is a \$3.00 charge for this service, it is much cheaper, must faster, and much more efficient than using overnight mail. It also tends to reduce mistakes over phoning in the turn. And finally, if any of you experienced any ME-PBM players who would like to be put into position to take over a stand-by position in an existing game, please let us know. You cannot choose the game, but you will be notified when a stand-by position becomes available.

Finally, if any of you took MCI up on their Friends and Family offer, please let us know how it is working!

Good Gaming,



PETE STASSUN



ALONG THE PATHWAYS

Words From the Wood	Inside Cover
EDITOR'S COLUMN	
Personals	1
Communications.	
ME-PBM	6
Between the Hammer and the Anvil.	
Fantasy	10
The Last of the Dragon Slayers (Part 2).	
ME-PBM	13
Land Ahoy.	
ME-PBM	14
Thranduil.	
Half Of Heroes	15
The Victors.	
Half Of Heroes	16
The Victors.	

WHISPERS OF THE WOOD is a monthly publication primarily for the use and enjoyment of GSI players of EARTHWOOD, EARTHWOOD - THE SEA KINGS, STATE OF WAR, AND ME-PBM™. Subscription rates: \$15.00 for one year (12 issues) or \$25.00 for two years (24 issues). Individual issues cost \$1.75. GSI reserves the right to change these prices without prior notice of any type. Back issues are available.

Credits

Editor.....Harold Ford
Staff.....Richard Figueroa, Judith Heath, Michelle Heath & Georgette McIntosh
Publishers.....Pete Stassun & Bill Feild Jr

This Month's Cover: "Strafing Fire"
by Guy Gondron

Volume IX Issue * 1
Published by GAME SYSTEMS INC
APRIL 1, 1992
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PERSONALS, CLASSIFIEDS, AND WHAT-NOTS. . .

Every current player in a GSI game is entitled to a free forty word submission to this column each issue, for each game they are in. Further submissions require a charge after the initial 40 words of \$2.00 per each additional 40 (41-80 words is \$2.00 etc.). GSI reserves the right to refuse material deemed unsuitable.

GENERAL

Please do not let ME-PBM become bland and boring! Keep our personals section interesting! Three dozen nearly identical "Oh, mighty me" messages signed by a legion of faceless Witch-King's and Uvatha's is POINTLESS!

Last issue marks my seventh year using the Psycho-Pirate alias in Whispers. I am not the intruder here. With all modesty I can say that I am the reigning King of the personals section. I helped DEFINE the tone of these games! Begone naysayer.

Psycho-Pirate

Well said Naugrim! Let us keep the flavor of Middle-earth true. "Baaltroc", "Psycho-pirate", "King Benjamin" play your other games. Do a little research and read the books and you may yet understand what Middle-earth is?

Bain

Middle-earth™ PBM

GAME 3

Dunland has thrown off the yoke of darkness and now worships freedom. Free Peoples rejoice, Dark servants tremble and Neutrals decide as the Mighty Dunlendings forge a new world!

Warlord Enion

P.S. You asked for it, you got it.

A recent conversation in the flaming ruins of Dilgul:

"Well, Hargrog, does Uvatha still think he is Overlord of Rhovanion?" The messenger replied, "No sir, Lord Thelor, sir." Thelor laughed, "That's good to hear."

Baaltroc

Let our words be heard the length and breath of Middle Earth! We the Haradwaith choose. No longer will we smile when those of "noble lineage" pretend to tell us our place. For Sauron

Lord Haruth Ramam

GAME 4

With half the Free people and the Dunlendings attacking me and still the Witch-king is undaunted. Now the real power of the Dark Lord will be seen, and the lying Dunlendings will see it first!!

Witch-king

Let all of the Free Peoples celebrate. Khamul, the Dragon Lord, has gone to meet his maker..... and he won't be back.

Beoraborn

GAME 6

Mûrazôr,

Your message was loud and clear. We may be a small nation (and Neutral), but Dunedain blood still runs in our veins. Beware all

enemies! Rhudaur marches to war! All intelligence data is welcome.

Prince Arfanhil of
proud Rhudaur

Free Peoples,

It has been proclaimed that the Woodmen have done nothing to aid in the fight against evil. So be it. We will do nothing to help. N Gondor, S Gondor, Dwarves, fare you well in your struggle.

Beoraborn

GAME 11

The Sinda have broken the bonds of reality and found a new allegiance. Anyone wishing to join the "Pseudo-Free-Peoples" contact us!

Nimrodel & Tharudan
of the Sinder

The Sinda Elves are cowards! They hide in their hidden cities and cover their eyes and ears to the dangers of the world. Traitorous dog! Our pact is over!

Long Rider

GAME 12

News Flash:

After crushing Regent Argirion's army at Kul Dinbar, the Cloud Lord's troops returned home victorious only to discover that their home was nothing but a pile of ashes.

The Dol Amroth Tribune

GAME 13

Barad-Dur has fallen! Light Disperses the Darkness. So much for those West-Point so called Tacticians. You'll probably flunk the academy as well! And what

happened to the threats as Mueller's Mauraunders? Has Ren the Unclean taken a bath?

Lonely Arthedain armies seek the company of an interior Witch-king army for practice and amusement. May lead to destruction. R.S.V.P. 1005. "New Numenor" Like Pets. ie Mûrazôr or Dancu.

We bid farewell to Prince Celdrahil. Like King Argeleb II, Bain I, the Eothraim, Haradwaith and Northmen, he resisted Sauron. For that he is dead. Resistance is useless.

The Dark Servants

GAME 14

A warning-Dark Servant assassins are very effective. Guard your army commanders well.

The Ghost Of Rn
Assassinated Easterling

Numenoreans and their kin have been lording over 'ordinary' men for far too long. The Dunlendings will no longer stand for this. Cardolan is first, but other Numenorean successor states beware-You're next.

Lord Enion
Ruler of the Dun Lands

GAME 17

The Witch-king has kindly donated the morgul plate, vasamail, elfbane. Bids are welcome.

Lord Halles

The North is now virtually free of the inept legions of Sauron. Mordor must remember that while they struggle we build unchallenged. Haradwaith and the Corsairs, your feeble attacks and defeats will be forgiven if you turn Good now!

Bain I

GAME 18

Amroth,

Your dishonor cost you the Dunlendings, Corsairs and the Woodmen as true allies. Awaken from your slumber, Free Peoples! Trust not the Sinda and their puppets, the Dwarves and Eothraim!

Er-Mûrazôr of proud Angmar
#1 Kentucky Nazgûl

GAME 19

Mûrazôr,

I tire of the waiting. Prepare to die.

Elrond,

Arthedain is honored to fight alongside your noble troops. May your sword never dull and may Mûrazôr suffer from an acute case of decapitation.

Marl Tarma
Minister of Defense

Looks like Hoarmurath is dead. Maybe this has sobered you up Ji Indur? The scale has tipped to one's favor, but whose?

Zarendarger for (22)

GAME 21

Ouatha II

Do not ask for too much. I have explained my actions to you, and provided a promise. I have no quarrel with your nation, so do not

make it more than it is.

King Amroth of proud Sinda

GAME 22

Cardolan soon falls! His brother soon to follow. Goblin Gate lowers its flag as well. The Noldo wives weep for their fallen men. Who will be the next to fall before the might of Rhudaur.

Melkor
Lord of Rhudaur

GAME 23

Followers of Evil,

The Eothraim spit on your armies, make jokes about your manhood, and would sleep with your women if they didn't all look like dogs. Prepare to meet your doom.

Gisulf
Chief of Buhr Waldlaes

Free People:

Hear my call. Mordor has struck the first blow! Do not yield ground; instead standfast, make them pay dearly for the spoil upon which they tread. Let their blood flow freely!!!

Raven, Guardian of
the Free People

Hail Free Peoples!

We have endured attacks from the Dark Servants long enough. Let us now launch an offensive the Dark Servants will loathe to remember. The Dragon Lord will be their first casualty; so says Thranduil of the Sindar.

Nazgûl, The Witch-king we're waiting.

The Khazad

GAME 24

Free Peoples,

Though the foemen be many, and enemies as the sand near the sea, Light is stronger than Darkness, Victorious yet we shall be. --Axe work for orc necks! Let's step to the task! Die well Dark Servants.

Ironboot

GAME 25

Death to Sauron and all those who follow the Lidless Eyes. Free Peoples and neutrals unite to destroy all of the Dark Servants. Sauron has armies at his towns at 3120 and 3221.

King Benjamin

Why haven't I heard from you out there? Could you be too busy to write to me? Good Job Woodmen! One down 8 to go! How many orcs can fill a wall closet? Find out in the next issue of Whispers of the Wood!

Sinda Elves

"King Benjamin hails all the Free Peoples and Neutrals. Death to all the Dark Servants and Followers of Sauron. Many of Sauron's forces will die soon. The Free People are uniting under one banner for the total destruction of Sauron!"

GAME 26

The Dark Lieutenants answer The Witch King's call of unity and we too call on all Dark Servants to work as one

Gothmog and Urzahil

It might be winter but I

believe it will be getting rather hot for the Free Peoples. Who gets hit first? We won't say, they'll be begging for help shortly, but it will arrive too late.

Anonymous

Easterlings!

The Free Peoples of Rhovanion will brook no expansion in these lands. Keep your towns.

Peoples of Rhovanion!

Friendship we offer to all folk that are Free or that would be Free. To others toleration and peace.

Northmen

A harrowing cry is heard over Arda. Brave men tremble and women cry in terror as Mûrazôr lets loose his call to gather the followers of Sauron. From across Arda the riders gather and plan with Sauron's Lieutenants the destruction of the Free Peoples know fear as one by one they are destroyed and their lands absorbed into our new order.

GAME 27

Hey peoples-listen to my sister Bronwyn. She's smart, an' she knows what she's talkin' about... If you don't listen to her you may have to listen to me-an' that ain't smart! See you 'round, maybe?

Fiona Quickblade

To all the realms be it proclaimed-the lands of Enedwaith are the sole province of the Clans of Dunland. Send your armies there and

risk war; leave us alone and know peace!

Bronwyn the Wise,
Speaker for the Clans

Hey Evil Clique,

Greetings! How come you all are servants? Don't worry we are aiming to abolish slavery and make everyone free. Of course this does require your elimination.

El and the Vaders

STATE OF WAR

GAME 77

News Flash:

The armies of Wisconsin and New Mexico clashed in bloody battle at Springfield, Illinois. Zhukor's First Army of Wisconsin is reported to be the victor and total casualties are estimated at 700,000.

P Luskin

New York:

The more temporary your solution, the more permanent your problem. You are a liar and a trickster. Good luck in your next life. Where is Bruce?

Gov. Of Massachusetts

GAME 78

To the Wanna-be of Wyoming,

Haven't got it together yet? I bet you're confused now. After I finish you off I'll let you know how it happened.

P.S. To all you ME-PBM snobs, get a grip & a life!!!!

Montana Max
Directorate of the Montanas

EARTHWOOD - ORIGINAL

GAME 226

Days of honor, nights of death! Beware of he who strikes from above!!! P.S. I long for a good old fashioned Earthwood death struggle.

Raven

Goodbye Cruel World.

T. Gray

GAME 227

"Band Together! Destroy the circle of blood alliance! Act quickly or they will win the game! They are player #2, #9, #14, #22."

J Lai

Well it's turn 16 and only 13 players left. 2 more expected to be out by turn 18. What a game!

Mike Freed

alias Char Ravenswing #9 Lord of the South Circle of Blood Alliance

GAME 228

Only time is the barrier for your death. High Elves, my axe will taste your blood.

Thorin Skullcrusher

Tales of Middle-earth PBM...

Between the Hammer and the Anvil

by Thomas Lemont

Winter had arrived early in the northern tier, and almost all activity had been reduced to a minimum. The ground was covered in a thick blanket of snow, and it shone with a pale light, as the moon tried to force its way through a dense ceiling of dark, wafting clouds. Slowly the mountainside became more visible, as the moon proved its dominance, portraying a landscape of bleak flatlands and towering peaks, all thrown together as if it was here the Valar had discarded all their unused ideas when they had first shaped the world.

Atop a plateau rested a lonely fortress, formed from living rock; this was the Dwarven stronghold of Zarak-dum. Long had Zarak-dum endured the ravages of the polar climes, but nevertheless its people continued to prosper and grow in their power. They loved the mountains dearly, living in areas that others would find intolerable. Intended by Aüle power of Melkor, they were short, stocky, strong, invulnerable to flames, and the hardest of all races.

A scouting party had recently returned with important news from the south; the Wraith-king of Angmar had usurped much of the lowlands of the Ettenmoors, pitching small camps within their territories. This grieved the Dwarves, for they knew that many of their kinsmen must have been driven from their homestead, to make way for the foul orc hordes of Carn Dum and Mount Gram.

Many months earlier the great forces of Zarak-dum had produced large quantities of liquid metal, fashioned by master smiths

and craftsmen, into scores of arms and armor: magnificent suits of plate and mail, war helmets, great two headed axes, crossbow points, sturdy shields, large shields and hammers, and mighty pickaxes and mattocks. Present fortifications were drilled regularly; watches were also instituted.

On this particular evening, an ambassador with small retinue, had arrived at the gates to the city. He requested a meeting with the nobles of the palace.

"Show us the seal of Durin, if you are who you claim to be, and be quick about it, before my crossbowmen fill you with iron," called a stout warrior from atop the outer battlements.

"And who may you be, guardsman?" asked Hagal, slowly reaching for the pouch on his belt. "I'd like the pleasure of your name, once I have audience with your master." He then displayed an iron medallion to the watchers' view. The gates did not open, but rather a small door was brought to Hagal's attention. The door was cleverly designed into the outer wall, and now it was pushed open by two large Dwarves in gray mail coats.

"This way, sir," said one of the Dwarves. "Our orders are to provide you with escort."

With a warrior in front and behind, Hagal and his retinue were ushered down a long, winding hall, until they came to another door; this one being more visible, but banded with thick straps of iron; Everything about the fortress was impressively powerful.

One of the guardsmen opened the door, and the group proceeded

forward, into a large, well-lit chamber.

"Greetings Hagal, ambassador of Khazad-dum," called a Dwarf seated upon a great iron throne. Motioning to the guards, the Lord said, "You may go now, kinsmen."

The Dwarven soldiers bowed, turned, and left the room.

"Hall, mighty Dain. I bring news that you had deemed to hear for lo these many weeks."

"Well, come then, and tell me what you have to say."

Hagal reached into his overcoat and produced a folded document. Handing it to Dain he replied, "All that I need to tell you, my lord, is written in the King's own hand."

Dain took the parchment from Hagal, unfolding it quickly. With his eyes quickly roving over the paper, he murmured, "Yes-yes, yes. This is the news I had expected, but I first had to obtain the Kings orders before I acted rashly. The time is now, to go on the march." Dain turned to one of his retainers, "Go assemble the officers within the Great Hall." The retainer turned upon his heel and left the room.

"My lord," said Hagal, "There was a guardsman from the outer battlements, who would not let me enter Zarak-dum upon my arrival. He insisted that I produce the seal of Durin as proof that my claims were true, as if my raiment was not enough."

"Who was this impudent soldier?" requested Dain, turning back to Hagal.

"He called himself, 'Mazarbul', lord, and I wish to congratulate you on the discipline and awareness of your garrison; he did an excellent job."

Both Dwarves had a hearty laugh, then Hagal left for the journey back to Khazad-dum, while Dain made his way to the

Great Hall. When he arrived, most of the officers were already present, and the benches were soon filled. The noise of much murmuring and muttering amongst the warriors soon quieted as Dain stepped atop the dais at the forefront of the Hall.

"My friends and officers of the garrison, I have called you here today to relay news that we have been anxiously awaiting, for some time now. As you are all aware, Mûrazôr's filth, from out of Angmar, has come forth as rats from a cesspool, to infiltrate our lands south. You know, too, that we had foreseen such an occurrence, and thusly prepared our forces to meet the threat face-to-face. However, we had to first receive word from the capital of our respected King, that this was his intention as well. My friends, we have indeed received that word." A boisterous cheer went up from the assembly.

"Now my friends there is no time to waste. For the longer these new camps exist, the stronger their lord becomes. That is why I have decided to put the garrison on the offensive. At first light, we march on the camp of Rauda, and crush it under the hammers of our warriors. The others shall soon follow."

A tall dwarf, nearly the size of a man, spoke up, "My lord, there is also news that several armies of Mûrazôr, led by Dancu, Durkarian, and Cykur, are moving to protect their new establishments. What must we do if they seek to intercept our movements?"

"Must you ask?" interjected another, seated a few yards away, brandishing a large iron mallet. "We will crush them as well!" And he crashed the hammer upon the floor of the hall. Another cheer resounded within the chamber.

Dain raised his hands to quiet the crowd. "Yes, it is true that those foul leaders will seek to protect their new claims, but we have the advantage of morale, brothers. Our troops are well trained, very well equipped, and well led. It may go hard for us, but we shall show them that one Dwarven warrior is worth at least four Orcish ruffians."

The following morning, the soldiery assembled in the outer courtyard of the palace. Weapons and armor glistened in the last light of the polar moon, and all warriors stood in steadfast attention. Officers made their last routine checks of all baggage train items, supplies, and forces, then dispersed to their respective units.

Dain rode to the front of the massed formations, astride a huge polar bear, covered with matted layers of chainmail. His armor was of burnished steel, his helm of polished gold. A stout warhammer was clutched in his hand, and a large, circular shield was strapped about his left arm.

"O mighty Khazad," Dain addressed the crowd, "the time has come for us to glorify the name of our ancestors. We must call on the great name of Durin, and upon our creator, lord Aüle, for the victory that must be ours." And with a great rattling of weapons upon shields, the procession advanced.

The camp Rauda fell quickly the next day with little casualties to the Dwarven armies. Continuing his press, at the word from Khazad-dum, Dain and his dwarven forces, in concert with Rhudaurlian armies, intended to smash the bastion of Mt Gram, weakening the foothold of the Witch-king within the region.

The generals then gathered in a hastily constructed command tent, and voiced their concerns to

one another about the fight which lay before them.

We cannot stop with the destruction of only a few small camps," said Lord Turchan of Rhudaurl. "My men thirst for battle, and their thirst must be quenched by human or orcish blood!"

Patience, Turchan," replied Regent Arfanhil, King of Rhudaurl. "The time will come when we shall indeed face the Wraith on his own ground, and we must respect, if not fear, the power which he wields."

Turchan, frustrated, tapped the fingers of a gauntlet-covered hand upon the table. "When do we move?"

"My friends," said Dain, his arms wide, the matter is quite simple. Reports indicate that Mûrazôr has fallen upon financial difficulty, and cannot maintain his armies much longer. Mt Gram is apparently held by only a small garrison, which should be easily overcome, with only minimal losses for our own side. And, because of our catapults, mangonels, ballistae, scorpions, and other machines of war, the fortifications themselves should prove to be no problem."

"How many machines did you bring with you again?" inquired Arfanhil.

We have nearly a score," replied one of the Dwarven captains, "while Cardolan forces, now on the move northward, bring up almost as many; however, we cannot wait for them to arrive, lest we lose the advantage of destroying the isolated garrison of Mt Gram while the Witch-king may still bring about an army to bear. We must act now."

"The Dwarf, it seems, speaks true," said Turchan. "If we are to crush the servants of the Black Lord we have no time to waste in idle chatter."

Slightly perturbed by the humans remark, Dain scowled, then replied, "Then it is settled, longshanks. At dusk we shall move against Mt Gram."

The evening sky was overcast, the air biting cold, and light winds whipped the snow about the troops, causing them to look like frozen statues. His war machines were dragged by teams of men and polar bears, atop large, wooden sledges, forming the bulk of his massive baggage train. Dain rode to the front of his Dwarven formations, barking orders above the wind, then moved to the front of his army. Arfanhil, sitting atop a heavily blanketed warhorse, ushered his Rhudaorian forces forward, dividing the cavalry to the flanks and the shock troops to the center, and waving his broadsword above his head in a means of silent communication. Finally the vast assembly was prepared.

All could see the dark walls of Mt Gram in the distance, teaming with the militia gathered from its inhabitants; such an insignificant force to contend with the 5,000+ troops arrayed against them. This would indeed be a crippling blow to Mûrazôr and his aims to conquer the north, and Dain could not help but laugh, the steam of his breath circling about him as smoke from a forge.

With a great bellow, Dain ordered his engineers to launch their aerial assault. In response, a barrage of heavy stones and fiery pitch sailed high into the air overhead, lighting up the night sky and illuminating the masses about the parapets of the fortress. The cloak of fire and rock flowed like a burning wave above the fort, its wake of thundering destruction as ice-covered stone dashed both humans and orcs to pieces.

"Prepare the ground assault!" shouted Arfanhil, spurring his steed towards the forefront of the heavy cavalry units. The solid ranks of mailed horsemen bristled with spears and lances, and began their slow trot across the snow-covered plain which lay before the foothills of Mt Gram, building up momentum for the charge against the staked positions outside the gates.

Dwarven and Rhudaorian infantry columns quickly followed in their stead, bringing up ladders to breach the walls, as the barrage of aerial missals continued to pound the interior of the fortress like a hammer upon the anvil. Archers atop the walls rained down their own means of destruction upon the attackers, until they were blasted from their holes.

The charge struck the center of the forces assembled before the gate, as few riders were impaled upon the sharpened stakes, and soon the area was cleared. The ladders were raised against the walls and both man and dwarf clambered to the parapet, fighting those soldiers who remained within. At last the walls were breached. And with a tremendous rending of iron and rock, the gates were wrenched apart by battering rams.

The men within the fort continued to fight, but when their orcish counterparts lost heart and fled down their dark tunnels beneath the mountain, they had no choice but to surrender.

As small contingents of soldiers marched prisoners back to each other's respective capitals, the Dwarven and Rhudaorian armies salvaged what they could from the ruins of the broken fortress. Dain, Arfanhil, and a few officers were within one of the

few remaining buildings, a kitchen sitting at a small table.

"A great victory!" exclaimed Arfanhil, wiping his brow with a gloved hand.

"Yes quite correct," replied Dain. "The Witch-king will now fear as we knock upon the gates of his land." He removed two large steins from a nearby shelf, and filled them with ale. Presenting one to Arfanhil he said, "Now drink, friend. Whatever tomorrow holds, let us know that at this moment Dwarf and man have fought

together for a common goal. A historical time indeed, and I regret that my lord and king could not be here to savor this moment, as he has been campaigning further south. Yet, as I am here, and representing the Khazad, I do congratulate the warriors of Rhudaur, for they fought as the Dunedain of old and deserve credit as such. All hail the Khazad and Rhudaorian! May the Witch-king and all servants of evil fade in the spirit of their power!

The Last of the Dragon Slayers

Part Two
By Will Parker

"How much longer?" Kent whined, swatting at the cloud of gnats and mosquitoes that were encircled about his head.

"Not far now," Deston called, giving Kent a disgusted look.

The two skirted around a pool of quicksand, waded through a pool of scummy water, and scrambled over an old log. Kent squealed when a hairy spider scurried across his hand. Deston shot him another contemptuous look and continued to lead the way. They entered another pool and began to wade across.

"Something just slid past my leg," Kent said in a horrified voice.

"It's probably just a snake," Deston said.

"A SNAKE!!!" Kent screamed as he plunged forward to the opposite bank and crawled hastily out of the water, despite the weight of his armor. Deston laughed and Kent shot him an evil look. "Boy, I ought to cut your head off for taking me through this."

"Hey, mister, you were the one who wanted to fight the dragon, not me. Now shut up and follow me."

"You are a very impertinent young man. Your parents ought to be ashamed of your behavior."

"They are ashamed of it."

"Oh." The two continued in silence . . . for about ten feet. "How much longer?"

"Not long now," Deston snarled. "You've been saying that for the past hour."

"We've only been in the swamp for thirty minutes. Besides, we'd be there if you weren't so damn slow."

"Watch your mouth, young man."

"Yeah, yeah, that's what they all tell me."

"I'm sure they all do, but I'm going to do something about it." Kent lunged forward as if to catch hold of the young boy and administer a sound spanking, but Deston leaped nimbly out of the way.

"I don't think so, dragon-slayer," Deston said. "Besides, you don't want to hurt me. I might get the idea to leave you alone in this swamp, and we both know that without me, you don't stand a chance of finding your way out. And that's assuming Mandrig doesn't find you."

Kent nodded and mumbled, "It's Dragon-Slayer, not dragon-slayer."

"You say something?" Deston asked with a suspicious glance.

"No," Kent said, "I was just making a remark about the gnats."

"Oh, okay. Now, follow me."

The two plunged forward into the swamp. After several more minutes of slogging around in scummy water, Kent's hysterics over every little creep-crawly thing, and Deston's smart-alecky

comments, the two reached Mandrig's lair. They heard the dragon long before they saw him, and they smelled his breath long before they ever heard him.

"What is that stench?" Kent asked.

"Well," Deston said, "it's either you and your rusty armor or Mandrig's dragon breath. I'm not sure which is worse."

"Watch it, young man," Kent warned.

"Watch what?"

Kent growled.

The two eased forward quietly, so as not to awake the slumbering dragon. Kent was a strong believer in the old proverb that said, "Let sleeping dragons lie," and he did not want to have to go against such wise advice. At last the two came up to the small clearing that Mandrig called home.

It was not much of a lair, as far as dragon lairs go. There were no mounds of gold and precious jewels. There were no piles of charred bones from the dragon's previous kills. In fact, Mandrig's lair was nothing more than a small island of clear land with a couple of boulders on the side in case he felt the need to sharpen his claws.

It was from behind these boulders that Deston and Kent watched Mandrig. The dragon seemed perfectly oblivious to what was going on around him, and seemed perfectly content to stay that way. Kent stared in amazement at the size of the old dragon. Then, looking at the shredded stones that the two were hidden behind, he gulped. Deston gave him an evil look and chuckled. Kent turned a little white in the face.

"See, I told you so," Deston said.

"You sure did. Now let's get out of here."

"What?!"

"I said it was time to go."

"Go! We just got here, and besides, I thought you were going to kill him."

"Well, I would if I had the time, but I just remembered an important engagement in the neighboring kingdom. I have to go and slay an ogre or two. However, I'll probably be back this way in another decade or two, and I'll take care of your dragon then. Okay?" Kent turned and began to walk slowly—and very quietly—sneak away.

"MANDRIG!!!" Deston shouted. The dragon snorted and Kent jumped.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" Kent hissed.

"Why me?" Mandrig moaned, coming awake. "That's it. Move over Santa Claus, I'm moving to the North Pole."

"Hey, Mandrig," Deston shouted as he trotted toward the dragon, "look who I've brought. His name is Kentough Berrizinni Dragonbane and he's the world's greatest dragon-slayer. I guess you didn't kill them all, did you?"

"That's Dragon-Slayer," Kent said in a low voice so that only Deston could hear him, "and will you please shut-up." Kent smiled sickly at Mandrig.

"Oh," Mandrig said peering close. "He doesn't look like much of a dragon-slayer to me." With a sniff, he turned his head.

"That's Dragon-Slayer," Kent growled, "and I could too kill you, Sir Dragon."

"Really."

"Yeah, really."

"Go for it then."

"Huh?"

"I said, go for it. Try and kill me, Mr. dragon-slayer."

"Oh boy," Deston said clapping his hands together, "a fight." Both Mandrig and Kent shot him an evil glare.

"Well," Kent began, as he tugged nervously at his beard, "I could kill you, but since you could very well be the last one of your kind, I had better not. I think after I took out that flock of dragons in the Kallendore Mountains, your kind was placed on the endangered species list."

"I thought you said that you had never killed a dragon before," Deston said.

"Will you please shut-up?" Kent asked with a forced grin. "Are you trying to get me killed or something?"

"Well, now that you mention it . . ."

"Never mind."

"I'm waiting," Mandrig said as he flexed his muscles. Kent gulped. Deston laughed.

"Waiting for what?" Kent asked weakly.

"Waiting for you to kill me, of course. Or at least try and kill me."

"Well," Kent said, "as I was just telling Deston before he rudely woke you up, I have business elsewhere and really must be going. I'd really like to stay and fight you, but a commitment is a commitment."

"What business?"

"Well, you see. There's this ogre . . ."

". . . in the neighboring kingdom and you have to go fight it. Yeah, that's what the last one told me."

"What last one?"

"The last dragon-slayer that tried to kill me," Mandrig nodded his head toward a pile of bones by the boulders. Deston blinked and Kent looked as if he were about to cry. When Kent looked away, Deston watched the bones disappear into thin air. He knew they had not been there moments before. He looked at Mandrig and the dragon winked.

"Well," Kent said, "it's your life we're talking about here." And with that, Kent made a valiant attempt to draw his sword. The sword stuck. Kent gave a sick laugh. He drew his dagger. The tip was broken. Kent's laugh became sicker. Deston started to roll on the ground in hysterics. Mandrig just grinned and began to visibly salivate.

Kent looked hopelessly up at Mandrig and fell wearily to his knees. A single tear rolled forth from his left eye and he bowed his head and awaited the killing blow. Mandrig, his dragon grin reaching from ear to ear, lifted one clawed hand and prepared to deliver the coup-de-grace. Deston looked on horrified.

"Any last words, dragon-slayer?" Mandrig demanded in a booming voice.

"It's Dragon-Slayer," Kent corrected in a weary voice.

"What?"

"Never mind, just do the deed and get it over with."

"Deston," Mandrig said, "you might not want to watch this."

Deston looked on stunned. Mandrig was actually going to kill this poor defenseless and humble knight. He was shocked. He always thought that deep down inside, Mandrig had a heart of gold. But now, the enormity of what the dragon was about to do, hit him.

"Stop!!!" He shouted.

"What?" Mandrig said.

"Huh?" Kent said.

"I said, stop," Deston said, his youthful face looking scared. "Don't kill him, Mandrig."

"Why not?"

"Because he hasn't hurt you any."

"He tried to kill me. I'd call that a justifiable reason to kill him."

"I know, but you know that he really didn't stand a chance of killing you. I mean, Mandrig, you're a thousand times bigger than he is and then some. He didn't stand a chance, and besides, it was my fault."

"Your fault?" Mandrig asked.

"Yes, I was the one who brought him to you, was I not?"

"Well, now that you mention it, yes.

Why did you bring him to me?"

"So you could fight each other."

"We did fight, and I won. Now I am going to kill him and eat him for dinner." Mandrig leered at the hapless knight and Kent fainted. "See, he's nothing but a weak burden on society."

"He's not weak," Deston protested, "he killed a wyvern once."

"Well, ain't he special."

"Mandrig!"

"What?!"

"You can't kill him."

"And why not?"

"Because, I won't let you. And if you do kill him, I'll kill you."

"How?"

"Well," Deston said, pointing to the edge of the clearing where the ground was the highest, "you see that bit of raised ground right there."

"Yeah," Mandrig said not liking the sound of this.

"Well, you see, I thought about building a house there and moving into it. That way we can be together all day long, and you can tell me stories, and play games with me, and be with me all day long. Now isn't that just what you want?" Deston smirked. Mandrig began to look a little green in the face.

"Wake up, dragon-slayer," Mandrig said, nudging the knight with a claw. Kent jerked awake. "You can leave now."

"Huh?"

"I said you were free to go."

"What? How?"

"The kid vanquished me in combat."

"Physical combat?" Kent asked incredulously.

"Nope. Verbal."

"Ahh. I see."

"No, you don't," Mandrig said, "you haven't known him long enough."

"From what I've seen, I can already tell."

"Now that we've got that settled," Deston said, "let's do something. Kent, do you know how to play hide-and-seek?" Mandrig groaned.

"No," Kent said.

"Don't worry, it's a simple game. I'll teach you."

"I'd love to stay and learn, but I really need to go kill that ogre. Darn. I was really looking forward to it." Kent picked up his broken dagger and prepared to leave. Turning to Mandrig, he saluted. "It was nice meeting you, Sir Mandrig. Maybe I'll stop by some time."

"Sure," said Mandrig. "Any time. The door's always open to my friends."

"What door?" Deston asked.

"It's a figure of speech, kid."

"Bye, Deston," Kent said.

"Bye, Kent. Good luck." Kent began to walk away and Deston turned to Mandrig. "Well, Mandrig, how about a story or two?" Mandrig looked like he was going to cry.

"Hey, Kent," the dragon called. The knight turned around with a grin on his face.

"Yes."

"You need a hand with that ogre?"

"Somehow I knew you'd say that."

"Well?"

"Sure, come along."

"What about me?" Deston demanded.

"It'll be too dangerous for a young boy like yourself," Kent said gravely.

"But we'll tell you about it when we get back." Mandrig added helpfully.

"I want to go."

"Sorry, kid," Kent said.

"That's not fair," Deston protested.

"Life isn't fair," Mandrig said.

"That's what my mom says."

"I know," Mandrig said.

"Wise woman," Kent added.

"You're mean and I hope the ogre chops you up into pieces."

"I hope so," Mandrig said, "at least I won't have to deal with you anymore." Deston turned red in the face and stormed off. Mandrig and Kent watched the young man crash through the undergrowth, kicking at rocks and anything else that got in the way.

"I think he's mad," Kent said.

"I know. Ain't it a beautiful sight."

"What? Him being mad."

"No. Him leaving." And with that, both dragon and Dragon-slayer had a long hard laugh. Kent laughed so hard he started to choke and Mandrig got the hiccups.

"Well, I guess we took care of him," Kent said, when he finally recovered.

"I guess so. Well, friend Kent, shall we go take care of this ogre of yours."

"What ogre?" Kent said with a grin.

Mandrig chortled. "I can tell that you and I are going to be good friends."

"I HATE YOU BOTH!!!" Deston shouted from a long ways off.

Kent gave Mandrig a look of mock abashment, and Mandrig grinned sheepishly. Then the two went into hysterics again.

Tales of Middle-earth PBM...

Land Hoy!

by Finsky

The longboats of the Corsairs pulled into the docks and onto the beaches in front of the white-walled city. Those citizens actually at the wharf watched in curiosity as Admiral Mireädur and his Wizard stepped from their crafts and organized their legions. Approval registered more and more as those watching noticed the gleaming armor, the crisp precision, and the good natured energy of an Elite force.

And what a force! Besides two companies of armored pikemen and a company of archers to protect their Vanguard, eight whole companies of the legendary Marines of the Seafaring Folk! Help had arrived!

Two of the Nazgûl's armies had only weeks before marauded into Harondor and were drawing closer by the hour, so the arrival of the Corsairs sent a stir through Caras Mirilond. Four squadrons of Men-Of-

Wars and over a dozen troop-transporters crowded the harbor. The city would not die without a fight!

As the pair of officers led their army through the streets to the far side of town, they gazed around in excitement. Caras Mirilond. The Shrine of Castamir - the Jewel of Harad! Every heart powering the jackboots of the new arrivals leapt! Oh, how they coveted this city! But in these times, the King of this land was a staunch friend of Angamaitë. And like a good friend's wife: Caras Mirilond was a treasure you could admire, and even dream of, but never touch.

The center of town soon gave way to the homes of its inhabitants, and then finally to the fields at its feet. The Admiral stiffened as he saw the mounted Hordes of Harad. The camp of their cavalries was

already stowed, and they appeared ready to march. And indeed, smoke could be seen rising from settlements just over the neighboring hills.

Where was their general? His standard was lost amidst the dust of his forming columns. Admiral Mireädur and his mysterious companion gave mustering orders to their commanders and set off to find their host.

Streaming from the city and joining with the ranks of the Haradwaith, the Corsairs marched into the hills: and some of them caught a last glimpse of the sea they knew so well. The weathering sun sang a soft farewell to those with time to peek, as they rushed off into the gathering Night-the onslaught of Sauron....

Poems of Middle-earth PBM...

Thranduil

by Nick Cody

Lord of the Wood: green, tall, and vast.
Lord under the Stars, flaming in the night.
Lord of swan ships: green sails and white mast.
Lord of the Grey: the elves of twilight.

Wielder of Troll Slayer and Orc Slayer.
Enemy of the Flaming Eye, and Balrog slayer.
Defender of the West, a Lord Marshal there.
Friend of man, eagle, deer, and bear.

Feast giver! Harp player! Storyteller!
A Host to rival Elrond's good graces.
Curate, Herald, and wisest soothsayer.
A giver of smiles to children's faces.

The Hall Of Heroes

Earthwood

Game 209

In 60 turns The Alliance of the Riders on the Storm overwhelmed the opposition to become the sole rulers of the Land. The alliance consisted of players 21, 24 and 25. Congrats to you all.

Game 216

In 42 turns The Alliance of The Righteous Maelstrom overran all that opposed to take full control of the land of Earthwood. This alliance consisted of players 17, 23, and 25. Hats off to you on a job well done.

Game 219

In 42 turn The Alliance of The Knights of Fortune destroyed all that opposed and thwarted their missions. This mighty alliance is composed of the following players: 3, 9 and 18. Congratulations on a great victory.

The Hall Of Heroes

Earthwood-The Sea Kings

Game 35

In 51 turns the Alliance of the Free Peoples KO'd all of the forces of Darkness and allowed the Light to shine throughout the seas. These warriors consist of players 18 and 22. Congrats to the new rulers of the seas.

Game 37

In 43 turns The Wings of Doom Alliance sank the ships and looted the cities of all that opposed their efforts to become the Sea Kings. This alliance is comprised of players 11, 18, 20 and 24. Congratulations to all of these members.

State of War

Game 73

In only 24 turns the armies of The Alliance of The Dirty Rotten Scoundrels managed to overrun the forces of all those which were not of their alliance to form a new federation. This alliance was spearheaded by player 5 and he received a great deal of assistance from players 4 and 18. We salute the members of this mighty alliance.