

.....

The Oracle Speaks

*Got a question about your game you can't seem to find an answer to? Ask the Oracle!*

MIDDLE-EARTH PBM

.....

Comments

"First of all, this game [Middle-earth PBM] is the best of the best! I haven't even started playing, but I wait in eager anticipation for my first turn [results]. The scope of the game is immense and the rules and options have blown me away! I love it! You have outdone yourselves."

*Ed. Thanks for the 'pat on the back'!!*

\*\*\*\*\*

I just wanted you guys to tell Amelia James that I love her work. Some of the characters I create are from the stories I write. She draws then just as I imagine them while I'm writing. Especially Arleme, Makrunnady n' Fredonia Lyn. And I loved her "Whispers" cover. That's the kind of art I want to see more of!! You should color it and offer it as a poster. I'd buy it!!

*Ed. Amy also did the character sketches for the Middle-earth PBM game!!! - as for posters, see the editor's column*

### Questions

**Q:** Are the 'Suggested Readings' - both I.C.E.<sup>TM</sup> and Tolkien's works - necessary parts of the game or simply supplemental?

**A:** All 'Suggested Readings' are helpful, but purely supplemental.

**Q:** The Rulebook states "artifacts must be used by issuing the appropriate order, in the turn ..." - But order #205 indicates a combat artifact remains in use until something happens to change the situation. Which is the case?

**A:** An artifact will remain 'in use' once it has become 'in use'. If a character obtains an artifact, and does not currently have one 'in use', then one (the most powerful) will be selected. If a character obtains an artifact, and one is currently 'in use', then no change will occur. If the new artifact, or any other is desired to be the one 'in use', then #205 must be given. If a character loses an artifact, but another is still in their possession, then one (the most powerful) will be selected.

**Q:** How does the "Combat Bonus" for artifacts and spells affect Personal Combat? Naval Combat?

**A:** The "Combat Bonus" value is translated into values for:  
Personal Combat = value + 50 (i.e., a 500 bonus becomes 10)  
Naval Combat = value + 100 (i.e., a 1000 bonus becomes 10)

**Q:** How are losses determined in Naval combat?

**A:** Troops are considered to be spread evenly aboard all available transports. Thus, if 15% of your transports are lost, then 15% of your troops will be lost as well. However, warships are there to protect those transports. Therefore, the warships will be lost before any transports are sunk.

**Q:** Are the 'without food' penalties applied to each hex moved through, or applied on the total movement points used?

**A:** The 'without food' penalties are applied to each hex. This means, for example, that a 'cavalry only' army moving through the plains would spend  $(1 * 4/3) = 1.333$ , which rounded up = 2. Thus, the 'cavalry only' army can actually only move 6 hexes, or half their potential distance.

**Q:** Is there a limit to the number of population centers that can be created/posted in Middle-earth?

**A:** Yes. The exact number is determined by the total number of population centers in existence (for ALL players, not per player) and this figure is NOT revealed. However, careful reading of your character's reports as the game progresses will be helpful in determining if that limit has been reached.

**Q:** At what tax rate does the loyalty rank become affected, either adversely or to our benefit?

**A:** The exact values are NOT revealed. However, at certain rates the loyalty rank is assured of going down or up by a fixed amount. However, the intermediate tax rates can result in either a slight decrease, or a slight increase, or no change at all in the loyalty rate. Also, note that the 0-3 increase/decrease is for each and every turn. Additionally, on the turn that the tax rate is changed, there can also be an additional substantial decrease (or increase) in the loyalty, based upon the amount of the change, at all of your population centers.

**Q:** My nation spends more money than it makes in income. How can I fix it? Is this fair?

**A:** Third Age, circa 1650 is a time of recovery and bold plans. This means that some nations have been suffering and are trying to return to a position of power. Others have grand plans to acquire new holdings and strength. In either case, this expansion takes wealth. Thus, it will be up to the nation's leaders to continue these grand schemes/recovery or curtail their nation's growth. Many nations face this dilemma. Suggestions for methods of increasing wealth can be found on page 21-22 of the Rulebook.

**Q:** My nation has a special ability that allows me to create new Agents at a rank of up to 40. What order can I use to gain this advantage?

**A:** The only way to take advantage of this ability is to use the "Name New Character As Agent" order (#731) and with an Agent that has a rank of 40+. This special ability appears in several different forms (for each skill type), and for each there is a different order (#728 - #737). The "Name New Character" order (#725) can not be issued to take advantage of this ability.

**Q:** My nation has a special ability that allows me to create new Mages at a rank of up to 40, but all my Mages have a Mage rank of 10. What can I do to still gain this advantage? Is this a problem?

**A:** At this time in the Third Age, many nations are suffering, or just recovering from the Great Plague. This means that many former heroes have perished. Therefore, although your nation may have the ability to create such Mages, you will have to train your current Mages to at least rank 40 to gain the advantage. This is true for all skill types and many nations may find themselves in this situation.

**Q: My nation has no Mages. How can I create any?**

**A:** The "Name New Character" order (#725) can be issued by any character with Command skill and can be used to create a character with any skill type (or combination thereof).

**Q: Does it make any difference in what sequence I list my orders on the turnsheet?**

**A:** Yes and no. All orders, regardless of in what sequence they are listed on your turnsheet, are randomly shuffled and then sequenced by order number for purposes of order execution ('Bid' orders are then ordered by the amount of the bid as well).

However, the sequence can make a difference if you instruct your character to perform two skill orders (which is not permitted!) in the same turn. In that case, the second order listed will be considered the 'duplicate' and thus ignored. This is because, in most cases, players list their most important orders first, regardless of the actual sequence in which they will be executed.

**Q: I am confused about the turn sequence. Can you move a character and then have him perform an action? Or vice versa?**

**A:** All orders are executed in the sequence determined by the order number. Thus, you could have a Commander train his army (#435), and then move (#850). Or, you could have an Agent move (#810), and then perform a scout hex mission (#915). However, if a character was in one of your own population centers, then you could not have that character move (#810) and then influence (#525) - the #525 goes before the #810. The character could move and then, on the next turn, issue an attempt to influence.

**Q: If a navy is at a harbor/port, and the harbor/port is removed/destroyed, what happens to the navy?**

**A:** The navy is not affected by the lost harbor/port. The navy can remain in the hex as long as it wishes. It can even, if the terrain is 'shore', anchor ships and go ashore. However, if the navy moves away from the hex, and the terrain is not 'shore', then the navy can not return to that hex. Only an army would be able to enter that hex until the harbor is restored.

**Q: When can a navy give army orders?**

**A:** A navy can issue 'army' orders as long as the navy CAN anchor its ships and go ashore. It does not do so, but it must be able to. Only in cases of actual combat (#230 - #260) or movement (#850 - #860) will the ships actually become anchored as a result of another order.

**Q: Why can't we build roads?**

**A:** The roads found in Middle-earth around 1650 T.A. are the legacy of the earlier efforts of the mighty skills of the High Men and Eldar races. Many of these roads date back to the First or Second Ages. Neither the desire, nor the skill, still remains to build and maintain these fabulous constructions.

**Q: My nation has a special ability that allows me to hire Men-at-Arms at no cost. What does this mean?**

**A:** Normally, the first time an army is created, or 'Hired', there is an initial gold cost of 5000. Some nations, if they 'Hire Army' with Men-at-Arms, can do so at no cost.

**Q: Is the 'force' needed to threaten a population center based upon numbers of troops or strength points?**

**A:** The 'force' is based upon the quantity of troops, not the type or quality.

**Q: Can a Mage use any two Mage skill orders, or is it just spells that can be used twice per turn?**

**A:** A Mage can not use two Mage skill orders in the same turn, except for casting two spells, and even that can be dangerous!! Thus, a Mage can not 'Prentice Magery' and 'Cast' in the same turn.

**Q: What is the difference between 'Transfer Command' and 'Transfer Troops' with all your troops?**

**A:** The difference is that the 'Transfer Command' will automatically transfer all baggage and ships. The 'Transfer Troops' ONLY transfers the troops indicated. Furthermore, the "Transfer Command" also allows for the former Commander to join the new army without additional orders. The "Transfer Command" should also be used when you are trying to combine two armies into one.

**Q: Why do some of my population centers appear on my turn map but not others? Is this a problem?**

**A:** The turn map represents the general reports and feedback that your nation receives from its indigenous populace in its historical realm/region. These reports are NOT generated by any single character. This is why the turn map is fixed the entire game, even if you move your capital or base of operations. However, there are several orders (#905, #925, #940 {w/#415}) that can provide as many 7-hex reports as you can handle. These orders generate text reports and a smaller version of the turn map.

This problem is shared, to a greater or lesser extent, by many nations and is part of the difficulties faced when your nation expands beyond its borders or when your nation is scattered about - more orders must be expended in order to keep close tabs on your realm.

Fortunately, these distant population centers will report when they have been approached/invaded/attacked/taken away.....

**Q: Can armies of different nations combine to attack?**

**A:** Yes, but the armies are NOT joined. They simply can meet at the same place and attack on the same turn.

.....

**Q:** I am supposed to kill a certain character - How do I find out who and where they are? How about who owns and where the artifacts are?

**A:** There are several ways to locate both characters and artifacts. There are several Lore spells that can reveal the characters (420, 430) and locate information about the artifacts (412, 418, 428). Actually catching up with the target character, or obtaining the specific artifact can be a bit more of a challenge...

Also, much of the supplemental reading contains details about characters, population centers, nations, artifacts, NPC's, and other special activities that can be encountered in ME-PBM.

**Q:** What is a 'good' stealth?

**A:** Any stealth is good!! Most characters have stealth of 0. However, any stealth over 15 is considered exceptional. Few characters (PC or NPC) have stealth over 25.

**Q:** Can the "reveal production" spell provide the production capacities of population centers you already own, within the radius of the spell?

**A:** Yes, the hexes are chosen at random.

**Q:** If some of your own characters are in one of your own population centers, will they encounter any or all foreign characters that enter that hex, even if the natural "sighting" capabilities of the population center didn't spot any foreign characters?

**A:** Characters will not 'encounter' other player characters unless ordered to do so (scouting, challenges, double agents, ...). Being aware of their presence does allow you (or them) to initiate some interaction.

**Q:** When attempting to threaten a population center, does a war machine help out, other than counting as 25 troops? Please be specific.

**A:** No, they count as just 'more troops' to help the 'threaten'.

**Q:** When attempting to threaten a population center, does a war machine help out, other than having a chance to damage fortifications? If so, exactly how do they count? Please be specific.

**A:** The only details revealed are those disclosed in the rules - others can be inferred from game play.

**Q:** Does army morale go up when an army commander increases in rank?

**A:** No, not as a result of the commander's rank increase. Morale is increased only as indicated in the rules.

**Q:** When attacking an enemy army (only) at one of their own fortifications, will they receive a constitution bonus from their fortifications? Does the attacking army have to overcome the fortifications? If so, can they damage the fortifications in the process (with or without war machines)?

**A:** In response to the first question the answer is 'Yes'. To the second, the answer is 'No'.

**Q:** When defending against an enemy attacking army that is at their own population center (ie when you are simply sieging their population center and they attack you), does the enemy attacking army receive a constitution bonus from their own fortifications?

**A:** Yes, if combat occurs at a hex with fortifications which are owned by your enemy.

**Q:** Is there any way to capture/destroy a fortified population center without war machines (and without sieging, threatening, using emissary orders, etc.)?

**A:** Yes, you can capture/destroy it with just an army. The war machines are a help, but not a prerequisite.

**Q:** Can evasive movement prevent non-friendly armies/navies from having to stop when running across each others paths?

**A:** Yes, that is the primary purpose for moving evasively.

**Q:** Does the casting proficiency for spells already learned increase when a mage's rank increases?

**A:** No, that is usually one of the factors for determining the original casting proficiency.

**Q:** When an agent attempts to assassinate a character, what skill ranks of the target character matter, or matter most?

**A:** The highest one of the four skill ranks.

**Q:** The order "Cast Lore Spell" on page 103 says that success (the amount of detail and accuracy) is based on the Mage rank. However, the descriptions of lore spells in the Magic section of the rules state that (for success vs failure) success is solely reliant upon the casting proficiency the mage has for that spell. Which is true?

**A:** There is a difference between learning a spell, as oppose to casting a spell. When researching a spell the characters mage rank is taken into consideration, but when casting a spell the proficiency rank is then used. We suggest that you reread Order #940.

.....  
**Q:** Can an army, or specific troops, be put on maneuvers more than once in a turn (by different commanders)?

**A:** Yes, and by reviewing the discussion about 'characters with an army' you can determine how this can be done.

.....  
**Q:** Do ships, war machines, or fortifications matter at all in calculating victory points?

**A:** No, they are of strategic importance only. The actual method of tallying victory points is information withheld from the players.

.....  
**Q:** Can a navy move from 2927 to 2926?

**A:** No, nor from 2236 to 2235 nor from 1118 to 1218 nor from 1119 to 1219.

.....  
**Q:** Does the "Reveal Production" spell reveal the five hexes with the greatest amount of that resource or is it random?

**A:** The hexes revealed are chosen at random.

.....  
**Q:** Does the "Recon Area" and "Scout Area" orders reveal navies in water hexes around that hex? What about "Scry Area"?

**A:** The answer to both questions is 'Yes - to some extent'.

.....  
**Q:** Can "Scry Hex" be done in a water hex? What about "Scry Area"?

**A:** The answer to both questions is 'No'.

.....  
**Q:** How exactly does troop morale work? At one point in the rules it says that troops transferred to an army commander take on the morale level equal to the morale rank of the receiving commander. Does this apply to the transfer command order?

**A:** Yes, it is only in cases of split army (morale = 30) and hire army (morale = 10) is this not the case.

.....  
**Q:** If my troops in an army are demoralized so that their morale is less than the command rank of the commander, can I merely transfer them away and then transfer them back on the next turn so that their morale increases to the level of the commander? Can this work in the opposite way also (if the troop morale is initially higher than the commander rank)?

**A:** You can 'merge' disgruntled troops into 'energetic' armies to improve overall morale (and vice versa). But the commander rank has nothing to do with any existing army's morale. Transferred troops simply assume the morale of their new army comrades.

.....  
**Q:** If an army commander does die from a challenge, and there is more than one character with command skill in that army, which character will become commander?

**A:** The highest commander available.

.....  
**Q:** Can I order a character with command skill in an army who is not an army commander to attack an enemy army or population center in anticipation of my army commander's death due to a challenge?

**A:** Yes, but the order will fail if the commander survives the challenge or if there is another character with the same command rank that becomes the army commander.

.....  
**Q:** If a hidden population center is revealed by a Mage spell, can the owner of the population center simply re-hide it the next turn again so that I cannot attack it, etc?

**A:** Yes, it CAN be done, but it is not an ability that many nations possess. By and large, the answer is 'No'.

.....  
**Q:** Since a navy in a land hex (harbor, shore, port) can anchor ships if it wants to, then it is able to use orders that an army can use. Does this mean that an offshore navy can use the order "Split Army" (navy in this case)? If so, can it choose to transfer the specific number of ships?

**A:** In response to the first question - 'Yes', it can even do so without anchoring ships, just as long as it is in an area where it can. In the case of the second question the answer is, 'Yes', but you would have to use another order to transfer any ships.

.....  
**Q:** If I establish a population center far away from my homeland area, do I get a map report for the area surrounding it? If so, how large?

**A:** No, but you can scout, recon or scry to get smaller (7 hex) maps each time you do them.

.....  
**Q:** In your example of population center combat, Borgen's army lost 10000 + 2121 constitution points in troops. Were the war machines damaged? Can they be damaged?

**A:** This is in fact an error. A correction was published in the Errata for this issue of Whispers, but the correct figure should be 2125 only. War machines can not be damaged, but they can be destroyed if the army is destroyed.

.....  
**Q:** Also, if the army did have one less war machine, would the fortifications have been reduced to a tower?

**A:** Yes, they would have.

**Q: Do the false rumors created by the "Spread Rumors" order only last for one turn? Will this order affect the spell "Perceive Secrets"?**

**A:** In response to the first question the answer is 'Yes'. To the second, 'No', only to Uncover Secrets.

**Q: Are warships eliminated before transports in navy battle?**

**A:** Yes.

**Q: Can a navy commander put troops on maneuvers in a port/shore/harbor hex even though his ships are not anchored? What about transferring troops in a similar situation?**

**A:** Yes, but only if they could be anchored.

**Q: Can transfers, other than ship transfers, be done between navies in the seas?**

**A:** Yes, this can be achieved by using the basic transfer orders.

**Q: If there is not enough gold to cover maintenance costs, is the tax rate automatically raised to cover the costs (assuming the needed taxes are under 100%)? In other words, if my tax rate is 80% and my maintenance costs require the additional revenue generated from a 95% tax rate, am I guaranteed that this tax rate will be successfully achieved without an order if needed, or is it possible that my tax rate will not be successfully raised (not when issuing the order)?**

**A:** The answer to the first question is 'Yes'. To the second, it will be automatically increased without an order, but your loyalty will be even more dramatically affected than if you had used the order.

**Q: Under the steal gold order, it says that "success will gain the character gold based on the net revenues and any gold production the population center generated that turn". However, on page 27, it says that capitals are more vulnerable to gold stealing because they house the reserves. How is this true if the amount stolen is based only on the revenues and gold production of the population center?**

**A:** Your capital is the only place where all of your reserve is potentially vulnerable. It is not easy, but a very good agent could exceed the normal gold limits, and a great agent could even clean you out - but only at the capital.

**Q: Also, by the net revenues, do you mean the revenue at 100% tax rate for that population center?**

**A:** Yes.

**Q: Also, can an agent steal gold from a pop center if the nation have no reserves at this time?**

**A:** No, considering that if there are no reserves then, what is left to steal?

.....  
**Q: Can a nation go bankrupt at any time during a turn other than when maintenance costs must be paid?**

**A:** No, only maintenance costs must be paid. Thus, other expenses will simply fail to be paid.

.....  
**MIDDLE-EARTH PBM**  
**Errata**

P 59 (toward bottom of page) - should read:  
Damage to Army                      about 15%                      (2125 / 14700)

Pg 74-76 All recruit orders requiring weapons or armor must have the requisite material in the baggage train, or in the population center stores, as per page 27 (Recruitment).

P 111 (toward middle of page) Initial Cost Charts - should read:  
Heavy Cavalry                      2 units of leather per troop

**Address any questions you may have about your game to "The Oracle Sporks". Printed inquiries may be signed or anonymous but please include your name and game number when submitting.**