

WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



**GAME
SYSTEMS
INC.**

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POINT NW 10



WORDS FROM THE WOOD

MERRY CHRISTMAS!! HAPPY NEW YEAR!!

Another year draws to a close and we here at GSI wish you all the best in the upcoming year. Change is common to us all, and we here at GSI are no exception. Middle-earth is now a reality and scores of players are rallying to the clarion call of the Free Peoples or of the Dark Servants. For an example of how a new player views his entry into Middle-earth, see the story by Glen Baker in this month's issue! Also, we bid a fond farewell to Jason ???? (who is off to bigger and better places, we hope) and ask you all to say hello to our newest member, Michelle Heath! Welcome aboard, Michelle!

Remember, Christmas gift certificates are still available before the holidays in all denominations! This is a perfect gift for that gamer who has everything else! Just write or call and let us know who is to get the gift and how much it is to be for. Remember that we can deduct the cost from an existing account if need be, or you can send a check or money order to cover the cost. But do it now! Make someone's Christmas bright!

I want to thank all of those players who took the time to send in stories and strategy articles. Well done! And all of you who didn't - take a look. It's not that hard and we all like reading them. So get busy! I'm also pleased that so many of our new players are utilizing the personals in this month's issue. Remember, the first 40 words are free to current players! Also remember to include your most recent security code when sending in personals and any other correspondence to GSI. It's important and it safeguards YOU, so please don't forget.

A much larger number of players have decided to have their turns read to them during the first week than we anticipated. This was only meant to help those people who absolutely HAD to know the results and couldn't wait for the turn to arrive. So, starting December 1, 1991, all requests for turns to be read over the phone during the first week after the turn is processed will be charged \$3.00.

Now, in answer to some inquiries which we've had over the past few weeks, let me relate the following:

In order to avail yourself of the reduced long distance phone charges by using the deal arranged by GSI and MCI, you must call MCI at 1-800-333-3636. This number will get you directly to the right personnel. It's a great idea to save money!

Some players have asked whether we have army counters that can be utilized in ME-PBM to keep track of enemies and allies. We don't have counters, but we use the Middle-earth miniatures which are available from GSI. These are high quality miniatures from Prince August and are recognized as appropriate to Middle-earth by I.C.E. If you're interested, look for the flyer which we're sending out now!

If you lose a character, but want to keep his sketch, or if you want to design your own sketch for a character in ME-PBM, just let us know. For a one time fee of \$6.50, we can assign that sketch to your new character for the remainder of the game!

Finally, 3 week games of ME-PBM are filling up almost as fast as 2 week games. So, if you need that extra time to plan your moves, just let us know that you want to sign up for the 3 week game. These games are also available for Earthwood!

Again, we wish you the very best for the Holidays and, until next month,

Good Gaming!



Pete Stassun



ALONG THE PATHWAYS

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This Month's Cover: "Duel"
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Middle Earth-PBM - A New Player's Perspective

Play-by-mail games had lost their appeal with me years ago. It seemed that all PBM games had fallen short of my expectations. In general they were either too simple, and posed little challenge, or they seemed challenging but your options were very limited once play began. Also as a Novice player playing an unfamiliar PBM system, you can quickly fall prey to the seemingly ever-present experienced player who knows every player's position inside and out, and knows how best to exploit your weaknesses, usually resulting in your being knocked out of play before you learn how to play well. ME-PBM is not in the same category as any PBM game I have experienced. Virtually limitless options and thrilling turn results have once again turned me into a PBM believer.

When a friend of mine who has been playing Earthwood for years told me that G.S.I. was putting out a game with Tolkien's Middle-earth as a backdrop, I was cautiously interested. My first question to him was "how much?", and when he replied " \$6.50 a turn," I almost laughed in his face. But, as he explained more about the game to me I began to think it might be worth a try. Three things were in favor of me joining the game:

1. I'm a long time Tolkien fanatic.
2. ME-PBM is based on the I.C.E. (TM) Middle Earth Role Playing system which I have been using for years.
3. I would be beginning the game when it was first opening up which meant I wouldn't be facing any players who knew the game inside out. So after making up my mind, myself, my friend and my older

brother sent off our registration fees, and we waited patiently for our rules and first turn sheets as Dark Players.

Upon receiving the starting turns and rules book, I found I was looking forward to this game even more. As my group of players compared player positions we found that things were well balanced between player positions. One of us had powerful characters, fair production, and lackluster troops, another had well trained troops, decent production, and poor characters, and the last of us was dealt a fairly even hand in all areas. We mailed off our turns and eagerly awaited our results. Unfortunately our first turn results were fairly miserable mainly due to our lack of knowledge of how the rules ran which caused us to issue some orders improperly, or at the wrong time. A pleasant surprise I hadn't expected was that every other Dark Servant player had written three times, either sent or replied to a message. Communications between the players was opened almost immediately at the start of the game.

Communication between players is what makes ME-PBM so great. In other games, Earthwood for example, if you are a new player and you open communications with another nation, you never know if you're going to be backstabbed, you're basically on your own. In ME-PBM cooperation between allied players is not only helpful, but is required in the early stages of the game. The need to create inroads against your common enemy outweighs the need to fight amongst yourselves (for example: one of my victory conditions requires that I terminate

one of my brother's characters. Now should I do so or should I let him be until later in the game when victory conditions are needed because the game is close to ending? As it turns out my game was filled with people who had playtested the game and they were experienced. This however was helpful, not harmful to my position. The reason it was helpful is simple, all Dark Servants or Free Peoples players have one main objective: seize the One Ring and either hand it over to Sauron or destroy it in the cracks of Mount Doom, so cooperation is desirable with everyone on your side. The experienced players cleared up some rules questions I had and offered some advice on how to succeed. Also, one experienced player set up an information network so that we could have a good idea what was going on in the overall picture of Middle Earth.

Only on the first turn is being a novice player a hindrance, and beyond establishing communications with other players will probably give you a better idea of what to do. To those of you who may be getting ready to send in your first turn, here are a few things my group made major errors on with our first orders. Don't try and create a Camp on your first turn. The general sequence of events (pg 62 of the rulebook) is the exact sequence that orders are issued, so for example you issue these orders for one of your characters: first orders Move Character (order #810) and for your second order you chose Create Camp (order #555) in order to move to a vacant hex and create a camp (sounds reasonable right?) you will find that Emissary orders come before movement orders in the general sequence of events and that you are actually (when your orders are processed) trying to create a camp first and move on to the hex afterwards (and since your

characters already start on population centers you will have washed an order trying to place a camp on an already established population center.) The Research spell order (#705) is also very tricky. Before you issue this order, first read pg 32 of the rulebook, especially the part under the heading of "Prerequisite" very carefully before deciding which spell you should research. The explanation of the research spell order (order#705 pg 92) doesn't mention the need for prerequisite spells, nor does it refer you to pg 32 for more information on researching spells. This I feel is an oversight on G.S.I.'s part, but it is very important that you understand that section of the rules fully if you want to develop a mage character. [Editor's Note: This has been corrected in the newest edition of the Rulebook.] When you decide on using your armies aggressively be sure your nation at least dislikes the nation you are planning on attacking, otherwise some orders may not go through. (Threaten population center (order #498) for example seems simple and straightforward, but if you read the order carefully you will note that the population center has to be that of an enemy, which means you have to at least dislike that nation in order to succeed.) The most important piece of advice I can give you is to read the order descriptions for each order you issue as you write them down, so you don't forget any information, or any prerequisites listed that you may not have fulfilled.

Take the advice of an old PBM gamer, ME-PBM is by far the best game system currently out on the market. Knowledge of the Tolkien universe is useful, but not required to succeed. The game is worth far more than the \$6.50 a turn it costs due to the hours of enjoyment each

turn, and the complex world which you will be exploring.

Join with a friend and you'll have twice the enjoyment.

Glen Baker
A.K.A. Witch King (ME-PBM game #7)

Tales of Middle-Earth PBM
'The Dance of Death'
by David Hill

The town of Lest was nestled alongside the Sea of Rhûn and had a harbor where the fisherman's boats anchored for the night. The town had lived in peace for so many years that few remembered the art of war, though it was practiced by some. The sprawling plains around his city offered bountiful harvests and the lake plenty of fish for the town's needs. The populace grew very content with their life and and rapidly grew in numbers. One of the children born at this time of contentment was Barlin who rose to become a great leader of the town.

Barlin grew up in a simple, natural world full of wonderful toys and other, indolent luxuries. He obeyed his father, played with his friends, and had a perfectly happy childhood. The plague affected some of its citizens, but none of whom Barlin knew, so there were no hardships to challenge his existence. Barlin grew up to love the world and he feared no peril from it. His eager spirit made him a leader among men who took joy in following this hopeful lad. His sense of adventure took him wandering far about his land and beyond as he mastered boatmanship to aid him in his journeys.

Barlin seemed to live a charmed life as he never encountered trouble in his travels and made many friends. His noble spirit led him to an appointment as commander of the Northmen navies, despite his youth. Everyone liked the young commander and assisted him in learning the technical aspects

of commanding a fleet. Barlin knew well how to lead men and his friendly, outgoing personality quickly won over the most contrary person.

He had not held this office for long when alarming news reached him - Dilgûl had been captured! He was ordered to investigate the site and determine if it could be retaken. He accepted this charge with eagerness and exultation at his anticipated victory. His fleet sailed off on a sun-filled day of hopefulness.

The trip across the lake did not take long as the weather was very agreeable. The grey fog surrounding Dilgûl did not darken his spirits as he brought his ships up to the shore. Indeed, the mists were being cleared by the wind that had brought his ships forward so quickly. Even the sight of the Long Rider's army surrounding the beach could not daunt the spirit of his army.

Barlin hurriedly assembled his army along the beach, anticipating a sudden assault from his foe's cavalry. Midway through his preparation, he felt a sudden chill and paused in bewilderment. Looking toward the enemy lines, he saw a black shadow mounted on a tall war-horse that sent shivers down his spine. Barlin had never before felt fear of anything and so knew not why his body was reacting so strangely to this apparition. The horseman was like a beacon of darkness absorbing all the light that the sand reflected.

The figure beckoned for him and he thoughtlessly wandered in front of his army. One of his

experienced lieutenants, aware of his danger, halted his progress before he became too much of a target. Barlin was dazed and uncertain of his surroundings, and ignored the lieutenant's attempts to grasp him as he staggered forward. The lieutenant smacked him across the face to bring him back to his senses, to the dismay of his troops. Barlin looked as though he had been in some far distant place.

"What are you doing!?" demanded Barlin, thinking this was treason.

"Whacking some sense into you. You were marching straight to your death."

"I was doing no such thing." Then Barlin saw how far away they were from the army. "How did I get here?"

"I know not, sir, but I think it was some deviltry from that Nazgul."

They both looked toward the enemy and were surprised to see the Nazgûl heading toward them. They did not want to run away like cowards, so they held their ground and Barlin raised his sword, preparing to signal his army to charge.

But the Nazgûl was not leading his army to attack, he was coming within range to parley. "Greetings, Hero from the North, what do you do in my lands?"

Barlin was taken aback by this friendly exchange as he had only expected to only survey the lands and attack if need be. He did not think words would accomplish his mission.

"These are not your lands, they are the lands of my ancestors and you have no claim on them. I am here to reclaim them for the Northmen."

"Are you indeed? And how will you accomplish this? Your pitiful army could not rout a den of Hobbits, let alone my fierce cavalry."

Barlin was a bit perplexed by this as he had not had the time to survey his enemy's army nor plan how he would assault them. He finally took a good look at his enemy, but thought his well-armed army could still overcome their superior numbers.

"But this disagreement should not come to blows," suggested Uvatha in sympathy for Barlin's plight. "This is a conflict of rule and so should be decided by a combat between the leaders. You and I should be the sole combatants to decide whose land this is."

Barlin was about to reply when his lieutenant swung him about for a private conversation.

"You cannot accept, sir. That is a Nazgul, more deadly than any living thing in this world."

Barlin threw the lieutenant's arms off him. "That is enough. I will not be considered a coward by my troops."

"Your troops will not survive if you die."

"Nonsense. I am not afraid of that foul creature."

"Sir, you should be. Have you ever killed a man?"

"I have been tested many times in combat."

"But have you ever killed anyone?"

"No, but I was a top fighter in my class."

"Sir, this is not the time to learn about mortal combat."

"Enough, Lieutenant! I will accept your challenge and send your foul carcass to the doom it deserves!" So, fearlessly, Barlin agreed to fight the Nazgul, but whether this act was heroism or foolishness was yet to be determined.

Barlin strode forward, reviewing the tactics his trainer had taught him. Uvatha dismounted and it wasn't until then that Barlin noticed how tall the Nazgul was, for

he had only seen him in the distance before. A full head and a half taller than Barlin was the Nazgul and had much more massive shoulders. The mace the Nazgul wielded with one hand could not have been lifted by both of Barlin's. Still Barlin did not quail, but marched forward in ignorance. Barlin was about to learn his most important lesson, how to die in a thoughtless act of courage.

The battle did not last long. Uvatha swung his mace hard down upon Barlin. Barlin blocked it with his shield, but was pounded to the ground, his shield arm broken. Unable to move his shield, the second blow crushed his skull. The

lieutenant ran forward to salvage Barlin's remains, but he also fell to Uvatha's mace.

Victorious, Uvatha signaled his army to charge. The Northmen army, appalled at the ease with which their commanders were dispatched, broke ranks and routed back to the ships. Uvatha's cavalry overtook most of them and rode them down without losing their pace. The few who reached their ships were burned alive on them. No Northmen survived to report the conflict. The mastery of Dilgûl was unquestionably determined and the Great Hero from the North set upon a pike for carrion birds to feed upon.

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™ **FBM**

GAME 2

You know...I'm getting a little tired of moving around all the time I guess I can't get along with my neighbors.

Arfanhil

Merry Christmas to the Dog Lord! This year I gave him 4000 steel swords, 1500 twanging bows, 700 axeheads, fire, death and destruction! And these are just the stocking stuffers!

Gallantrisdidy of the Sinda

GAME 3

The plains of Rhovanion are hereby closed to the forces of evil.

Any Dark armies found in this region are subject to immediate annihilation. I fear that you have overextended yourself, Long Rider.

The Althyn, Mahrwin
Horselord of the Eothraim

At the head of an army of horrible might, The Lord of Morgul sat atop his black charger before the walls of Fornost Erain. The carnage of two Dunedain armies lay strewn about his dread form. "Argeleb!" he commanded, "I await thee..." But the Lord of Men was too afraid of the Black King to come forth. "So be it, Coward of the Dunedain." Turning to his hordes, the Lord of the Nazgûl signalled for the fall of Arthedain...

The storm has broken in Arnor. My army is busy digging a trench to bury all those dretches that once served the Witch-King. When will evil learn, they can't just win.

ZARENDARGER

War rages. Free Peoples struggle against Dark Servants while Neutrals sit on the fence. Where will they fall? They are the key.

Great Prophet Bob

Major battles are happening at Fornost and Minas Ithil, but I haven't fought anyone yet. Will diplomacy be my downfall? I hope not, but maintaining my army is costing too much. I think I'll attack...the Dog Lord!

Baaltrac

Bain,

At last a good nation has crawled out of its holes to confront me. I guess your grovelling offer of peace was false. I can't wait to meet you on the field of battle and reduce my deficit!

Uvatha

GAME 4

Our diplomatic channels are officially open concerning the subject of National Allegiance. Do your best to sway the strongest nation in Middle Earth. Only serious offers will be considered!

Haruth Raman, Regent

GAME 5

The Northmen have been crushed, the might of Gondor has been smashed, and the armies of Arthedain lie in ruins. The Free Peoples shall soon be swept aside and the Dark Servants will rule!

Ren the Unclean

GAME 6

Greetings Middle Earth,

Have faith those of good heart. With brave sacrifices, we are about to cleanse the North, and soon turn East and South with aid. Take heart, Gondor and Beornings, we are coming. For those neutrals whose hearts are turning black, aid us or feel the fury of the Elves.

And to my penpal Morgeleb... Your dark veil is paperthin, your words have proven empty and now you feel the wrath of my "my mortal friends". As for your desperate challenge...I, Elrond, am coming!

Aure Entuluva
Elrond Peredhel

GAME 7

Strangely enough, the first victim of this war will be the Haradwaith done in by all of its neighbors. From Angamaitë's report to the Captain's Council.

Greetings Ovatha II
(Lord of the Easterlings),

Why must the leader of a nation continuously debase himself and go forth BEGGING for aid from both the Free Peoples and the Dark Servants?

GAME 11

Attention Good Guys, from us Bad Guys. You are treading on sacred ground. Stay clear or perish.

The Voice

GAME 13

Question: What will be soon lining the roads that lead to Mordor?
Answer: The herds of many a fallen Eothraim warrior. . .

LONG LIVE SAURON!!!

Greetings Neutral Lords,
SAURON bids you greetings and cordially invites you to participate in his victory over the Free Peoples. ALL HAIL SAURON!!!

By far, the Evil forces have been more persuasive in this game in convincing me of what side to join. Other Neutrals and Dark Players, contact me about the plans we shall make!

Dunlendings

Northern Gondor: You didn't need Daigag or his army...did you?
Eothraim: You will lose three armies within two turns.
All other Goods: I take personal pride in the defense of Mordor. Stay Away.

Dendra Dwar

GAME 14

Teldûmer of the Corsairs spits upon the Dogs of Gondor! Fish shall dine upon the bones of your Navies

and shall fight over the remains of Prince Celdrahil.

Lord Teldûmer of the True Dúnadan

STATE OF WAR

GAME 75

Montana: You're too small!
Oklahoma: You're pure evil!! EY-Missouri: You're dead, dead, dead!!!

Silvanus
The Guardian of Light

GAME 76

Texas- Don't think my Nevada campaign will distract me from taking your states. You're next!
Governor of Kansas

GAME 77

Those who would ally, come quickly! I go to war, and neither distance nor presumed might will protect my enemies. All who remain silent risk my wrath. Speak with me quickly before the door shuts.

Governor Frelenghuysen of New York

Greetings fellow Governors;
our aims should be threefold-

- 1) Secure 2.4 states for ourselves.
- 2) Destroy the Federal Government.
- 3) Watch the Trailblazers win the NBA title!

The Magic Man
P.S. Good luck on all three.

A saying from the Old West- Ever see a cowboy ride a beaver while swallowing a potato. It's not a pretty sight.

EARTHWOOD - THE SEA KINGS

GAME 37

The Spartan bones are now dust, the Macendians a memory, the Necromancer is nearly done. The Barbarian hides in the hills, owning not a city. Tharzuhl and his allies count the days.

GAME 39

Sorcerer,
I'm ready for you now. Name the PLACE.

Necromancer

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

After much research and summoning, the Crimon Bat awakes . . . Its hunger must be slated as the Glow line spreads with its advances. Beware, the Bat has very few friends. . .

LORD LUCAS

Ha! I take Keep! Sorcerer and I rule all soon. I crush your heads! Nobody home! Ha!

And the spy returned to tell his master his good report. Unfortunately, master was not present. Neither was his 2000+ demons... Hmm... Where did he teleport?

GAME 41

Lairs are #3, #6, and #25!
Sam the Seer

HEW,
Who are you trying to fool? If you wanted peace, you should have written back and stayed away from my city. Of course I attacked you at my city gates! Was I supposed to give you the key?

Conjuror

Galerous(6): Sure I'm your friend... soon as my dagger severs your spine Overlord(25): Please (repeat 6). Püteon (7): Hmm! Still...Mirk. No wonder it stank. Warlock: Sizzle, crack, pop, ahhhh... Raz: Later Warlock. Thanks Overlord, for Grisol that is. Where's Samwise?

Could someone please tell me who I'm allied with. There are so many that I can't keep track.

Diogenes

To whom it may concern,
I am neither a) allied with the Barbarian, nor b) taken out of the game. Please verify rumors before blurring them out in the future.
Thank You,
Overlord (HW#25)

To Everyone,

Trust is generated by the perceived strength of your ally. I destroyed the Athians(#12), 10000 CON at the cost of 300. What has Raz done? Will he keep Grisol? Samwise

The Necromancer rides the Storm. The Necromancer is the Storm. Storm the Necromancer is coming.

EARTHWOOD - ORIGINAL

GAME 188

I cast a spell of disappearance. Then spent 5 moons meditating in a desert. Upon my return I was the strongest player left. Three turns later I have dispatched the last warrior. My magic now rules this world. Next... Deveel

GAME 218

Calicia,
You called me a wimp. Well get ready for some whiplash!! The Storm likes dangerous ground and I'm saving a piece for you. The Storm

GAME 219

Mithrandir and Tipareth,
That was kind of costly, 3000 NPC's to our 600. OUCH!! Middle-Earth players, beware, I am coming. King Oberon Defender of the Athians

GAME 220

Wizard,
I see you're ready for another round of musical cities. Don't you know any better games? I'm getting bored. Tyr

GAME 225

Kingdom for sale: complete with sharp tongued, sexy heroines, evil nasty villains and of course an ever faithful sidekick. Reasonably priced, friendly neighbors. For more info, contact the; Earthwood (Un)Real Estate Co. C/O Whispers of the Wood Box 69

Dear Sniffles,
I've always found foot fungus fascinating. Is it true what I hear about Gnomes and feathers? Where can we meet? Love, Sandy P.S. Sorry Char(lie).

GAME 226

It's been said that Dwarves hide in holes and smell funny. Since you've emerged from your holes at least take a bath. Lux the Conjuror

Is anybody out there? Why aren't you talking? Just an update - 8 and 21 are going to die, good job 23. Kilroy Watchman of Earthwood

GAME 227

Wanted: An intelligent enemy for battle and/or war. Must be fairly competent (that leaves most of you out, fools!) Apply to #9, Char Ravenswing, Athian King, Lord of the West.

*5 players down and it is only turn 8! At this rate, the game can

be over at turn 30! Let Earthwood be united!"

Since they exterminated our brothers, the Mountain Dwarves, the Gnomes will pay with lives of their people. Thorn Silverstone Lord of the Hill Dwarves

Correction

Please note that in our November issue we incorrectly credited someone else as being the author of "Glengalen-The War Begins" when it should be given to Michael Powell. Please except our apologies for this grave oversight.

The Oracle Speaks

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

MIDDLE-EARTH PBM

Q: Can war machines be destroyed? Can they be damaged?

A: War machines can't be damaged, but they can be destroyed whenever they are used in combat.

Q: What is the benefit of sieging a population center?

A: The benefit of a siege is that it lowers the loyalty of the center, food stores and doesn't allow transfer orders affecting the pop center to take place. There is a chance that you can reduce reducing the fortifications if war machines are present. This makes it much easier to threaten or assault the pop center, but it does take time...

Q: How is gold determined?

A: Gold reserves can determined by using the following formula:

Old Reserves	What you had at the end of last turn
+ Expected Revenue	Combat losses from <u>this</u> turn may affect figures. You don't get revenue or gold from sites you no longer own!
- Old Maintenance	You must <u>pay/maintain</u> the troops so they <u>will</u> fight!!
- Expenditures	Funds spent executing orders this turn
+ <u>Credits</u>	Funds received for the sale of goods or transfers from others
= New Reserve	'Current gold reserve' listed on this results sheet

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

WARGAMES
by S. Layne Potter

The forest beneath him glowed faintly in soft, pastel colors, the sub-ethereal signatures of various life forces. The beauty of the multi-colored patterns was lost to him, for he was intent upon one trail, a signature that was familiar to him but which he had not expected to see in this area. The nether winds carried his mind above the trees as he cast about with his senses. The teaming life of the forest clouded his perception, diluting the trail he sought, making it near impossible to find. He had just enough strength for one last scan.

"The south quadrant," he decided as he unleashed his mystic energies. His perception fanned out across the various patterns below.

"There! At last I've found them," he rejoiced as his senses picked out the specific patterns he sought. "Now a close scan to verify my suspicions and then homeward." He narrowed his focus to perceive the patterns more clearly.

Landarium, magician primus of the brotherhood of HighLhun and Governor General of Lemoor, awakened from the trance, willing away the fatigue brought on by the night's ethereal hell ride.

"The master is tired is he?" a sibilant voice asked from the darkness. "There are ways of remedying such pains," it continued, "for a price."

"I need not your remedies, Azaric," the mage replied. "Begone from me, before I return what little

remains of your shriveled soul to your true master below."

The creature groaned in pain at the sound of its name. "You do us an injustice, my lord. We merely wish to aid you as our bargain states."

"I said I do not need your kind of aid. Begone."

The creature quickly scampered away into the darkness, its black scaly hide rendering it invisible. Landarium, fully awakened by this minor confrontation, turned his thoughts to the information gathered. "A strong contingent of the Hill Dwarves," Laandarium mused "and lead by Dirk Banbreaker, the famous adventurer captain. No doubt expecting to find a ruined city, here at Lemoor, not a fledging fortress."

Landarium was worried. This group was strong enough to take his rebuilt fortress and at the moment he did not have enough garrison to stop them. Most of the inhabitants were workers and engineers, here to rebuild the city, not defend it.

"I must inform the king at once," he decided. With a gesture, a small creature covered in iridescent scales with a large bulbous head and oversized bat wings, appeared before the wizard.

"Take this message to the capital..." Landarium began, the darkness of the night the only thing privy to the affairs of the Master and his servant.

The young king stared sullenly down at the poor servant who had been elected to deliver the message.

"Not even the Royal Locksmith can open it?" the king asked, his strong voice tinged with anger

"I'm sorry, your majesty, his honor says there are magical closures he can not foil. He recommends trying to dig in from above." The servant cringed from the look in the king's eye.

"Inform his honor, the Royal Locksmith, to keep trying. We will be there to inspect his handiwork." With a wave of his hand he motioned the servant away.

"Damn, and double damn," Demeron thought. "Curse the assassin who stole my father's life before he told me the passage phrases to the lower vaults. Curse his soul to a thousand eternal torments! Perhaps, I can get the wizard, Landarium, to contact one of his friends down there to devise some particularly nasty torture for the spy's soul..." King Demeron Irontooth's reverie was interrupted by a slight cough. Standing before him was a beautifully familiar face, Larisha, the Royal Farspeaker. Dressed in a pale green gown which beautifully accented her stunning auburn hair, Larisha waited for the king to acknowledge her.

"Ah, Larisha, you are a sight for sore eyes. Your presence always enhances the beauty of our court."

"Thank you, your majesty, my wish is only to serve you. I have a message from Primus Landarium in Lemoor, his message speaks of urgent matters important to the Crown."

"What is the message, Larisha?" Demeron asked, forgetting the various and sundry tortures devised for the soul of the assassin.

"Might I suggest, your majesty, that we meet Lord Gelthor and Minister Bonelore in the Council Chamber? The message is urgent and this will save it from having to be repeated."

"Yes, you are right. Summon them and let us meet them there." Demeron rose from his ruby throne and with his bejeweled cape on his shoulders, walked quickly from the room, heading for the council chamber. Larisha paused momentarily to summon the General of the Home Guard, Lord Gelthor, and the young

king's advisor, Bristol Bonelore, then quickly followed his royal personage.

"Damn and double damn!" Lord Gelthor exclaimed, pounding his fist on the surface of the ancient council table.

"Of all the ill-timing," he continued, "in a few months the city would have been completed and fully garrisoned. Then an entire army of dwarves led by that rustbucket of a king sitting in Morin, would not be able to raze the city!"

"Perhaps they are on a diplomatic mission," Bristol interjected.

"You know as well as I do, Bonelore, that dwarves don't believe in diplomacy. The only language they know is warfare," Gelthor snapped.

"Do not be so hasty, Lord Gelthor, your zeal for power politics has already cost us hundreds of lives in the battle with the Hinvic Wildmen," Bristol replied.

"Why you little worm! That fiasco was no fault of mine. If the captain had followed my orders, those half-crazed mountain men would be cleaning our latrines by now." Gelthor's face was livid.

"Both of you, stop this bickering now!" Demeron ordered. "This is getting us nowhere. Bristol, I think Lord Gelthor is right, the Hill Dwarves are not much for diplomacy. Our two emissaries sent to Morin, in the Cansas Mountains, have not been heard from in months and are probably dead."

"Nevertheless, Gelthor, Bristol is correct in that we should not get into this with our swords swinging. If the dwarves take the city then we will retake it, but for now let us wait and see.

"Larisha." Demeron turned to the farspeaker, "Who do we have in that area that can reach Lemoor quickly?" Larisha thought for a moment

"Well, your majesty, Marina is with Captain Aarondor's expeditionary force. He could reach Lemoor in a few weeks," she replied.

"He just joined forces with Chief Wendralic's people," Gelthor added. "They defeated an earlier incursion of Hill Dwarves."

"Very well, order him to travel as quickly as possible to Lemoor and inform him of the situation." Demeron commanded. "Tell him not to attack without my orders. That will be all."

As the others left the room, young Demeron sank into the high-backed council chair. The idea of war with the Hill Dwarves did not sit well with him. He had built the Ranger Empire from a backwater city to a far reaching nation encompassing fully one quarter of the world, and all of this rather peacefully.

"It's not that I'm afraid" Demeron told himself. "It's just that I wish there were some other way. Demeron stared across the chamber at the portrait of his father a man he looked up to and respected. A man of courage, wisdom and justice. A man he wished were here right now.

The Troll deployed to the right of the Centaur Lancer so as to threaten the Grey King. From this position it could quickly rush forward to pin the Grey King and deliver the coup.

"It would seem that I have you at a disadvantage, Chief Wandralic," the Ranger Captain stated.

"It would seem so, Captain," the Chief replied as he studied the game board, a slight smile crossing his face. The rustle of the tent flaps brought the gamer's attention to the entrance as a soldier stepped through.

"What is it, Lieutenant?" Captain Aarondor asked.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir, but Lady Marina has a message from the King," the lieutenant replied.

"Just as the game was getting good, too," Aarondor lamented

"Bring the farspeaker, lieutenant," Chief Wandralic replied good naturedly, "the game was just ending."

The chief moved his giant to the last stanchion, coupling the Giant Spider guardian, and pinning the Necromancer behind a row of Goblins.

"Check and Mate," the chief informed Aarondor unnecessarily.

"Damn you, Wendralic. Why is it that every time I have you where I want you, you always slip under my guard?" The chief's reply was cut short by the entrance of a stunningly beautiful woman dressed in utilitarian traveling clothes.

"Captain War Chief." The woman greeted each with a nod

"Good evening, Lady Marina, have a seat." The captain offered the farspeaker a camp stool. "That will be all, lieutenant. What does his Royal Highness have to say?" Aarondor asked reseating himself on the cot.

"His majesty informs you that a company of Hill Dwarves led by Dirk Banebreaker, is camped outside of Lemoor. You are to travel there with the War Chief's men and await further instructions. He stresses that you are not to attack without his command." The mention of Hill Dwarves brought Wendralic's attention away from the task of replacing the game pieces in their well-worn traveling case.

"They are back?" the war chief asked incredulously. I would have thought that they had enough when my warriors demolished their last foray into my lands." "Well, apparently not." Aarondor replied. "Maybe they think Banebreaker is more than a match for us? We'll just have to teach them a lesson."

Aarondor stood, "Thank you, Marina. If that is all, we have work to do. Call in the outer patrols and alert the sentries." Marina nodded and closed her eyes to concentrate.

"War Chief, have your warriors ready to move at first light. We will have to forcemarch in order to reach Lemoor in time. There's a long haul ahead of us."

Wendralic saluted and stood out of the tent. His sons stepped in behind him as he made his way back to his camp.

Aarondor reseated himself beside Marina who had just finished calling in the patrols.

"Contact Primus, we have plans to make," he said. Once again, Marina closed her eyes, sending her thoughts across the land, seeking a familiar pattern.

The journey to Lemoor was a long and hazardous one. The mountain passes were choked with mud and the rivers were swollen by spring rains and melting snow. Wendralic's scout chose the quickest trails, though not always the safest. A number of men were lost in a mud slide, and five pack mules drowned during a river crossing. Yet despite these difficulties, Aarondor's army arrived outside of Lemoor three days ahead of schedule.

Camp was set up on the far side of the city, out of sight of the Hill Dwarves. Patrols were kept in close and scouts were sent to observe the enemy location. The city was not under siege which surprised Captain Aarondor. He had expected to arrive and have to relieve the city, if not retake it entirely, but the dwarves had simply set up a fortified camp outside the city and waited.

Marina entered the warm tent from the chill rain outside, her mind somewhat fatigued by the effort required to maintain contact with the capital, so far away. Captain

Aarondor was standing beside the table, assessing the game board as War Chief Wendralic made his move. Primus Landarium was seated on the cot next to the gravel stove. All eyes turned to her as she entered. Marina dropped her wet cloak on a peg on the main tent post and moved to warm her hands.

"Well?" Aarondor asked impatiently, "what are his majesty's orders?"

Marina stared intently at the young captains. She fully understood the ramifications of her message, although she wished otherwise. War! A war that could destroy both races. Yet, she had to trust that the king knew what he was doing.

"The King has ordered you to attack and destroy the dwarves, to fortify the city and await reinforcements. No word has been heard from the Dwarven capital and Lord Gelthor believes they are merely awaiting their own reinforcements before they attack."

Aarondor paused for a moment. This is what he had been planning for all along, yet he had hoped it would not come about.

His job was war, but it was not a job he relished.

"Very well. Wendralic, deploy your men as planned," Aarondor ordered. "Primus, prepare your men inside the city. Keep them out of sight until the trap is closed, then issue forth from the city to prevent any escape. My own wizard, Halivar, is at your command. All right, gentlemen and lady, we have a battle to win."

As the sun rose over the damp forest, the still of the morning was split by the shrill sound of a hunting horn. At this signal, Wendralic led a large force of his men charging into

the dwarvish camp. The dwarves were expecting the attack, and in their hastily formed rank met the charge and held. Immediately, the flanks of the dwarven lines moved to strike at the flanks of the cavalry wedge as the center maintained its position.

Wendralic skillfully maneuvered his men so as to first strike at one side and then the other, all the while slowly retreating toward the forest beyond the city. The dwarves, out to avenge their previous humiliation at the hands of the Horse Clan, drove forward trying vainly to surround their elusive prey. At the last possible moment, Wendralic sounded the retreat. The nimble horsemen quickly fled into the forest with the dwarves in hot pursuit. The trap was sprung.

From all sides, the remaining forces of the Ranger army converged on the disorganized ranks of the Hill Dwarves. The dwarves were decimated. A small band fought its way out of the trees only to face the fresh troops of Lemoor and Landarium's conjured forces. Few of the dwarves survived while the Ranger casualties were minimal.

Later, in Landarium's keep, a less important, but no less hard fought battle, was being waged.

"You won't slip from me this time, WarChief," the captain vowed as he moved the Atlane Footsoldiers to the third stanchion, threatening the Were-man with coup.

"Self-assurance is a virtue among my people, Captain, but boastful pride has often caused a good rider to fall." The War Chief moved the Direwraith Commander to the seven merlin, pinning the Grey King.

"Check and Mate."

The Hall Of Heroes

Earthwood-Original

GAME 222- In 26 turns a new light has been shed in the land of Earthwood. Holders of that light are members of the alliance known as the Shivering Brigade. Along with player #24, players #7, 14 and 22 were the fuel needed to ignite this flame and keep it burning. Our hats go off to them for a job well done.

State of War

GAME 70- In 21 turns the alliance of the Bushmasters used a seemingly limitless supply of wit and wisdom to overthrow the Government and form a new Confederation. Player #16 displayed great power and might along with his allies (#5, 15, 19) in achieving their goal. Congratulations, on a job well done.