

WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



**GAME
SYSTEMS
INC.**

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WORDS FROM THE WOOD

Well, here we are once again. First things first, I would like to congratulate those of you with Middle Earth *fever* for writing your stories and sending them in to share with all of our readers. Secondly, I would like to offer a bit of encouragement to those of you who are a little hesitant with your submissions to get them in and let us all share in the enjoyment of your creative effort. We know that you can do it, so send those stories in!

For those of you with the *fever*, I offer you a most challenging opportunity, and I wonder if you can past the test. GSI, as you know, is running several games of Middle Earth. For one reason or another, we have a few openings in these games, and these positions are available to you to assume as a STANDBY player. These STANDBY positions can only be assumed by players with experience in ME-PBM. NOTE! STANDBY players may not choose a particular game, but will be utilized in any game which has an open position that is still considered viable. Please contact GSI for details on how to acquire such positions. The challenge lies in your ability to reclaim the prominence of the nation which you have taken over and to become a deciding factor in the game.

Players, for those of you who require a little more time in plotting your strategies, GSI has 3 week games currently filling for all the games we are running. For those interested, please note that the response on our 3 week games is a little slower than our 2 week games. Therefore, it may take a little longer to get the full compliment of players for those games. 3-week games include Earthwood-Original, State of War, Earthwood-The Sea Kings, Venom, and, most of all, ME-PBM.

For those of you interested in purchasing Middle-earth Products or Miniatures, you can contact GSI for the available catalogs. These products include reference books about the Nations, Characters, Regions, etc. The Miniatures are of the various Characters of Middle-earth and the NPC's found throughout the land. Please note that when ordering these products, it will take 2 to 4 weeks for delivery after we receive your order.

Well, it seems that Christmas is just around the corner! And, as usual, GSI is offering gift certificates for just such an occasion. So, if you, your loved one, or your friend are current players or are thinking of playing, what better way to surprise them during the holiday season than to give them a gift that you know they'll enjoy? But order early to avoid the Christmas mail rush!

I guess that's all there is for now. So, until we meet again, it's time to sign off until next month. See Ya!!!

Harold Ford



ALONG THE PATHWAYS

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Middle Earth - PBM's Counsels of War

by Raymond Campanale

Elrond stood atop the pinnacle in the highest tower of the Grey Havens, gazing out across the western ocean. His fair Elven face deep in thought, his grey eyes reflecting an immeasurable sorrow as Círdan entered and stood beside him.

"Can it be, Círdan," said Elrond, "that our final doom approaches?"

"Who can say, my friend?" said Círdan. "Because of the music of the Ainur and the vision of Ilúvatar, the Valar know much of what was and is and shall be. However, all things lie in the freedom of Eru and so it is that some things have no foretelling. It may be that your fears may come to pass. All we can do is play our appointed roles and contest the growing evil we face."

"Already the kings of the realms have begun to arrive," continued Círdan. "Thranduill of Mirkwood is expected to arrive with Báin, lord of Khazad-dûm, by nightfall. With the coming of the sun we will call to counsel all the kings of the free peoples and take measures to oppose the shadow of the east."

Elrond turned to face his friend and a spark of menace shone in the depths of his eyes. "If such is the fate of Middle-earth, then so be it. May the Valar protect us!"

The midsummer sun dawned bright and clean as it rose above the peaks of the Misty Mountains in the east, bathing the land in its warmth. The songs of birds rang keen and clear and the cries of the gulls echoed throughout the Grey Havens. Elrond strode through the

gardens and terraces of the citadel deep in thought, a faraway expression on his Elven face that spoke of bliss and beauty in ages past and lands long forgotten. Suddenly the ringing of the tower bells tolled and a page appeared on the path before Elrond arrayed in the livery of the house of Círdan.

"The lord Círdan has sent me to summon you to counsel, my lord Elrond. Your presence is needed," said the page. The Elf-lord nodded to the page and followed him along the path that led to the tower and the counsel chamber. He made his way up the broad steps that led to the archway as the tower guard came to attention. Elrond strode across the great hall with its mighty pillars carved in the likeness of immense trees, some crafted of the darkest obsidian with leaves fashioned of shining mithril, others of white marble with flowers of the purest gold that reflected the light of the many torches which lined the walls of the great hall. Each of the pillars soared to a vast height where their branches reached out to uphold the dome in a dazzling tracery of stone. Elrond stepped through another archway on the far side of the hall which led to a stair of many thousands of steps of the pinnacle of Círdan and the counsel chamber far above.

Another guard stood at the doors to the chamber and bowed low as he stepped aside and the Elf-lord entered the room. All stood at the sight of Elrond and greeted him with a stiff bow or nod. Though all present were kings and lords of great power and

majesty, all regarded Elrond with grave respect. Many there marveled to see him present for all knew that he dwelt in Imladris, many day's journey to the east, and that he left Rivendell seldom, save in times of great need. But all there took heart; for all knew of the great wisdom at the command of the Elf lord. Yet all were aware that his appearance forboded great evil to come.

In the center of the chamber stood a massive oak table of exquisite craftsmanship. At the head sat Círdan as the eldest lord of Middle-earth. On his left, sat the five lords of Eriador and Rhovanion. Elrond seated himself on the right of Círdan. Next to Elrond sat Thranduill, king of the Silvan Elves of northern Mirkwood. Next sat Báin, lord of Khazad-dûm and the Dwarfven empire. On the dwarf's left was Tarondor, king of Northern Gondor and prince Celdrahil of the Southern fiefs. Also present was King Argeleb of the Arthedain kingdom, Hallas, lord of Cardolan and representatives of the Éothraim clans and the other nations of the free peoples.

"Greetings Elrond, be welcome," said Círdan as he turned to face the others present. "All of you have journeyed many days to attend this counsel with hopes that some clue as to the source of this new threat will be revealed to you and a plan may be devised to oppose and counter the dark tide that seeks to engulf all the kingdoms of the Free People. If there is any hope that Men and Elves are to prevail," Elrond broke in smoothly, "then full knowledge of the events leading up to our present situation must be made known to all of you in order to understand the source of our peril."

"Much will here be said," continued Elrond, "that is known to some of you, and still more that is unknown to any that now walk Middle-earth." Elrond's face took on a grave expression as he broke into a slow chant, his voice so low that all had to strain to catch the words.

"Wilt thou learn the lore that was long a secret - of the five that came from a far country? Only one shall return, others never again. Under men's dominion Middle-earth shall be until Dagor Dagorath and the doom cometh..."

"Dagor Dagorath!" said Thranduill in a fierce whisper as he jumped to his feet.

"Alas, it may be so. My heart tells me that this conflict signals the end of this age of the world, but if it is to end in the final battle, only Ilúvatar knows. But if it is the will of Eru, then so it shall surely be. To determine if this is to be the Dagor Dagorath is of no avail. Our purpose is to seek and find a means to contend with the threat we face. That is all that is within our power to accomplish, if that," finished Círdan.

"All of you," said Elrond, "know fully the history of the war of the last alliance and the fall of Sauron. But few among men now remember when the Istari arrived at the havens from the uttermost west about 650 years ago. Few indeed remember that in the beginning the Istari numbered five when they first set foot on the shores of Middle-earth. Curunír; Saruman the White. Mithrandir; The Grey Pilgrim. Aiwendil; Radagast the Brown."

"And Alatar and Pallando," broke in Círdan.

"Yes", finished Elrond. "None now remember the 'Ithryn Luin', The Blue Wizards, for they passed into the east and fell out of all

knowledge of Middle-earth. Little is known of Altar and Pallando, save that Saruman traveled into the east with them but returned alone. To our sorrow I believe that they have surfaced again. I know not what evil could befall us as a result of their sudden appearance."

Elrond continued, "For years uncounted the Noldor have sought for the evil that we knew had returned to Middle-earth, the coming of the Istari proved that peril was near. The lords of the west do not send emissaries for no purpose. For as is known, being sung of in many songs and told of in many tales, the Istari came forth from Valinor to the aid of Middle-earth. What was not known until now, was that the Blue Wizards went into the east and there established realms of their own, nurturing their strength slowly and hiding their intent and purpose with their powers growing ever stronger. It is possible that a dark lord has come again to Middle-earth, and perhaps is in league with the Blue Wizards."

Elrond added, "It has been many lives of men since the rule of Isildur, son of Elendil, and our enemies have had time to grow strong while we are now weakened by plague and internal strife. And what is worse, they command the Nine!"

"The Nine Riders!" yelled Tarondor as he jumped to his feet. "This is ill news indeed."

"Indeed," said Elrond. "The Nine were diminished with the overthrow of their master in the end of the Second Age. But they were not destroyed because the power that Sauron put into them, perhaps bolstered by the power of the Blue Wizards, has sustained them. Yet that alone is not the worst of the news that I bear. In

the fullness of their power, and possibly using the wisdom and knowledge of Sauron, these dark servants have descended into the deep places of the world and gathered to them a few of the VALARAU KAR!"

"Balrogs!" whispered Báin, with a look of great fear shining bright in his eyes. "Yes," said Círdan. "Demons of terror. The Balrogs of Morgoth that escaped the wrath of the Valar when Thangorodrim was broken at the end of the First Age of the world. The Balrogs now haunt Middle-earth once more!"

"Then we are doomed," said Beoraborn, lord of the Woodmen of Mirkwood. "But my people will never give up hope. None of the Beornings ever bowed to any servant of evil, and none ever will. We will fight to the bitter end, if bitter it must be!"

"I did not say that we are without hope," said Elrond. "The realms of Gondor and Anor are not what they were in the days of their glory when Elendil ruled, but the power of Númenor is still strong. The Dúnedain are fierce and fell and the Éothraim are the finest horsemen in all of Middle-Earth. The archers of Mirkwood and the Noldor Elf-lords are still unmatched in battle and the grim valor of the dwarves is a power to be reckoned with. The power of the Free Peoples is greater than the wizards or Sauron may expect. It may be that we can stem the tide of Darkness, for many of the heirlooms of Númenor rest still in Rivendell and they will stand us in good stead in the days to come."

Elrond continued, "It will not be as it was in the days of the Last Alliance, for the Nine now act more independently, whereas before they were constrained by the will of Sauron. Now they appear to rule

kingdoms of their own. Six of the Nine have established their bases in Mordor. With so many in one realm, all grasping for dominance, this could be to our advantage, for they will also be at each others' throats. Gothmog has his base also in Mordor where he hopes to hold their alliance under his direction, but the Dragon-Lord has reopened Dol Guldur in southern Mirkwood. Óvatha, the ninth of the Nazgûl, has established a citadel near the sea of Rhûn and is powerful in that region. The Witch-King moves out of Angmar. This means that they are now able to assail us on many fronts and will attempt to keep our forces divided if they can keep from warring on each other."

"You speak the truth," said king Argeleb. "The flame of war again rages in Arthedain. Late last year a multitude of Orcs invaded my borders in a sudden onslaught. But the Dúnedain are vigilant even in times of peace, watchful though it be, and my legions drove them back with great loss."

✧ Once Again the Drama Begins ✧

(to be continued)

Glengalen The War Begins by Philip Trip

I am Glengalen, the youngest of the ancient race tarrying here in the twilight of the Hither Shore. For I am a member of the Noldor. My race, alone among those in Middle Earth, dwelt in the light of the trees in the uttermost West. But though the ancient lineage is mine, I am a newborn. A sapling among mighty oaks. This is how my story begins.

"It has also been so in Ithilien," said prince Celdrahil. "My warriors have encountered Wolf-Riders there."

"And many evil creatures of diverse shapes have been sighted in the forest," said Thranduil. "Many of my scouts have disappeared."

"The dwarves have not been idle," said Báin, lord of Moria. "We have not forgotten the great wars of old and ever the forges of Khazad-dûm blaze forth with the making of swords and axes. I have made ready a great store of weapons, armor and fortified many a stronghold in the four corners of Middle-earth. We are ready to march forth to war!"

"So be it!" said Elrond. "The Free Peoples still hold great power in Middle-earth. It may be that the Dagor Dagorath is upon us, and doom is at hand. But if the last battle must be waged, then the Free Peoples shall be the victors!"

Into my hands had been entrusted the Mallorn Staff of Elves. A great trust that was, for all that it was driven by even greater need. For the North is marching. From deep within Carn Dum the war drums beat and the tramp of iron-shod boots return the sound like an evil echo. The Orc army of Angmar takes the field against the Free Peoples of the West.

The stroke will be heavy, but where would it fall? That is the question to which we had to know the answer.

To the far west there lies the kingdom of Arthedain, most powerful of the heirs to Arnor's might. If servants of Sauron march there then a trap can be laid. For Lord Elrond has assembled an army in Imladris, ready to pounce on the cities of Angmar, sweeping the encampments of the enemy from the field even as the main host marches against the last of the Dunedain.

But closer at hand is the land of the Red Hills, Cardolan. The blood of Numenor runs thinner there. A stroke against the fortress of Amon Sul might clear the field of foes. If the main body of the enemy takes that route, then Elrond must fall upon the rearguard to distract some forces from the attack.

Yet neither of these is the choice that brings fear to the heart of the Noldor. For Rhudaur is in doubt. Lesser men, with little resemblance to the Edain of old, now rule this kingdom. Many of them already favor the enemy. If they join their Men to the Orc hosts, Imladris itself will be the target. That is the reason I was sent to search the forests of Rhudaur. We had to know if our neighbors still resisted the enemy's call.

The shade under the eaves of the forest was like a long green twilight. But there was a deeper darkness there. Fear. It is too small a word for the cloud that crept like a fog through the wood. I knew that there was some great evil at work nearby.

Too late I understood. He had come! The Black Captain, the Sorcerer-King and the Morgul Lord he is named. But in the days that

only the Elves remember he was Er-Murazor, the Black Prince, in a land now lost beneath the seas. The Witch king of Angmar, Lord of the Ring-Wraiths and mighty among the sons of Men, had come to Rhudaur. Before his power I turned to flee.

An elf moves quietly within the forest, but the Witch king has senses sharper than those of any beast. Suddenly he was before me blocking the path. Black was the Nazgul's raiment and the horse he rode. Black too was the great mace, Nallagurth, that hung from his stirrup. But it was the fell sword *Vasamacil* that he drew as he rode towards me. Blood red flames flickered down its length. I raised my Staff as if to ward off the blow.

Between his cloak and crown no head could be seen. Yet from that hideous void issued: "Foolish Elf! Do you think that twig from the Golden Wood can thwart the will of Sauron! This day you meet your doom!"

I could not answer. The fear that flowed from him like a black breath pooled about me. My tongue clung to the roof of my mouth and my heart nearly failed me. But even as he raised his blade there came, like a golden dawn, a great light beneath the eaves of the forest. A rider, clad in white and astride a white horse, galloped down the forest path. Glorfindel, captain of the hosts of the Noldor, had also come!

"Be gone fell dwimmerdark," he cried as he drew rein, "in the names of Elbereth and the Secret Flame, I command you!" Even as he uttered these words, Glorfindel drew his rune-spelled sword, *Macilromen*, and against the white light of that blade, the dark flames of *Vasamacil* seemed dimmed!

"Come not between a Nazgul and his prey," came the reply, "though you be an Elf Lord, I shall cleave you from crown to saddle!"

"Perhaps, but I shall stand against you if you do not flee. And I do not think that I am fated to die on this day. A little foresight is granted to me and your end I dimly perceive. But my own end is far away, or so I deem."

At these words the Nazgul fell silent. The prophecies of Glorfindel had never failed but often they were fulfilled in ways unexpected. Suddenly the black horse reared and spun. Yet even as the Witch-King put spurs to the beast, a knife flashed from his unseen hand. A Morgul knife it was but Glorfindel was not beguiled. With a flash, *Macilromen* met the lesser blade in mid flight. The foul dirk fell to the forest floor where it writhed and smoked as if alive.

Glorfindel peered through the dark after fleeing the horseman. "His end is still unclear to me

though perhaps I now see something of its shape. But this is not the time to speak of it. You must fly, young Glengalen! Fly to Imladris and warn the captains of the Elves! For it is clear that Rhudaur is fallen beyond reach of hope and the stroke will come by its way soon! Take my horse and fly south to Rivendell!"

"And you lord?" I cried, "How can I leave you here unmounted and alone?"

"Fear not," He replied, "I think that I yet have enough woodcraft to escape on foot and I am bound for the heavens, where mayhap I can obtain help from Cidran, Captain of the Ships, to lift the siege that soon will gird Imladris."

And thus it is that I ride now, a black army at my heels. The battle has begun. Before another day dawns, the fate of Imladris may be decided!

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.

Middle-earth™ *FRM*

GAME 3

The north erupts into conflict as the Witch-king proves himself. He shall find that he is wanting. So shall all Dark Servants find it so.

Argeleb 2 (4)

King Tarondor, Northern Gondor
Do you dare face one of the

Nine in personal combat? I'll be waiting at the gates of Minas Ithil... but tarry not, my patience grows thin.

Ren "The Unclean"
Eighth of the Nazgul

To all,
Know that Dunland and Rhudaur are allies. If one is attacked, both shall join the other side.

Lord Enion of Dunland

Uvatha: Beware, for the Northmen have allies! King Tarondor: Help is on the way! Dendra Dwar: I feel like dog hunting! Elrond: Good luck against Khamûl!

Baalroc

The Mornatur entered the Council Chamber and quickly knelt before his master, "Our armies are ready, Great One." A fire leapt up in the darkness of the Black King's eyes as he hissed, "Go...bring Death unto the Dunedain!"

GAME 7

I hereby declare that I'm going to break the record of number of assassinations in Middle-Earth. Free Peoples despair. For I will be taking the bodies of your dead home to feed my pet monsters.

The Gourmet Assassin

"Shadowking has come to Middle Earth. And it seems like a fine place for a backstab. Bwah ha ha ha!"

Since we are under such a strain for our warriors to rise to war, any gifts to us will be helpful and remembered. Do not attempt to enter our lands uninvited lest we make our decision prematurely.

Ovatha II, Tros Hesnef
Lords of the Easterlings

GAME 9

To all of Good Heart in Middle Earth: The descendants of Numenor at last unite! Our brethren of the Corsairs and Southern Gondor ally with us in the cause of justice. The

kin strife is long forgotten and united we will triumph. To our brothers in the North; Hold fast, the Ring will be found and Sauron overthrown forever.

King Tarondor
Lord of Gondor
Heir to Anarion

GAME 10

Well, it's turn #4, and the war is already shaping up to be an interesting one. Hearty Eothraim-style greetings to all those players - allies, opponents, and those in between - and best wishes to Eothraim players in Middle-Earths everywhere.

GAME 11

Hosts of Mordor,

Any further attempts to 'Persuade' my people to join your horde, will be met with the utmost resistance. This is my first and final warning.

Warlord Tros Hesnef

A call to all neutrals everywhere, Join the Free Peoples and remain free! Embrace Sauron and become just another (servant) slave.

Tired of blood thirsty pillaging and plundering? Do you find your nights wakeful with worries of ruthless raiders from the south? Let the fine people at Corsair Insurance Company (Member FPIC) craft the right Piracy Prevention Policy for you. For a nominal monthly consideration CIC will do your worrying for you. Contact your local, friendly CIC agent for an

estimate. Remember our motto, "Pay or Burn".

Malde Mer-President,CIC

GAME 12

Greetings Mighty Lords!

The Easterling Tribes welcome envoys from all Nations. Trades of news, info and goods possible. Our warriors seek direction-who will be our friends, who our foes?

Ovatha II
Sturlurtsa Khand

Rise up Free Peoples and answer the call of the war-drums. Rally around the Dwarves. Strike fear and devastation into the shriveled, blackened souls of the Dark Servants. Neutrals are invited to join in the victory.

King Bain I

STATE OF WAR

GAME 73

California here we come to crush your bones and steal your women!

The Childrens Television
Workshop

GAME 75

Missouri,

A Federal garrison on your Indiana capitol hex will not help you live longer. You're dead, dead, dead!!

Your Enemy,
Silvanus
The Guardian of Light

To all concerned,
New York Just lost two of his armies. Tisk. . . Tisk. . . One should

learn to come to war, prepared to die. And it's been nice knowing you Vermont.

Governor Bob

GAME 76

Hey Alabama,

Don't worry about your Southern Border. Will cover you and Doug Ingram, if you're here, let me know Player #1, Game #76.

Robert Mackay

Things are looking very grim. Surrounded and out manned I shall not last long. Psych!

Governor of New York

GAME 77

Fellow Governors,

I'm looking forward to adding your heads to pikes outside of my capitol. Pray that you're not first.

Ivan the Terrible
Czar of Wisconsin

Vice President Tauntem invites everyone to a sheep-shearing festival to be held in the Midwest. It'll be quite an event. The folks have already gathered and are begging to be fleeced.

The states are at war once again, and only a chosen few may win, I will be one you shall see, With heads on pikes my enemies shall be, Take heed of this poem these words I say, Or you may be the one to pay.

Ivan the Terrible
Czar of Wisconsin

The armies of Tennessee shall endure a thousand light years.

Yours Always,
Silvanus

The Guardian of Light

Hidden face(or whoever you are), you contacted me in SOW #71 about gaming together. Contact me. Call me if you still have the number or write to me through SOW #77, player #8.

Arafindel, The Shadow Lord
(Formerly Michigan of SOW #71)

EARTHWOOD - THE SEA KINGS

GAME 40

Where are all the braggarts' boasts and prediction 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

The Sorcerer is a traitor and a liar. Ye folk of honor do not trust him.

Stoutaxe

GAME 41

Greetings friends,

Due to a rebellion within the Canadian Post Office I have been out of touch for a while. I'd like those who wrote and offer friendship in return. To the Conjurer: You offered a truce then attacked 2 of my groups. A good move, but you failed to defeat them. That will cost you dearly.

Orion (HEW)

Grisnol has fallen and with it HW25. Let him prove as the first example of my might. One more shall perish by turn 10. Trust not the Hafling Lord, he suffers from Alzheimers and doesn't remember his name often.

Raz

Hive Queen (3) is allied with Diogenes (18)...no wait she's with Raz (17) no! Wait, it's Diogenes. Fenris (24) is with Human Warrior (25). Ironstead at 0508 : City Level 5, Recruiting Level 4, 650+ troops and 0 gold.

EARTHWOOD - ORIGINAL

GAME 209

UGH! Bowels rumbling. Expect serious movement.

Chief Bowels

GAME 218

#23 is the Storm

Conjurer, your time has come. Giants, I can't wait to feast on your race. HEW, get a life. Human Warrior #23, you tread on dangerous ground.

Long live the glory of
Calicia, The Mystic Lady

GAME 223

**** Newflash ****

This Just in:

...Mammoth empire crumbles in just a few turns! One local warrior was quoted as saying,

"Make Rume for us - Here we come!"

Stay tuned for battle reports from Rume, Alcazar and Linden!

GAME 225

The Masque of the Red Death has begun. Choose your dancing partners. Let's have a ball.

E.A.P.

Well, true believers,

Pray to your gods. It will be of no avail. For they don't really exist and neither will you.

Atheist and the Athians
P.S. Yes, this is a threat.

GAME 227

I ride the pale horse and hold aloft the flaming sword of war. Soon the Athian horde shall descend upon you.

Char Ravenswing #9

"My, my, all the player races are dropping out fast, 3 already on turn 6. Looks like only the strongest will survive the lands of Earthwood."

Jerrico

Tales of Middle-earth-PBM The Long Rider's Sojourn

by David Hill

Uvatha, the Long Rider, gazed out across the lake from his castle on the mountain-top. Mists swirled about his domain but through the gloom, twin pools of amber hue penetrated these shadows. Long had his gaze remained constant as he saw many nations expanding on his frontier while he confined himself to this island, harnessing his power.

The Lake-Men's town had once been but a struggling camp in need of help from its neighbors, but now stood proudly on its own. Their numbers were now too many, but too few to stop his designs. All was in preparation for a major campaign against their meddling interests. His southern commanders were to meet at Dilgul to combine their might for this great assault. The time had come to execute his plans to further the cause of his dark master.

Dilgul was usually bustling with activity, but with the high wind and fog, it appeared somber

and sedate, a perfect reflection of Tol Buruth. Uvatha planned to turn those humans from their idle slothfulness to an efficient, productive town under his firm command. Dilgul would be an excellent base for military operations to avoid the complications of naval movement.

Uvatha gazed long and far on that day, planning every move his armies were to make. He knew there were many different races in this region and had sent messengers to those he thought would be friendly to his cause. He could only guess their counsel for now and so determined to execute his plans without thought for their replies, as the words of messengers can be as sly as a hobbit's tongue over a troll's fire. He therefore turned away from these speculations to join his army at the dock where his navy was set to sail.

The trip across the lake was uneventful; no loud speeches were

shouted, no boastful singing nor moronic oaths made. The men were well disciplined as they sat in the hold awaiting the time for battle eagerly. Uvatha expected much from his troops but told them little, for there would be no battle at Dilgul. The dreams of battle kept his army eager to endure the wrenching trip over water so he did not want to demoralize them by revealing his plans.

The arrival of the Long Rider's fleet caused a panic at Dilgul as the peaceful populace fled to their homes and the city militia rushed to guard the gates and keep the streets clear. Uvatha assembled his forces far from the gate and awaited the arrival of Drumuda with reinforcements from Mordor. Uvatha knew that if his men came too near the city, their battle-yearning could not be restrained. Even at this distance, a few still tested the limits of their bows but could not come within 50 yards of the walls.

That night they made camp, though the troops were grumbling about the lack of fighting. They wanted to at least raid some houses outside the walls and burn some fields, but Uvatha would have none of that because he knew he would need those crops to keep the army fed. He therefore kept watch all night and had only to stop one band of dissidents to keep the whole army in line for fear of his wrath.

Drumuda arrived at noon the next day and transferred his troops into Uvatha's ranks. Uvatha then brought his horse to the front of the columns, facing them. Whipping his lance around the sides of his horse and around his back, he finished this awesome display of martial talents with a bellowing "By the Dark Lord!", to which his troops responded whole-heartedly. The battle-cry raised, Uvatha reared his

horse to the front, brought down his mighty battle lance and rode toward the city at a halting gallop, his troops marching behind him.

He could see the men at the city's walls quail at his approach, yet they held their posts. His army outnumbered them two to one and were vastly superior in training, skill, and armament. The battle would be an easy one if the confrontation came to blows, but the sight of the city marshal confirmed Uvatha's suspicion that the gates could be opened another way. This Marshal was a lazy, fat delegator whose eyes were dancing to and fro in desperation for a way to avoid this encounter. The more Uvatha stared at this man, the more he sweated, and the more Uvatha knew this would be an easy victory.

Uvatha halted at the city's gates and his army reluctantly halted behind him. He lowered his lance in the sign for parlay and awaited the Marshal's response. The Marshal had stepped away from the gates under the pretense of soothing the populace, but one of his Lieutenants brought him back. Sweating profusely, he approached the gate, his eyes darting over the vast army arrayed at his gates. His eyelids twitching, he lamented over being born in this age of strife.

"Wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-wh" Men on both sides began laughing at his uncontrollable stutter.

Once the laughter had died down, Uvatha brought the moment back to purposefulness. "What I seek is someone to hold negotiations with. Be that thee or is there someone more eloquent I can hold discourse with?" said Uvatha to another outburst of laughter.

"I, Begulder, speak for the Northmen of Rhovanion," haughtily said the Marshal as he assumed airs in response to the rebuff.

"And quite well now that you have found your tongue."

"Who are you and why do you disturb my populace?"

"You should know full well who I am since we have been neighbors for so long." The marshal glanced nervously at his Lieutenants but found no answer there. "I see the rumors of Tol Buruth grow dim here, but that is of no matter. I am Uvatha, Dark Servant of Sauron and Lord of Mordor. I seek to discuss matters that pertain to the mutual benefit of both our races." Uvatha could sense that his troops were getting restless at this idle speech and so determined to squash this toad.

"We do not see anything advantageous to armed bandits assaulting our walls."

"But we have made no such assault nor harmed you in any way. If anyone should be insulted here, it should be me for here am I, a King of a powerful empire, being made to act like a beggar to find shelter for the night."

"A beggar indeed! You are more like a robber trying to force your way past my gates!"

At this Uvatha charged up to the gates causing the marshal and his men to flee their posts as Uvatha's war-mount snorted chilling mists of dew upon them. His army cheered in preparation for

battle, but stopped as he came to a stop.

"If I wanted past your gates forcefully, they'd be rent asunder and your men slaughtered long before. The only way you can avoid this is to open your gates, lay down your arms, and surrender." Uvatha practically hissed this last word in his wrath.

The marshal had tripped in the press to clear the gates and was rolling around trying to get up. He knew he had no fight in him, and a glance at the men shaking nervously at their posts told him combat would be useless. He was a Northman, however, and that nation was ruled fairly and taxed moderately. But he also knew that their armies were far away and unprepared to take on this huge force gathered outside his gates. The choice of the coward is the easiest one to make. "Can you ensure the safety of my citizens?"

"Of course. No harm shall come to them." I have too many needs for them, Uvatha thought.

Soon Uvatha rode in past the gates. No men were harmed, no cheers heard, only many angry looks on both sides. Throughout the commotion, a gnawing, restless feeling arose among all concerned as to what this change of events might portend.

A Matter of Honor

by Baron Blitz

Ovatha II stared at the fires of his camp as most of his troops slept. He was indeed troubled by the events of late. Founded long ago in The Great Invasions, the tribes of the Easterlings had prospered throughout the plains from The Sea of Rhun to south of the Black Gates. Recently, those gates had been active, spewing forth all sorts of foul creatures...

Ovatha was awakened from his troubled thoughts as a black figure appeared from out of the darkness into the camp. Ovatha's burly personal guard gave the creature a wide berth as The Lord of Khand waved them away.

"Greetings, Great Khan" whispered the cowed figure, "long

have I waited to meet thine acquaintance"

"Speak, foul denizen of Mordor, what is thy wish?" growled The Great Khan as he tightened his grip on his trusty blade.

"I wish to seek thy allegiance to the banner of Sauron. Surely you see the movement of The Black Forces swarming to our banner?"

"Aye!" spat Ovatha II "and your forces will rue the day if they cross The Eastern Tribes."

"As an emissary of peace, I am prepared to offer thee steel, mithril, and mighty artifacts for your service."

"And become a vassal to Sauron? Ha!" grunted Ovatha. "The Eastern Peoples are no one's slaves!"

"The Corsairs have joined us, and Haradwaith even now join with the Quiet Avenger for serious discussion...do you not know that the Free Peoples will fall to our might?"

With a hearty laugh that startled the dark emissary of the Cloud Lord, Ovatha replied "well, perhaps you should ask them!" as a sturdy bearded dwarf stepped from the background.

"Well, I reckon Smellface thar is a mite uninformed for a Dark Servant! Seems that he hasn't heard of the loss of Southern Mirkwood to the elves (with a little dwarven help I might add)..."

"Indeed..." grunted Ovatha II. "However, little dwarf, you must also know that the Long Rider has sacked your holdings around the Sea of Rhun, and but 2 days ago my co-regent Tros in the north tells me that the Northmen have been routed around the same area..me thinks thou shouldst beware..."

With a hiss of satisfaction Gorgun, vice-emissary of the Cloud Lord said "Yes, Great Kahn, we are winning, and my brethren the Dragon Lord has been but set back..."

"Ah, Great Kahn, but did yer brethen tell ye of the sack of Ithroudin, a major city just north of The Black Gates themselves by the Eothraim? A major army of the cursed Dog Lord was defeated thar! Har! Take ye bag o' bones!"

The Dark Servant hissed and drew a glowing black blade and as 100 sharp steel and mithril blades skidded from their scabbards, they made it reconsider its angry actions.

"There will be no fighting here, unless I deem it so!" said Ovatha with an impressive voice that caused both emissaries to back away.

Similar events were occurring with Tros in the north. He and his mages had kept a close eye on the dealings of the Free Peoples and the Dark Forces in the area. Tros and his leaders drilled his 2000 heavy cavalry day and sometimes night and skilled Varag archers manned the heavily fortified towns around the Sea of Rhun and just outside Mordor.

"We must join a side soon" sighed Tros to Ungot, his most powerful mage and advisor.

Our forces are ready, but soon the armies on either side will attack us. Most of the other neutrals have committed, and we cannot withstand the pressure much longer..." counseled Ungot.

"Aye" said Tros with a mighty swing of his sword "soon blood will spill, and our cavalry armies will sweep across Rhovianon to glory! Me thinks with dwarven steel we will make the Dark Armies rue the day they maneuvered through our domain!"

"My liege" shouted a outrider of the army. "The Northmen capital is in flames!"

As this news came in, a wounded outrider also reported in. He was of the sturdy Sariag clan, and was bleeding heavily. His horse had suffered numerous wounds and was

panting, glistening with sweat from the hard ride.

"My lord, Vilisog has been attacked! Our people have been destroyed, and Eothraim riders were seen leaving...Orcs are everywhere around the battle! We must act! Ovatha is marching forces north to meet you!"

Tros cursed as he heard this news. Vilisog was a major town just outside the mountains ringing Mordor and had been well fortified. The Eothraim had been spotted nearby, but had before attacked only evil settlements.

"Very well, to Mordor we shall go!" shouted Tros as his well armed heavy cavalry streamed south to do battle. "Dark banner or white, our

kinsmen shall be avenged! Ride, Easterlings!"

Ovatha II charged north, the Khandian heavy cavalry shining in their mithril armor and mighty mounts, shouting war songs that even The Dark Tower could hear...and hear they did...

"Well done, my emissary..." crackled Gothmog to Shermaith, an army commander in the service of the Corsairs.

"Your troops carry well the banner of the Eothraim.... ha, ha, ha, ha....."

With that, the Easterlings did battle with the Eothraim and avenged their kinsmen, and Sauron was victorious from his Dark Citadel...it was all a matter of honor for the Easterling lords...

TO SEA OR NOT TO SEA....

by Michael Allen

THAT IS THE QUESTION. ONE OF THE MANY SUBTLE ASPECTS OF GSI'S MIDDLE EARTH PLAY-BY-MAIL GAME IS THE ROLE OF THE NAVY. INITIALLY, ONLY SOME OF THE PLAYERS ARE IN THE NAVAL ARENA, BUT ALL PLAYERS HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO AVAIL THEMSELVES OF THIS VERY POWERFUL TOOL. MANY PLAYERS I HAVE TALKED TO FEEL LIKE THE NAVY IS MORE OF A BURDEN THAN A BENEFIT AND WOULD JUST AS SOON SCUTTLE THEIR SHIPS THE FIRST TURN OF THE GAME TO AVOID THE MAINTENANCE COST. IT IS MY BELIEF THAT NAVAL FORCES CAN BE A VERY POWERFUL TOOL FOR ANY PLAYER IF USED JUDICIOUSLY.

NAVAL FORCES IN MIDDLE EARTH PLAY MANY OF THE SAME ROLES AS MODERN MILITARY NAVAL FORCES. PROTECTION OF SEA LANES AGAINST ENEMY NAVIES, INTERCEPTING ENEMY CONVOYS,

ESTABLISHING BEACHHEADS, INVASIONS, TROOP TRANSPORTS, PROTECTING PORTS, AND BLOCKADING ENEMY PORTS ARE SOME OF THE USES OF A STRONG NAVY.

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF DISADVANTAGES TO MAINTAINING NAVAL FORCES.

FIRST, THEY ARE EXPENSIVE TO MAINTAIN. PORTS COST 500 GOLD PER TURN TO MAINTAIN AND HARBORS COST 250 GOLD PER TURN TO MAINTAIN. IN ADDITION, EACH WARSHIP AND TRANSPORT COST 50 GOLD EACH TO MAINTAIN. IF YOU HAVE A LARGE FLEET WITH MANY HARBORS TO SUPPORT, IT COULD EASILY COST YOU 5,000 GOLD PER TURN OR MORE. SECOND, UNESCORTED TRANSPORTS ARE EXTREMELY VULNERABLE WHEN TRAVELING ALONE. A SMALL FLEET OF WARSHIPS CAN EASILY DEFEAT UNPROTECTED TRANSPORTS AND ELIMINATE ALL TROOPS (AND

POSSIBLY ALL CHARACTERS) WITH LITTLE OR NO CASUALTIES. THIRD, CHARACTERS IN NAVIES, WHILE AT SEA, ARE VERY LIMITED IN THE TYPES OF ORDERS THEY CAN ISSUE. FOURTH, MOST NATIONS' NAVIES ARE SUBJECT TO RANDOM CATASTROPHES IF THEY ATTEMPT TO CROSS OPEN SEAS. THIS FORCES MOST NAVIES TO STAY NEAR THE COAST. FIFTH, WARSHIPS AND TRANSPORTS ARE EXPENSIVE TO REPLACE WHEN LOST IN COMBAT. EACH SHIP COSTS 1,000 GOLD AND 1500 TIMBER TO BUILD.

SO, WITH ALL THESE NEGATIVES, WHY WOULD ANY NATION WANT TO MAINTAIN A STRONG NAVAL PRESENCE IN MIDDLE EARTH? IN MY OPINION, THERE ARE QUITE A FEW VERY CONVINCING REASONS. FIRST, NAVIES HAVE AN INCREASED RANGE OF MOVEMENT. THEY CAN MOVE 14 HEXES AND EACH WATER HEX ONLY COST 1 POINT TO ENTER. YOU CAN MOVE FROM ONE END OF THE MAP TO THE OTHER IN FOUR TURNS OR LESS. SECOND, IT IS MUCH MORE DIFFICULT FOR YOUR ENEMIES TO TRACK YOUR NAVAL MOVEMENT BECAUSE IT IS HARDER TO ANTICIPATE WHERE YOUR NAVIES WILL COME ASHORE AND THEY CAN QUICKLY MOVE OFF ANY NATION'S MAP. IN LAND COMBAT YOU USUALLY KNOW WHEN YOUR ENEMY IS MARCHING ON YOUR CITY, BUT NAVIES CAN STRIKE ALMOST ANYWHERE AT ANY TIME ALONG THE COAST. NOBODY CAN DEFEND ALL THEIR COASTAL HOLDINGS FROM NAVAL ATTACK WITHOUT A MAJOR DRAIN ON THEIR RESOURCES. COORDINATION OF LAND AND SEA ASSAULT IS PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE. THIRD, NAVIES ASSIGNED TO CRUISE SPECIFIC COASTAL REGIONS CAN PREVENT OTHER NAVIES FROM SNEAK ATTACKING. IF A NAVY OF

WARSHIPS CAN CATCH POORLY DEFENDED TRANSPORTS IN THE OPEN, THEY CAN ALSO INFLICT HEAVY CASUALTIES WITHOUT SEVERE DAMAGE. FOURTH, NAVIES CAN BE USED TO TRANSPORT TROOPS TO REMOTE POPULATION CENTERS. IN MANY CASES IT IS SWIFTER TO MOVE TROOPS BY SEA INSTEAD OF BY SLOW LAND MOVEMENT. EMISSARIES CAN ESTABLISH CAMPS ON DISTANT SHORES AND BE PROTECTED BY TROOPS IN A FEW TURNS. TROOPS CAN ALSO BE TAKEN TO ASSAULT ENEMY POPULATION CENTERS WITH LITTLE OR NO WARNING. FIFTH, STATIONING A NAVY OFFSHORE OF AN ENEMY POPULATION CENTER, WHILE AN ARMY SIEGES THE POPULATION CENTER, WILL PREVENT ANY REINFORCEMENTS FROM ARRIVING BY SEA. THIS IS PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE IF YOU LAY SIEGE TO AN ENEMY CAPITAL AND BLOCKADE WITH A STRONG NAVY. UNLESS HE HAS TROOPS CLOSE BY TO REINFORCE BY LAND HE IS IN SERIOUS TROUBLE. SIXTH, TRANSPORTS CAN BE USED AS MOBILE BRIDGES TO CROSS MAJOR RIVERS WITHOUT HAVING TO BUILD A BRIDGE. SINCE NAVIES CAN MOVE ON COASTAL HEXES AND MAJOR RIVERS THEY ARE ALSO EFFECTIVE INLAND.

IN CONCLUSION, IT IS MY OPINION THAT THE ADVANTAGES OF MAINTAINING NAVAL FORCES FAR OUTWEIGH THE DISADVANTAGES. YOU MUST BE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO LEAVE YOUR NAVIES UNPROTECTED AND DO NOT TRAVEL IN THE OPEN WITHOUT SUFFICIENT WARSHIP SUPPORT. MANY PLAYERS HAVE ADDITIONAL ADVANTAGES FOR THEIR NAVIES, SO DO NOT ASSUME ALL NATIONS HAVE THE SAME COST, RANGE, OR STRENGTH AS YOU DO. IS IT NOBLER IN THE MIND.....

SHIFTING SANDS

by Philip R. Tripp

*Pestilence, disease, and war
haunt this sorry place.
And nothing lasts forever;
that's a truth we have to face.*

*We spend vast energy and time
plotting death for one another.
No one, nowhere, is ever safe.
Not father, child, or mother. . .*

- The Book of Counted Sorrows

Raz awoke startled by the visions that usually accompanied his sleep. The hellish visions of death. Death of his family, his friends, his home. They came every night, every night for fourteen years. He knew that they wouldn't go away until those who created them were also a dream.

Zar crawled up on his belly, laid one paw on his chest, reassuring Raz that it was a dream. Raz smiled at his familiar and stroked its tiny head. The desert rat squeaked in satisfaction, no words were ever needed between the two—they were bound together for eternity.

Raz quickly broke camp, darkness was stealing the light and he wanted to be on his way. While he packed his goods his hand occasionally wandered to his chest. Fingers softly caressed the jewel that hung from his slender neck. This was what he had quested for—the Jewel of Ralmar, long thought buried in the desert sands, in the tomb of the Magi. It would grant him passage to the Great Spells.

Stuffing the last of his belongings into the sack of holdings, Raz headed away from the last rays of the sun. The journey would take most of the night, but by daybreak he would be home. Raz sneered at the thought

of the wizards when they would see his return.

"Imbeciles!" he thought to himself. "Sending me on a fool's quest thinking I'd return empty handed, begging for forgiveness, pleading, to say they were right, that I was wrong, that I needed more time, time to learn like all the magi needed, to say that I'm not special and seventeen cycles was hardly enough time to access the Great Spells, but alas here it is." Raz grasped the jewel "I've succeeded in their vacant quest, the search for naught."

Raz snickered to himself and Zar rubbed his nose in his master's long black hair, letting out three short squeals, laughing with him...

... The journey was a grueling thirty mile hike through the most desolate sands of the Sanoi Desert. Even the most experienced guide could easily get lost in the drifting dunes, but this was Raz's domain and the warmth of home urged him onwards. When the sun began to pierce the soft blanket of night, Raz noticed the small clumps of sand grass sprouting from the sand, the oasis was near. He also noticed—no, he felt that something was wrong. He couldn't tell if it was from the wind that died suddenly or at the way the grass seemed to bend and weep at the rising sun. Something was wrong

though and it got worse as he neared the village.

The closer he got to home, the stronger the sense of urgency overcame him. He pushed himself onwards through the soft sand, up and down over the endless mass of dunes. Then he felt Zar's whiskers tickle his neck as the rat sniffed the air and Raz wondered what aroma it was that he caught.

It did not take long for him to smell it too, the scent travelled on the early morning air like fog across a lake; not subject to the wind but billowing out in one direction. This was not the first time he had known this stench. It accompanied the dreams every night and he ran to his home.

When he first saw the village he thought he had slipped in time to his childhood again, back to when he had fled the terror before and looked back on the destruction. It was all too much like the nightmare, yet all too real.

Thin black columns of smoke reached to the sky from above huts, the ones that still stood. Many were just a pile of rubble, and the small oasis that gave life to this barren place was tinged yellow. Sulphur had been dumped into the depths spoiling its water forever. The fields that the wizards had taken so long to irrigate were scorched, nothing more than dead black sand now.

Raz stood there mesmerized by the scene, afraid to enter the village, scared that if he did, he would see the souls of his friends rising entwined with the smoke that reached the heavens. But he had to know who had done this, who had once again brought despair and killed his family. As he slowly made his way to the remnants of the village, the foul stench became heavy as he approached. Raz hardly noted it

for he felt as if he wasn't walking in reality. He entered the village expecting to see corpses sprawled about everywhere but he found none. The town was completely empty. His heart began to pound "maybe" he thought, "they escaped." "Yes that's what it was! The wizards caught wind of these killers before they got here and fled, but why didn't they stay and fight?" Many thoughts raced through his head as he made his way to the center of the village. he knew he would find solace there, for that was where the nightly circle was held. The dweomer of magic always lay heavy there and he would be able to get his thoughts straight there.

As he neared the circle he felt the power emanating from it but when he looked up, the peace he'd expected was replaced with terror. Rising from the center of the circle was a giant trident, the weapons of the witch hunters. It stood ten feet tall and impaled on the center prong and bent back at the grotesque arc was the body of the head councilman. At the base of spear, forty-two burned corpses were bound to the spear. They had been burned alive there, roped like a bundle of hay. Raz could see the screams petrified on their faces for eternity. He could see where their flesh had melted together, he could see where their fingernails had curled back from the intense flames. Raz screamed. The sound rolled across the desert like thunder. It echoed off the dunes and carried through the valleys they created. He screamed for hours it seemed, but finally he stopped. The horror didn't go away but the shock did. He knew what must be done. The wizards sent him to prove himself and he had. The war must begin.

The Legend of Keep

by Jason Block

Rink brushed his hairy feet lightly before hurrying off to school. He ran through the crowded, but elated, streets of Snuelton. Snuelton was one of the larger cities in Earthwood. It had seen good times and bad, but lately things had been going rather well. This made everyone happy, except for Rink. He still had to go to school.

Rink gave a hushed sigh before entering the large school hole. It was one of the largest holes in the city. Rink trekked through long tunnelways before he found his classhole. He went straight to his desk and proceeded to fall into a deep slumber. He awoke just in time to see the master enter the hole. Rink rose like the other halflings about him. The master strutted to his desk.

"Good day. You may sit down," began the master.

"Today is History, in the likely event that you have forgotten. Because this is History Day, I am going to enlighten you on a historical subject. I hope that some of you see the logic in this. Now, then, down to business.

"Most of you have probably sworn at one time or another in your life. There are various types of things that you may swear on. For instance, you may swear by The Great Ocean or by the blood of your enemies. If you are very serious, you may also swear by Keep.

There is more to this than you might think. To most of you, Keep is just a myth. To the learned and the traveled, Keep is a very real place. It is located in the valley

between two great mountain ranges to the north.

"Recently, one of our spies penetrated Keep's walls, which are known to be the strongest in Earthwood. Security was extremely tight. He found that Keep is governed by the Wizards' Council. This council is thought to have 1003 members. As if that wasn't enough raw power to destroy all the armies of Earthwood, the walls are protected by an army of ten dragons.

"Luckily, the Wizards' Council is a group of neutral sages, although rumor has it that they may take a stand in politics by attempting to kill a particularly cruel race. These attacks are both rare and horrible. Rumor also has it that the Council awards friendly races who journey to Keep with wizard mercenaries. This occurs only when the race presents an offering of gold to further the research of the Guild. The council seems to care about Earthwood, though only time will tell how much. I hope you all have learned something from my little talk."

"What do you say, Rink? Will you be a good halfling with the possibility of the Wizards' Council zapping you?"

Rink rose defiantly and stated, "I swear to it, sir, by Keep."

With those last words a lightning bolt cracked throughout the room. The master jumped beneath his desk out of fright. Rink jumped, too: about twenty-five feet across and ten feet up, a considerable leap for a halfling.

After everyone had caught their breath, the master spoke. "I think it ought to be said that when

you swear by Keep, it is for keeps."

It's A Spies Life Part II

by David Hill

The golden dragon soared high above the clouds, hidden from the castle below, but aware of all that transpired there. After circling for hours, the dragon plummeted toward the main tower, becoming smaller with each foot of descent until landing on the Anorocian King's windowsill as a raven. The king was pacing in his bed-chambers, pondering the movements of his enemies and the disposition of his forces. "I can't believe the High Elven Warrior has fifty-nine dragons! I have nothing to match against this!" In his state of bewilderment, he began speaking out loud his innermost fears as thunder bellowed its outrage outside.

The raven glared maliciously at the king as though it thought the king's fears a petty concern, unworthy of a figure of such rank. Suddenly the raven emitted a piercing screech causing the king to jump in fright. At this moment a bolt of lightning tore the window asunder and struck the king directly in the chest. He shuddered in shock a moment as the bolt burned through his body, then collapsed in the throes of death. Standing over him was himself.

Court the next day was extremely boring. Food production figures arrived, recruitment figures arrived, troop deployment figures arrived and were compared against enemy troop deployment figures.

The King lamented to hear some philosophy or poetry that could actually test his mental capacities. He finally interrupted someone's report on how sheep could be bred more efficiently to increase the food supply to declare that court was ended and that he wished to meet his spies in his chambers in fifteen minutes. He then fled the court to the bewilderment of his bureaucrats.

The spies arrived on time and shuffled into the king's room to hear their next orders. They sensed something was wrong when the king did not bark commands in his usual peremptory manner. Instead, the king assumed the dwimmer-glow form all dopplegangers used when no others were present.

"Dwigorlux, this is where you fled to? We heard of your disobedience, but cannot believe you would carry it this far! Where is the king?"

"The king has sunk to the bottom of the Ornus ocean by now and I have literally assumed his role."

The other dopplegangers could not believe this nor knew what to do in the face of such treason to their code of conduct. "Why are you doing this? You are risking becoming human!"

"Many deeds must one dare when necessity bids it. This action is necessary to ensure the survival of all races of Earthwood. Their war is little

better than the holocaust that almost destroyed us. These arrogant "higher" races are assuming the domineering airs of Lords and we are but their slaves. They have almost slaughtered the entire fairy race in the quest for domination. I have assumed the lordship of this realm to end this war and I need your help to do it."

The code of the dopplegangers demanded loyalty to the king they served and Dwigorlux knew that. That he wasn't actually the king was a technicality he hoped they would ignore. In their many years of subservience, the dopplegangers needed someone to direct them.

"These circumstances are too unusual for us to make a decision now. We will need more information on your plans."

"My plan is to bring all the dopplegangers together to spread misinformation among the kingdoms. The location of unallied races will no longer be revealed, for these races have become too good at beguiling them with false promises of wealth and glory, then using them as sheep to be slaughtered in the first charge. All reports on enemy troop strength will be vastly overstated so that the kingdoms will become defensive and stop their offenses. And all gold production will be sabotaged so that the kingdoms can no longer

afford to keep their armies. Then peace will once again rule Earthwood."

"All this is too much for us."

"Yes, we will need all of our kind united under this cause."

"But we are the only ones who serve you."

Dwigorlux smiled as he realized their loyalty had changed. "They serve but human kings. I am a Doppleganger King and demand a higher authority. They will continue to pretend to serve their king, but actually will follow the best interests of their race."

"We shall spread your message and report on what they say."

"I greatly appreciate your helpfulness. Soon the day of the Doppleganger will come and we will assume our rightful place as leaders, for we are a superior life-form."

The other dopplegangers did not appear enthusiastic about this change in their stature for they had not as yet tasted freedom. Soon they would realize how pitiable their circumstances had become and that knowledge would foster the power necessary to discard the mantle of subservience. Only then would they restore the balance of power that would allow all races to live in peace.

Encounters by Pete Stassun

As Thrashum II scaled the last ridge, he glanced around at the panorama before him and decided that this was indeed a good position from which to scout the approaching enemy armies. All he would have to do is wait and count them as they went by. Thinking to relax, he walked over to a large pile of glistening rock at the far edge of the slope and leaned down against it. It was not much later that the rock on which he was leaning seemed somewhat warmer than those rocks beneath his hands. With a sudden misgiving, he turned and looked straight into the golden orbs of a huge salivating golden dragon.

Does he Faint?
Does he Attack?
Does he say "Hi"?
Does he Run in fear?

This is an example of the type of encounter which may affect characters in Middle-earth PBM. In such an encounter, the character is given multiple choices and he must choose one. Failure to choose any choice will result in one of the choices being chosen for him. He enters his choice by using the order "reaction to encounter" (order #290).

I have been asked repeatedly since Middle-earth PBM began what type of encounters were available. The questions have included all of the following:

What kind of encounters are there?
How many are there?
Who can have them?
What do you get out of them?
Are they easy or hard?
Is there is more than one type?
How will it affect me?

Obviously, it is time to tell you all as much as I can about what you will face in Middle-earth PBM. The encounter type above is only one of three different types of encounters. This type of encounter is solely for Characters and requires the Character to use one of his orders on the following turn to make the appropriate reaction. These type of encounters may be deadly (like the one above), or they may seem non-lethal. In many of the reaction encounters, Characters face battle which can result in either wounds or death. Doing battle may also result in victory. Victory can bring several different things. These can include riches, spells, artifacts, and even - in some special instances - an NPC who may join your armies and fight for you (for awhile).

Moreover, battles are not the only result. Each of the various answers posed for the Character has its own result. These results are based on who the Character is, the relationship between the Character and his nation with the NPC, and the attitude the NPC has at the present time. In the same light, however, not every answer is wrong, either. There may be an answer which neither harms nor helps the Character and merely defuses the entire situation. You can only learn the proper answers to these questions by trial and error.

Whereas the first encounter type is a reaction type, the next is a two step type of encounter. The Character would be told that there is something which he has discovered which can be investigated. He must then issue the investigate order (order #285). He will then be told the results of his investigation. These results may pose a problem to him which requires either a single answer as in the case of a riddle, or it will tell him what occurred when he investigated. Some investigations lead the Character into circumstances where they are automatically forced into battle. Again, victory in either of these types of encounters can produce wealth, spells, and/or artifacts.

The third general type of encounter is one which occurs to armies. These encounters are more akin to random events than to either of the first two types of encounters. Encounters of this third type will be presented to the player as a series of events which occurred on that turn. The player will be told what occurred, with whom it occurred, and what the results of that encounter were. He will have no option to react to the encounter. This is not as harsh at it seems. All of these encounters are determined, not only by the allegiance of the nation and by the nation itself, but by the allegiance and identity of the NPC, and by a random luck factor as well. Therefore, these encounters do not always react the same way to the same player although there is a greater likelihood that the reaction will be similar to the first reaction and not totally opposite.

So, in general, there are three types of encounters: Encounters to which you investigate and then react, encounters to which you merely react, and encounters which react with you. What type of NPCs and situations make up these encounters? You have merely to read the Lord of the Rings to find out. These encounters can include meetings with Balrogs, Valari, Ents, Eagles, Hobbits, Demons, Spiders, Ghosts, Wights, Shadows, as well as many of the heroes and heroines that make up the history of Middle-earth. Even Gandalf and Sauron may be present.

For new players, you should note that encounters may be in different places and have different results during each game. Solving the same riddle does not always produce the same artifact. Investigating an encounter at one location in one game may bring a totally different result when investigating that encounter in another game. Moreover, many encounters within the same game are mobile. This is to say that they move across the realms of Middle Earth as do Characters. Thus, because you may experience one encounter in one location during one turn does not mean that that encounter will be there in the same location when you return. On the other hand, it doesn't mean that it won't be there either. Many encounters are restricted to certain types of terrain or to certain places or areas in Middle-earth. Other encounters have full range and can roam over all of Middle Earth.

Finally, I have been asked if I can give some hints to players who are faced with a multiple choice question which can easily kill their Character. Let me say this. There has been a lot of thought and research put into the various encounters. If you are met with an encounter which appears ominous, my best suggestion is to research the NPC or place that you have encountered. Much of the relations and reactions which encounters have are based on the history of that NPC or place. By determining as much as you can about your opponent, you have a better idea of what will happen with many of the choices offered. If you can narrow the choices down to one or two, you have increased your percentages of being victorious many times over. There are, however, some encounters to which there is not a good choice. In these encounters battle will almost inevitably result, and you will need a good warrior or a good wizard to emerge victorious. Don't give up hope, however! In many encounters the element of luck is not ignored. All our heroes and Characters have a chance that luck will play a part in saving their lives. If they are lucky enough, they may not be in good shape after the encounter, but they will still be alive.

Finally, one last note. The encounters were put in to add a sense of realism and randomness to the game. They are meant to more vividly recreate the world of Middle-earth and to pose problems and challenges to the players outside of the normal ones of tactical and economic conquest. I certainly hope that you will find the encounters to be as exciting and rewarding as I do. Happy adventuring.

Note to Players:

Due to our receiving several inquiries about Page 59 of the Middle Earth Rule Book, this is a correction and a reprint of that information.

Sample Population Center Combat Algorithm

Army versus Population Center activities can have varied forms. The opposing Army may choose to threaten (to avoid Army losses), capture (to avoid Population Center damage), destroy (to ensure there is no future use), or siege (to avoid losses and Population Center damage at the expense of time and loyalty) the Population Center. Any defending Armies must also be dealt with.

Capture/Destroy Population Center

The Population Center assault process is similar to 'Army versus Army' combat except that only one 'round' of effect is considered. In cases where more than one opponent appears, then damages are split proportionally between the opposing forces. For purposes of orders, the Population Center is considered 'sieged' on any turn a capture/destroy attempt occurs, successful or not.

- A) Compute the Army Troop Strength and Army Troop Constitution. This is the same as per 'Army versus Army' combat, except that tactics are not considered, but spells and artifacts are.
- B) Compute the Army War Machine Assault Value (war machines count as 200 points each).
- C) Determine the Population Center Fortification Value, by level.
- D) If fortifications are present, then the War Machine Assault Value is compared to the Fortification Value and, if the War Machine Assault Value is greater or equal, then the Population Center fortifications are considered destroyed. If the Population Center fortification defensive value is greater, then the level of the fortifications is reduced, proportional to the War Machine Assault Value.
- E) Determine the Population Center Value, by size, and add any remaining Fortification Value. The Population Center Defense is this sum, modified by the loyalty of the Population Center.
- F) The Army Troop Strength is then compared to the Population Center Defense and, if the Army Troop Strength is greater, then the Population Center is captured/destroyed, and the size reduced, as ordered. If the Population Center Defense is greater, then the Army is repulsed, without changing ownership or Population Center size.
- G) Compute the percentage of losses for the assaulting Army by subtracting the Population Center Defense from the Army Troop Constitution. If the Army Troop Constitution is less than or equal to zero, then the Army is destroyed at the end of the assault. If the Army Troop Constitution is greater than zero, then damage will be taken from the Army Troop Constitution and losses are incurred by all troop types.
- H) If neither the Population Center nor the Army was destroyed at the end of the assault, then it is possible that the conflict may continue next turn.

For example:

Using the figures above, assume that Borgen's Army is attacking a major town, fortified by a castle, loyalty = 85%. Borgen's Army possess 50 war machines.

Army Troop Strength	7467
Army Troop Constitution	14700
War Machine Assault Value	10000 (200 * 50)
Fortification Value	10000
Population Center Value	2500
Population Center Defense	4625 (2500 + 0 [10000 - 10000]) * (185% [loyalty]))
Damage to Army	about 32% (4625 / 14700)

Since the War Machine Assault Value equaled or exceeded the Fortification Value, the fortifications are destroyed. The Army Troop Strength is also greater than the Population Center Defense, so the Population Center would fall to the attackers. Complete effects upon the size of the Population Center will depend upon the order given (capture/destroy), but the fortifications will no longer be present in this case. If Borgen's Army had possessed even one less war machine, then the fortifications would have been reduced but held, and the Population Center Defense would have been increased.