

WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



**GAME
SYSTEMS
INC.**

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WORDS FROM THE WOODS

There's no doubt about it! Middle-earth PBM is a hit!! 3-week games are filling quickly and 2-week games are filling VERY quickly. So if you're interested in a slightly longer time to mull over your turns and plan your strategy, send in your registration for the 3-week game! You won't have too long to wait!

Please remember that position requests can not be guaranteed except to prior game winners. If you do not give us alternate choices for your position in a new game, then you may not get what you wanted. We can NOT let people WAIT for a position to open in a new game. It would be impossible to maintain any sort of order if we did this, and it would subvert the glory of being a past winner! So give us alternate choices when you sign up! We will try to fill your request if possible, but choices significantly increase your chances of getting what you want!

NEW SERVICE!! You can thank one of your fellow players who finally convinced us that some of you out there would appreciate getting a printout of your current status - even if you missed the turn. So, if you want a printout of your position after missing a turn, just give us a call (with your security number). The printout will give you your status, but there will have been no orders given or executed and there will have been no production. This is solely for those players who need to see if any foreign characters or armies have been sighted and if any of their characters or population centers are about to be under attack. The cost for the printout after a missed turn is the normal turn fee (\$6.50).

There is a small continuing need for Standby players in ME-PBM. These are positions which are still viable in the early weeks of a new game when a player must stop playing for one reason or another. Please understand that you can NOT request to be put into a specific game, but you will be notified if a position opens up that you would like to play. So, if you're interested in getting on our standby list, just give us a call. If you have a preference for Good, Evil, or Neutral, let us know that as well.

Congratulations to the New GSI Supervisor, Harold Ford! Harold has been doing such an excellent job for us that we decided to promote him into management. All of you who have spoken to Harold in the past know his easy going and friendly manner, as well as his complete familiarity with our games. Good going, Harold!

This month's cover is by a fledgling artist who neglected to make his name legible enough to read. Please contact us so that we can give you the proper recognition and credit!

Finally, for those of you who just HAVE to get your turns read to you over the phone, PLEASE wait until the day AFTER the turn is run. It is just impossible to find your turn to read it to you when we are still processing and printing. Thanks for your cooperation!

Good Gaming,

Pete Stassun



ALONG THE PATHWAYS

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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.

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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

Notice to All ME-PBM Players:

It appears that there has been a great deal of unnecessary attention given to character and alias names created by some of the players. As we all know, 'you can't please everyone', so is it really necessary to blow this thing out of proportion? It's quite obvious that not everyone is going to possess the same amount of enthusiasm for the game and we all will have to learn to deal with it. Please note that this will be the last issue accepting personals in regard to this subject, simply because its a matter of personal preference. So players, let's all learn to accept each other and try to work together to make Middle-earth the Best of PBM.

The Editor

GRUDGE GAME

Sauron, the Dark Lord, has summoned forth his mighty minions, the Ringwraiths. We challenge forward to battle any group of 10 Free Peoples for the dominion of Middle-earth. May the machinations of Morgoth sound the clarion call to the doom of Aman! Serious inquiries contact GSI or Aaron Cox at (904-474-8920).

That's Land H.O! and "...Westerling Sun..." (see last month's story). And Earthwood #209 was won by #20, 24 and 25.

Finsky

Psycho,

Been watchin' for 5 of your 7 and I hear ya'. Vet of EW, Denom, SOW...I signed for 1st ME. I'll be called what I want and I know the 'books' as good as any.

John T Schultz

Regarding the "Psycho":

ME-PBM is not boring, as you imply. If so, ship out! Why soil this world with your comedy, as you have others? Leave ME-PBM free from your tainting, for true Tolkien fans need you not.

The Dwarves

Psycho-Pirate,

Your name doesn't impress those who play ME-PBM because most are veterans themselves, but not of GSI games. Earn your reputation anew, but don't expect it to be easy.

The Voice of Reason
PS - I prefer the authentic names to add to the feel of the game.

Middle-earth™ PBM

GAME 3

All,

It is now 11 and the Neutrals have chosen. #'s 3, 8, 23 and 24 vs 11, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22. 4 on 7. Can we win? You bet.

General Enion of Dunland

Psycho-Pirate:

I heartily agree! Using names such as 'Bain' and 'Long Rider' is boring. By the way, I'll be visiting a cloud near you soon. Barad-dûr has been destroyed!

Baaltroc

GAME 6

Oh, smooth move. Just as I turn Good somebody manages to P.O. the Woodmen. Yo, Woodie! I'll be your ally. I've got some kick a characters and a decent overall production. Just holler if you need anything.

King Crimson

-Corsairs-

Elrond,

You are marked by your own allies as a traitor-no one trusts you anymore. The Woodmen and you are causing the collapse of the Free Peoples by your selfish acts. We chuckle as your puny alliance crumbles.

Morgaleb

GAME 7

Hey....Southern Gondor,
B.O.H.I.C.A.! If you Don't know what it means, just ask .

T.H.W.A.C.K.

(The Hellaciously Weird
Anxiety Causing Komittee.)

GAME 10

EASTERLINGS,

I blow my nose at you!

Akhorahil

The Comic Nazgûl!

GAME 11

Let all people note that Grima, also known as Wormtongue, now rules from the throne of Gondor. Believe his lies at your own peril. His

brother Oath breaker, sits on the Dwarvish throne. Lords Amroth, Celdrahil, Ovatha II and the others who wish to remain anonymous at this time.

GAME 12

Rumors of Dunedain wandering lost in the wastelands of Mordor amuse us as we crush the last Eothraim resistance and begin sewing black banners. 'Ware, men of Gondor, your time grows short, spend it well.

The Lord of the East

News Flash:

Just when the hordes of Mordor thought they had broken the backs of the realms of Gondor, the cavalry arrived. Several thousand of them: all dressed in steel, and all ready to fight.

The Dol Amroth Tribune

GAME 13

"Empty Dark Servant Boasts. The Eothraim only sent three turns and ruined themselves. As for the others, you take credit for things GSI gave you. It brings new meaning to the phrase I'd rather be lucky than Good!"

Free Peoples

GAME 14

Ice King, Ice King. Give me a break with your puny threats! And Urazahil you definitely are the mouth! But nothing of interest comes out of it.

Tarondor

Uvatha,
You'd better ride south as fast as your cavalry can carry your

army. Soon I will have divined the location of your army, and if I can reach you, my broadsword-wielding infantry will tear you up.

Eoder

GAME 15

Tarondor, I come for thee...

Bain,

Now you join Celdrahil in the deep, dark earth. Even Thrar III could not protect you from my dagger. Argeleb II and Tarondor, beware, for you are next...

GAME 17

All Free Peoples,

The Easterlings have shown their true colors. They are as Black as the Heart of Sauron. We begin a new offensive. The Witch-king has fallen! Long Rider, you're next along with your Easterling lackeys.

Bain AKA Melkor

Dark Servants:

The only way we will finally crush our enemies is to use our forces as one. Contact me so we can plan accordingly.

Dendra Dwar

Report to Amroth,

The Mallorn Guard has returned for decoration. We found Khamûl's camps an excellent training expedition, though their inhabitants were somewhat vile. The troop's eyes beamed appreciation for your offer of mithril. Tonight we celebrate!

Miloh Fangtooth

GAME 18

Amroth,

Your heartless treachery toward allies follows you from game to game. Your selfish ways will doom the Free Peoples. You steal from North Gondor but do nothing to aid their battles. I'm glad you're on my side.

Morgaleb

GAME 19

Spring has come and the enticements of which side to join begins. Ahh! The feeling of being in the middle.

Zarendarger(22)

Murazor and Dancu,

I would like to thank you for the entertainment you provided for my troops at Carn-Dum. They needed the training and I'm sure you needed the lower maintenance costs.

Marl Tarma
Minister of Defense

GAME 20

To all:

I am unable to continue this contest for reasons outside of the game. I wish the Dark Servants the best of luck as I know they shall win.

Urzahil #20

GAME 21

From the nation of fun & frolic, we are still neutral at this time for those who wish to bother us are mine and in case of doubt check us out, cause I got friends.

Rot N. Bart of Rhudaur

The nation of the peoples from the; Haradwaith, Corsairs and Easterlings would like to make known that they have created an alliance. We are accepting offers from both sides.

The Southern Axis

Okay, so when I met the first dragon I thought "cool, this could be fun...not!" I died. The second time; "now I know what to do..." I died. The third time...dead again! And now the fourth...help!

Enion

The Lords of Gondor are triumphant! While King Tarondor humbled Urklug's army and retook Minas Ithil, Prince Celdrahil has taken Barad Ungol itself. Hoarmurath and Dendra Dwar are next.

Baaltroc

GAME 22

With the night the dark hordes came. Before break of day Buhr Widafas was in ruins. The army there was destroyed. The Woodmen axe has become quite dull. While the shadow is becomingly more intense.

The Shadow of the East

The Woodmen capital falls to the might of Rhudaur, knocking them out of the game! Cardolan loses yet another battle to Rhudaur! The Neutrals seem to be the only ones achieving consistent success thus far. Who's next?

Melkor of Rhudaur

GAME 23

With torch aloft and eyes aglow Khamûl, the Dragon Lord, tread among the corpses of the defeated Dwarven army. "So this is what the Dwarves call soldiers" he hissed scornfully as his boot crushed the skull of a fallen Dwarven axeman.

"Their commander, Lord Bain, is he among the dead?"

"No my Lord, it seems he saw the battle going against him and fled the field."

"Send my best agent. I want his head brought to me on a platter and his body impaled on a pike outside the city walls."

"And speak to the troops, tell them they dine on Dwarf tonight."

Grievous losses! Bain dead! Fear not brave Dain, a huge Eothraim army will be sacking Dol-Guldur by the time you read this letter. I will see to the destruction of Goblin's Gate, the Dragon Lord's last capital.

Amroth, Elf-lord

While the Free Peoples talk about an offensive, Minas Ithil has fallen, Osgiliath is under attack, Bâin is killed by Khamûl and more disasters threaten. Come over to the victors, those who can.

Akhôrahil

Free Peoples,

Please accept my invitation to visit liberated Dol-Guldur. I am sure all will enjoy Khamûl's public execution.

Gisulf
Chief of Buhr Waldlaes

GAME 28

Nations of Middle Earth,

We would like to announce that Uvatha's proposal to turn our area into a maggot infested realm totally enslaved to his will came in a close second to the joint proposal from the Northmen and the Eothraim who have suggested cleansing the area of all evil by annihilating Nation #19. Anyone who would like to help out should contact either nation for details.

Naurmegil Co-Chair Sea
of Rhun Beautification Board

Positions Available:

Applications are now being accepted for positions in the new world order. The Betrayer's slaves need not apply as the only position available to them will be prone...6 feet under!)

Subedei Bahadur

Free Peoples:

Never doubt that when a beloved character falls in death, or when you find something missing, that I was behind it all!

Respectfully Yours,
Sikiché, The Dragon Lord
P.S. Stay away from Mirkwood!

Knock Knock N Gondor guess whose going to serve you gashes, slashes and ashes? Try the Dark Southern Shake and Bake Gang!! This dinner order is to go!!

GAME 31

The Masterpiece has begun:

Expect the best and the worst. The light and the dark at War, where the vigilant surveyors await the

spark that will ignite this powder-keg.

Ambar Lindë, Noldo bard

Wow, it's only turn three and already I have seized half of the Dragon Lord's population centers. I wonder what's next? Dol-Guldur maybe.

Bain I,
Liberator of Goblin-gate

STATE OF WAR

GAME 77

Ivan,

Your time has come ...Oh Joel Guess who's next! And what's his face. Ashley who! Wasteland, oh yes now I see!

Newsflash:

The casualty count in "Bloody Springfield" rises to 1.2 million as Texan armies are slaughtered before the city's trenches and bunkers. Eight armies were reportedly involved in this latest battle for Ivan's last stronghold.

EARTHWOOD - THE SEA KINGS

GAME 40

Where are all the braggart's boasts and predictions of future glory? Let's talk it up some! Oh by the way don't cry, Colmain. The Amazonians are still in the game.

The Voice of Reason

Sorcerer,

The outcome is not in question. You will lose. How badly do you wish to be crushed?

The Voice of Reason

GAME 41

To HW #25,

OK Human Warrior you asked for it. You offered me friendship, you offered me the Halflings on a platter. You offered me the Forest Elves. Then you backstabbed me once I ate his liver with some beans and a nice Chienty Wine it was delish.

Remember revenge is a dish best served up cold. I shall smite thee with my last breath. You lost this time and that was just a small group, I shall strike you often and hard. Only a fool goes against the Storm. From #19 Necromancer.

The Storm

EARTHWOOD - ORIGINAL

GAME 227

What a pathetic bunch of dregs my opposition has turned out to be. Let us join in some real competition

Tales of ME-PBM...

The Reckoning

by Thomas Lemont

It was almost as if time stood still within the small, forest glade; no sounds emanated from the surrounding wood, except for an occasional whisper of leaves, and the gentle splashing of a stream over its bed of polished stones. A butterfly fluttered silently through the air, alighting upon a white lily. The soft light of the morning sun filtered down from the heavens, dissipating

shall we? We three can't have all the fun.

Chontala the Wizard

GAME 229

Neither high nor low matters to us for we desire from those who are loyal so come one, come all join in trust for if you don't we'll beat you till you bust.

Minute Aide
"The Eliminator"

Ranger Lord,

I'm making a public appeal! Join me! And together we can rule all of Earthwood. We should be able to continue on other to join our cause. An early Alliance will win! Who will join with me in conquest of Earthwood.

Derek And The Boys

Wanted:

Those who desire communion with us. Seekers of peace and tranquility only need apply. Those who don't will be cast aside.

Minute-Aide
The Exterminator

the haze from the previous drops of dew. The entire scene was utopian; a true paradise.

Suddenly a dark figure lurched into the clearing. Grasping a twisted, black staff in its left hand, the figure hobbled to the edge of the stream, and fell to its knees. Throwing back its cowl, the figure revealed a visage of matted blond hair, fearful gray eyes, pointed ears and an open

mouth gasping for air. All was silent, save for his aggravated breathing. Still clutching the staff, he cupped his other hand and scooped up some of the clear water, gulping it down then repeating the process, his eyes continually roving over the surrounding foliage. Then heaving himself to his feet, the elf replaced his hood, wiped his hands on his cloak, and limped out of sight, to the opposite side of the glade.

Almost immediately, two horsemen galloped into the clearing, their horses snorting from the sudden halt. Both men were dressed in puce-colored surcoats over breastplates and chainmail, and outfitted with short-bows and sheathed swords.

The taller of the two men spoke, as he dismounted, "I shall check for signs that he came this way; you continue to keep watch."

The other man nodded his consent, removing an arrow from its quiver and placing it loosely on his bow. His horse slowly placed to and fro, crushing the lily that only moments earlier had borne the butterfly, as the rider scanned about him, noticing anything.

"Look!" said the man who had dismounted, pointing towards the edge of the stream bank where he now stood. "There is the mark of his staff, and his trail is easily revealed by the bruised grass and broken twigs."

The mounted warrior chuckled softly, then spoke, "It seems that Tharudan is in quite a hurry, but he cannot outpace a horse."

"True, Aegir, but he has kept ahead of us thus far."

"Tis pure luck, Hakon. The trees slow us down, but it should not be much longer afore we reach the forest's edge."

Aegir mounted his horse, saying, "Well, let us get moving. We must eliminate him before he reaches the woods of Lorien, for the

Lady's magic will not allow us to enter there."

Spurring on their horses, the two men dashed into the woods.

Meanwhile, Tharudan had almost reached the edge of the forest, and his breathing was ever more labored. He had broken his ankle in the mad dash through the forest, and he sat down to calm himself. Taking some scattered branches, he set to mending his foot, making of them a crude splint. He had been on the run for hours, but it seemed like days. His mind drifted back to the events that had transpired weeks ago, when his Sindar lord, Amroth, dispatched him to Mirkwood forest. He was ordered to reconnoiter the fortress of Dol-Guldur, and determine whether the Nazgûl within its walls was preparing for an offensive against Cerin Amroth, for the spells of Galadriel would certainly be hard pressed in keeping a mad horde at bay. When Tharudan had penetrated the fortress' security, disguised as a common peasant, he made his way silently to the palace, where he had overheard plans of the kind Amroth had spoken; but his stealth had failed him, and he clumsily tripped over a sentry in the dark, and a brief but fierce scuffle ensued. The guard was easily dispatched by a quicker dagger thrust, but not before an alarm could be raised. In an instant, the square was filled with a score of foot-soldiers, who were quick to pursue, so Tharudan hastily made his way from the city. He had easily outdistanced his pursuers, except for two scouts on horseback that had picked up his trail and now followed him relentlessly. Even then all would have gone smoothly, had he not also stepped on a loose stone and crippled himself, the pain of which brought him back to reality.

His strength was slowly returning, but he was still far from perfect condition. 'Twas a shame that in his apprenticeship he had failed to

learn any healing spells, but his magics were more inclined toward lore and the research of artifacts; not much of a consolation with two brigands nigh at the heels. Closing his eyes he sighed, letting the afternoon sun bathe his face in warmth, but the dull throb of his feet kept him from any true peace. He hobbled to a tall, crooked elm and sat down beneath its tangled branches, propping his injured foot atop a treestump, the pain lessening.

"I guess I must stay here tonight," he muttered quietly to small bird perched in the elm's lower branches. "Keep me company, little one, but sing softly, for the wolves are coming soon." The bird cocked its head to one side, and chirped a few notes; whether in agreement or not, Tharudan did not know.

Hakon removed his helm and wiped his brow with a fold of his surcoat. "Curse that Grey Elf!" he hissed angrily. "Even with his bum leg he has given us the slip!"

"Patience, Hakon", said Aegir, bringing his horse up along side his friend. His pace is slowed with his injury, and this is not the welcome wood he knows. Come nightfall, I will use the orb Khamûl has given to me, and I am sure it will reveal to us the elf's relative location."

Hakon stretched his arms, then dismounted. "I will look for signs of the trail this time, and you keep a lookout."

Aegir replied, "Yes, and I think it best that we pitch camp here tonight. I will use the orb, then we can continue on the journey come daybreak."

Hakon nodded, pulling a small axe from his horse's satchel. He walked over to a group of saplings and felled them with one quick stroke of the axe, then proceeded to chop them up into shorter pieces; he then began constructing a primitive shelter; a palisade fence and hut. Aegir scrounged the immediate area

for dried wood and leaves, gathering them together for a small fire, which he soon had burning brightly.

When the men had eaten some of the provisions in their packs, Aegir produced the orb from its cloth cover. The orb was a dark, cloudy, grass-like substance, and Aegir could not stifle a chill that ran down his spine when he touched it; it was like a sphere of black ice. Remembering the words of Khamûl, he began chanting undecipherable phrases, and soon an image slowly began to take shape within the sphere.

The image spoke in a low droning voice, "What does thou seek, mortal? Who disturbs me?"

Aegir spoke hesitantly, "I-I-it is I, Lord; Aegir your servant."

"Well, what is your purpose? Speak up....have you found the elf?"

"No, Great One. Tharudan has escaped, yet we believe he still resides in Mirkwood. But, he has injured himself and we must be very close. We need use of your..." Aegir started to say 'eyes' but then continued on, "...magics to locate him." A trickle of sweat ran down his cheek and he quickly wiped it away.

"Very well..."

Dimly, Aegir could make out the shape of Khamûl bent over the body of a prostate, bound atop a stone slab. In one hand the Nazgûl held a small, curved dagger; then, voicing a high screech, the wraith stabbed down with the dagger, slashing open the woman's abdomen. As her bowels spilled out, Khamûl tossed aside the stained blade, the weapon clattering on the stone floor. Then reaching into her intestine, he groped within the abdominal cavity as if looking for something. Turning towards Aegir's view he exclaimed, "the elf resides less than a day's ride northwest of your position. His injury heals quicker than expected, and he is nigh at the forest's edge. He must be captured and interrogated, so we

must learn just how much he knows of my plans against his capital city. That is all you need to know for now; find him, or you will both take his place in the dungeons of Dol-Guldur! With that the image faded.

Aegir replaced the orb's cloth covering and placed the artifact within a saddle bag.

"How I despise that wraith!" said Hakon, through clenched teeth and furrowed brow. "But after all, I suppose this isn't the polar region of Angmar, or the burning sands of Harandor."

"If what he says is true," said Aegir, "then we will not be worrying much about where we are stationed for the dungeons of Dol-Guldur are not a nice place to be."

At that moment the two men heard a voice off in the distance--not human, but certainly not elvish either. "What do you think it is?" inquired Aegir.

"I'm not sure," replied Hakon, strapping on his sword, but what say we find out?"

Hakon and Aegir did not travel long before they heard more voices, gruff and snorting.

"Orcs," said Hakon, peering through the concealing brush. "Probably a patrol or war party."

"Maybe they can assist us in finding the elf."

"I don't know, Aegir. I really don't care much for orcs, more than I care for elves, and I don't think that they much care for men. It could cause some trouble."

Aegir smiled, "Since when have we worried about trouble?"

With that, Aegir burst from hiding, startling a group of approximately 12 to 15 orcs clustered about a blazing fire. A moment later, Hakon also appeared.

"Who may you be, manlings?" inquired a large orc, standing up and calmly reaching for his club.

"Patience, orc," said Aegir, notching his bow, "I could fell you

before you took two steps, even through that leather jerkin you wear."

"Who are you?" asked the same orc, standing his ground, saliva dripping from the corner of his mouth. "I am Thrashnak, Chieftain of the Magath clan."

We are scouts for Khamûl, Lord of Dol-Guldur; this forest is his domain. Are you a war party in his service as well?"

Another orc stood up, fingering a large axe.

Thrashnak spoke again, "We serve the Dark Lord, if that's what you mean, but not Khamûl, foul undead thing he be."

"You speak of our master, wretch!" exclaimed Hakon, though even to him the extent of his loyalty was questionable.

Aegir held Hakon back, motioning the orcs to be silent. Then he said, "Nonetheless, this forest was given over to the control of Khamûl, second of the Ringwraiths of Sauron, and all who live here abide by HIS command."

"Then why listen to you?" said the orc holding the axe. "You're not Khamûl, just his lackeys, all men stink like dogs!" The other orcs jabbered and voiced their opinions as well.

"Listen," said Aegir, growing frustrated, "An elf has escaped from Dol-Guldur and we have been pursuing him this way. Has he come in this direction?"

"Sure!" said Thrashnak with a slight guffaw, pointing to an area in the clearing by their baggage. "We have a few of them in our possession." Both Hakon and Aegir looked in that direction, noticing three bound captives amidst a pile of equipment.

"And they are ours," said Thrashnak, bearing his fangs. A small group of the orcs had drawn swords, the others hefted axes and clubs.

"What are their names?" said Hakon, disregarding the orcs show of force.

Thrashnak replied, "That is none of your concern, manling."

"None by the name of Tharudan?" inquired Aegir, placing a hand on the hilt of his sword.

"All elvish names are stupid," said Thrashnak, "just like manlings! Now go, or we take you too!"

Hakon quickly fired an arrow, skewering Thrashnak's weapon hand; the Orc dropped the club and howled in pain.

"Something to remember me by," said Hakon sprinting into the brush; Aegir was right behind him.

"After them, fools!" barked Thrashnak, pulling the arrow from his hand and tossing it to the ground. "And four of you remain here on guard!"

The sound of the Orcs had soon faded in the distance, and Aegir and Hakon had swung wide around their camp, then doubled back. The horses were still there, surprisingly, and the rest of their equipment was untouched.

"Better get some sleep while we can," said Hakon.

"You go ahead," said Aegir, "I'll take the first watch."

When dawn had arrived, Tharudan was already awake. He checked his ankle, which was healing at a good rate, but it was still bruised and very sore. He gathered his belongings, then picked up his staff; not much of a staff really, in comparison to the Great Staves, but it served its present purpose, that of a crutch, rather adequately.

The small bird that had kept him company through the night had left him, perhaps to seek out food in this miserable forest. All about him was silent, save for his own shuffling about in the fallen leaves. Giving one last glance about him, he set off to the northwest, towards Lorien.

Hakon awoke Aegir at dawn.

"Get up you sluggard, time is awasting."

Aegir yawned, "I guess it is nigh time to find that thrice-cursed elf." He heaved himself to his feet, saying, "I'll check on the horses, if you feel up to making breakfast."

Hakon nodded. I had planned on that. I'm afraid that we'll have to eat what our rations provide, for I'm not that desperate to eat anything that resides in Mirkwood; no objections?"

"None," said Aegir, already brushing down the stallions, "But see if you can work out something with those biscuits; they were a might stale."

After the men had eaten, they were again on their way. It was a little over an hour at a furious pace when they had reached the edge of the forest. Hakon raised his hand to shade his eyes, scanning the horizon. The open plains lay before them, and the Anduin river was seen flowing in the distance. They decided to take the straightest route to Lorien, and urged their horses onward.

It was almost noon when Aegir brought his horse to an abrupt halt.

Hakon stopped the mount, and cantered alongside Aegir.

"There," said Aegir squinting into the sunlight and pointing northward out across the vast plain, "I believe we have found our quarry. Now all we must do is run him down and capture him."

Hakon looked to the direction Aegir instructed; off in the distance a figure was seen sprinting through the grasslands at a good pace, and would reach the Anduin rather quickly.

"Tis the elf, sure enough," said Hakon, "and it appears that he has recovered from his injuries, at least well enough to fly like a deer."

"Then we too must fly!" exclaimed Aegir, spurring on his war-horse.

Tharudan was running well, however he knew that Khamûl's

A Question of Balance

by Nick Cody

rangers would catch up with him very soon. His foot no longer pained him as it did earlier, but he could not keep up an even pace much longer, for he was no fleet-footed animal at home on the plains. Casting a wayward glance behind him, his keen eyes picked up a small cloud of dust, the calling card of what must be the two rangers in pursuit. In time Tharudan had crossed the Anduin, and he was within a few hundred yards of the forest, with Hakon and Aegir almost upon him, when suddenly a large pillar of black smoke arose above the treetops. Getting what must be called his "second-wind," Tharudan raced into the forest, heedless of the flailing branches that whipped about him; the sound of his pursuers crashed behind him.

"What could that smoke portend?" wondered Tharudan, for his fears were now fully aroused. Soon, he found the source of the smoke: Caras Galadon was burning! but how could this be, for the city was hidden by elf magic! Everywhere about him lay the carnage of war...bodies lay strewn about the forest floor; trees flamed and smoked, crashing down about him, crops were razed, everywhere was utter desolation...and orcs. A large army of orcs and men were gathering together the people that remained, chaining them, as a great warrior robed in black paced before the masses, brandishing a large sword. Quickly he noticed the elf, almost hidden by the acrid smoke rising from the piles of burning corpses, and turned toward him, motioning with his hand. Suddenly Tharudan pitched forward, clutching his stomach, and gasping for breath. Looking about him, he noticed the

two rangers who had been following him dash into the clearing, quickly dismounting and moving toward his position, weapons drawn. His body felt like it was on fire, yet he struggled to find the long knife hidden within the agent's cloak, perhaps failing him once more, as Aegir quickly pounced upon his prostrate form, knocking the dagger from his hand. Almost just as immediately his accomplice, Hakon, had roped Tharudan's wrists behind him, drawing the bonds tightly about his limbs.

"Why?!" shouted Tharudan, thrashing about on the ground like a crazed animal. "Why have you attacked us, and how was this possible?!" He knew that the attack had come early, and that soon his own city of Cerin Amroth would be torched and its citizens put to the sword.

Aegir backhanded the elf with a swift cuff of his gauntlet. Laughing, he said, "You know we are at war, elf. It seems that Khamûl could not risk your escape so he moved earlier than anticipated. However, I am sure he will still find your information useful. And as for penetrating the magic of Galadriel, it is obvious that my lord has researched the spell required to reveal your hidden dens; it has proven to be quite fruitful, it would seem."

Hakon laughed, helping Aegir hoist the elf to his feet, "It is time that we rendezvous with Khamûl."

"Aye, that it is."

Behind them, the smoke rose into the sky, like the black clouds wafting over the lands of Mordor, and soon the elves would realize that their shroud of invisibility and false security would fall away.

Upon first hearing about Middle-earth PBM I wanted to sign up as fast as possible and enlist in the cause of the Free Peoples. I believed them to be underdogs, barely able to hold their own against the Dark Servants. Now I am convinced that the opposite is true. The point is very much open to debate (as I have countless times with my friends) but I believe the Free Peoples have an innate advantage in this game. I will discuss the major factors here.

The economic superiority of the Free Peoples is not even debatable. Although the Dark Servants have population centers in the metal rich mountains of Mordor, most Dark Servant nations should be considered "resource-poor." They lack the wide variety of resources that are abundant in Free People stores: like leather, food, timber and mounts. So, with their trade to the market crippled, the Dark Servants must rely heavily on the tax revenue of their population centers.

But this reliance is problematic. The number and size of the population centers owned by the Dark Servants is significantly smaller when compared to the Neutral and Free People nations. On the average, most Dark Servant nations begin holding only two major towns, a village and two or three camps. This amount hardly produces an adequate tax base.

So now the question of expansion must be addressed. Can the Mordor-host force its demands? Who possesses the greater military, the Free Peoples or the Dark Servants? Here too, the balance tips towards the free nations, although ever so slightly. If you consider the seven factors involved-- total number of troops, troop type, training, weapon, armor, moral and "recruiting ability"-- I think you will agree that the Free Peoples are, if

not superior, at least equal to the Dark Servants in military standing. What I mean by "recruiting ability" is this: the Free Peoples are better disposed to rapidly recruit adequate armies because of their advantage in population center numbers and size and the naturally high training rank (@20) possessed by most nations.

The point is debatable, but regardless of which side you come down on, it is clear that the Dark Servants can not solve their economic problems by using their military, at least they are at the beginning of the conflict. Ultimately, a brute military victory for the Dark Servants is not feasible.

If any kind of favor lies with the Dark Servants, it is with their characters. Weak spots in the Free People alliance (concerning character strength) are the Northmen, Woodmen, Cardolan and the Eothraim, but the opposing alliance has no real soft spot. I don't think I need to remind any players of Free People nations that every evil nation has at least a Nazgûl or Lieutenant. Also the Dark Servants enjoy particular advantage in the ranks of their Agent characters. But do they even the odds? Not likely.

However, I just entered a game *31 which just might make a fool of me yet. The game consists of two teams of players and five independent and experienced neutral players. Keith Petersen's group of ten is playing the Dark Servants and the group Will Parker and myself organized is playing the Free Peoples. Game *31 will undoubtedly be a most interesting challenge, but in my opinion, especially for the Dark Servants.

I do have a few general strategy points for those of you who are having trouble getting a foothold. First, add some strength to your armies; you will need the extra punch when you face the Gondorian

and Eothraim armies. Instead of recruiting poorly trained troops at great expense, slap some steel or bronze armor on your best troops, your heavy cavalry or heavy infantry, and your armies will improve significantly. Then, organize your forces into two large armies, one to send after your enemy's towns and the other to protect your capital and the surrounding area. Furthermore, you must not venture out from Mordor alone: even your large army is not a match against an Eothraim or Gondorian medium army.

The best plan for the hosts of Mordor is to march and fight together: the three teams could be 1) Dog Lord and Dark Lieutenants; 2) Fire King, Ice King, Cloud Lord and

the Quiet Avenger (with the latter two primarily using their characters); and 3) the Long Rider could use his swift cavalry army to support either group at a critical battle. 4) the Blind Sorcerer could send his huge army into the fray, reaching Minas Ithil as early as turn *3! Its presence just might make the difference in a stalemate.

But who knows what the neutrals might do? I would like to hear some strategic analysis of their positions. I think the Easterlings, if courted properly are easily persuaded to ally with the Dark Servants. They have the most to gain if they do, and the most to lose if they don't. I am eager to hear some of your responses.

Strategies of Middle-earth PBM...

Flattening The Walls

by Michael J Petticord

"And it came about at the seventh time, when the priests blew the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, 'Shout! For the Lord has given you the city.'
Joshua 6:16

The key to victory in Middle Earth PBM lies in the reduction and capture of fortified population centers. Enemy armies may be routed, commanders assassinated, and entire populations reduced to quivering jelly by the taunts of silver-tongued emissaries, but victory will not be achieved until one has assembled sufficient force to knock the walls down. As a current ME-PBM player and a civil engineer with the Air Force Reserve, I have devoted considerable thought to the problem of fortresses.

Consider a major town with a fort. Even if its loyalty has been reduced to 10, this town still presents a defensive value of (2500 + 6000) * 110% = 9350. Under the rules, an army of 2500 can bloodlessly threaten such a location. But, if the army consists of 2500 men-at arms, such threats are likely to be received with derisive jeers from the inhabitants.

Conversely, a superbly trained army of a thousand mithril-armed heavy cavalry, led by the general, will take out the town in one turn using a capture order. But such stratospheric considerations are beyond the scope of this study. I address those players who, like me, live on the edge of bankruptcy, scrabbling to weld handfuls of orcs and hill brigands into coherent formations.

Most Middle Earth PBM armies are motley, ill-shod bands of one to two thousand infantry, archers and camp followers of wavering morale, wielding an assortment of leather, bronze and steel gear, led by a captain and employing a mage or two to throw fireballs.

Consider the individual average soldier. He or she has an ideal strength rating of 8 (I achieve this by averaging the ideal strengths of the six troop types). Armed with steel weapon and bronze armor,

possessing morale and training ranks of 40, and led by a captain, this soldier's effective strength, after all calculations are made (see pages 58-59 of ME-PBM rulebook) is about 6. Thus, the minimum army size required to capture the aforementioned demoralized major town/fort without the aid of war machines, combat artifacts, or spells, is 9350/6 or about 1560 troops.

Following the tables listing the Defensive Values (DV's) of various combinations of population centers and fortifications and the Minimum Army Sizes (MAS - based on my average soldier strength of 6) required to take them. These tables rely on several assumptions: the attackers have no war machines, combat artifacts or spells; the population center is undefended by friendly armies and has a loyalty rank of 50 to 90.

Any combination of population center/fortification is allowed by the rules. One may in rare cases find a camp guarded by a citadel. For brevity, I have included only the most probable combinations. (See APPENDIX.)

Conclusions:
If you own a large population center:

1) Know that large centers with major fortifications are virtually self-sufficient. Don't tie your armies down in guarding them unless you face a powerful and determined alliance that has spent ten or twelve turns building war machines. Use your armies to harass your opponents in the field.

2) Build outposts of camps/towers in front of your vital centers. These outposts are inexpensive and will stop invading armies for at least one turn, allowing you to bring up your own armies.

3) Stockpile two or three turns of food in your vital centers. This will enable them to withstand sieges until you can send in your regular armies.

If you wish to take a large population center:

1) Create heavy infantry and heavy cavalry as special shock armies. It is wasteful to maintain heavy troops for a long period of time but, even partially trained, they are decidedly more effective than well-trained light troops in the short run.

2) Make war machines. Ten built in three turns by a nation with abundant timber, can knock down a tower.

3) Cast defensive combat spells. These will enable a portion of your army to survive and occupy a center after a successful attack.

4) Coordinate. If I were to restage the Siege of Gondor, I would use 7000 troops, 40 war machines and every spell I could utter. This would require intense communication, especially over the division of spoils, with at least two other Dark Servants.

5) Be patient. Once you intend to attack a center, stay with your plans. Don't send your characters out on diversions. Recruit, train, build and move!

-END-

Population Center	DV ²	MAS
Camp (defense = 200; assume 50 morale)		
no fortifications	300	100**
tower (value = 2000)	3300	550
fort (value = 6000)	9300	1550
Village (defense = 500; assume 60 morale)		
no fortifications	800	135
tower (value = 2000)	4000	670
fort (value = 6000)	10400	1735

Town (defense = 1000; assume 70 morale)			
no fortifications		1700	285
tower	(value = 2000)	5100	850
fort	(value = 6000)	11900	1985
castle	(value = 10000)	18700	3120
Major Town (defense = 2500; assume 80 morale)			
no fortifications		4500	750
tower	(value = 2000)	8100	1350
fort	(value = 6000)	15300	2550
castle	(value = 10000)	22500	3750
keep	(value = 16000)	33300	5550
City (defense = 5000; assume 90 morale)			
no fortifications		9500	1585
tower	(value = 2000)	13300	2220
fort	(value = 6000)	20900	3485
castle	(value = 10000)	28500	4750
keep	(value = 16000)	39900	6650
citadel	(value = 24000)	55100	9185

MAS = DV/6 rounded up to the nearest five)

* DV = (defense value + value) * (morale + 100)%

** smallest army allowed by rules.

(Editor's Note: GSI neither confirms nor denies the accuracy of these figures, or the efficiency of the strategy.)

Strategies of Middle-earth PBM...

A Meeting With the Khan

by Baron Blitz

"Cursed Mother of the Desert Night" growled Lord Ovatha II as he received his war map, "Our forces are constantly being harassed by those Good Devils, and my best mage has been kidnapped under our very noses! And the winter saps our strength and economy."

"Aye Great Khan, the winter has hit our economy as hard as any enemy sieging our great cities or agent harassing your leaders....." sighed Jubal Forktongue, Chief Emissary and Prime Minister to the joint Khans.

-excerpt from the diary of The Great Khan

I have played many PBM's in my day, and by far ME-PBM is the most exciting and detailed I have ever played, challenging all aspects of my military knowledge and diplomatic skill. This article is specifically designed as advice for the Easterling player, although many points apply to the other positions in the game.

DIPLOMACY/MILITARY

First of all, any neutral should evaluate their position and tentatively decidé which side you plan on eventually joining. For the Easterlings, I strongly recommend the shift to Evil, depending

how strong your relationship is with the Harad and Corsairs. A successful 3-nation neutral alliance can make the South an interesting area, but with the Easterlings' capital and most of their cities South of Mordor and with large evil armies a hop away from your major settlements, evil is the safest route to go.

If you are an aggressive player, shifting your allegiance early can reassure your allies to cooperate and trust you and minimize your diplomatic worries. Furthermore, shifting to Evil can allow you to concentrate your settlements South of Mordor and send your armies

northward to attack easy good pickings. However, pay close attention to the disposition of your fellow neutrals.

In my game, I shifted my efforts to attack the Haradwaith, who had foolishly attacked his brother neutral the Corsairs. If something like this happens, you may shift your energies West and avoid the "Choose or Die!" pressures. An allegiance change limits many of your options, but eliminates long phone bills and sneak attacks by both sides which neither trust nor confide in you.

ECONOMY

One of the strongest points of the Easterlings are their cavalry armies, good commanders and potentially strong economy, along with "safe" southern growth (if Easterling go evil). I recommend immediately raising emissaries and spending considerable efforts toward founding settlements, particularly in the mountains and rough terrain. Mountains can garner you valuable mithril, steel and gold production.

Furthermore, most of the Easterling settlements to the south are not only protected by harsh terrain and few visitors, but typically the South rough terrain stays warm or hot year round, so you know what to expect as to production regardless of the season.

In addition, food can be used to maintain high morale with your armies, or more likely sold as a quick means of maintaining your economy. Also, Fall season goes through November, but all of the players are hit hard during the winter season. Most of the players in my game were not expecting Winter, so we were all scrambling to sell steel at 2 where last turn the same steel sold for 18 per unit. While tempting, think about holding onto your money when November rolls along. When the Winter months occur, resources will be plentiful and dirt cheap.

Summary

From my experience and from what I have seen, the Easterling position is the most challenging in the game. A good economy and strong potential for growth and armies make the Easterlings potentially a key player in the War of the Ring. However, mismanagement and poor planning can cost the Easterlings any advantages they have. Concentrating on good commanders, a few emissaries, mages, agents, a large well equipped army and a strategic attack plan can make the difference between success and failure in the Easterling nation. Good luck and happy hunting.

A good economy in Winter can sustain large armies and wreak havoc on an unprepared and economically unprepared opponent. In my game, the clever Noldo Elves and Dwarves left everyone alone until the Winter when groups of over 5,000 elves and dwarves equipped with siege engines and steel armor (already well trained) much to the chagrin of the Witch-king (and all other Evils as well). This is an example of a potentially effective strategy, good playing, and the role of a stored resources and a powerful economy in Winter.

Because of the harshness of the winter, storing up on gold (or resources if you are paranoid of theft) and building revenue producing settlements (village and larger) can make the Easterlings able to sustain a loss of all northern holdings, yet still maintain a large army and vibrant economy.

Characters

The Easterling strength lies predominantly with the potential to quickly to produce large cavalry armies and vibrant economy. While Easterling characters typically match or slightly exceed the other neutral characters abilities (and artifacts), characters are not the Easterlings' strong point. Both sides have characters and artifacts far superior to your own. I erred in my game by spending 10K to produce multi-classed characters who typically don't use 1 or 2 of their three abilities. I recommend making commanders and agents, because agents steal gold and protect characters and commanders typically lead, train, attack, etc., the vital occupation in the Easterling nation. Big, well equipped armies of cavalry and good commanders make the difference in the Easterling position, although I strongly recommend each army has a mage who can cast a defensive spell, and at least one mage who can scry production and search for artifacts.