

WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



**GAME
SYSTEMS
INC.**

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WORDS FROM THE WOOD

Greetings and salutations from my word processor to all of you out there in the real world. I realized the other day that none of you know much about me, the weirdo who rants at you every month from my computer on high. So, a little bit about myself. I have a double major in English and Theatre from Florida State University (that's right, FSU!! I have to do some before-the-fact gloating and say, "We're Number One!!" If we've lost, I'll feel the fool, but everyone has his or her dreams), two degrees that have a whole lot of applicability in today's expansive job market. Prior to coming to Miami, I spent about two years living in New York City and working with a communal theatre group--that's right, seven people living together in a loft in the East Village and doing theatre. What idealists! What commitment! What a laundry pile! While in New York, I worked with the Living Theater (which means nothing to anyone but other theatre majors, but hey--it was a thrill for me), weathered the infamous Nor'easter(while walking home from work, no less), and met the World's Largest Cat. I'm an avid gamer, I love comic books, and I collect used whip cream containers to recycle for money to save the starving whales in the tropical rain forests. And why am I here now, at GSI? Well, that little saga will just have to wait till another time, I'm afraid. If you feel, from reading this scintillating account of my life, that you want to know more useless facts from my life, simply send a self addressed stamped envelope to--well, to me, here at GSI. What will follow will be much of the same--but don't say I didn't warn you.

I'm not sure if anyone has noticed, but we now have larger return envelopes for you to use. We have done this in the hopes that it will cut the time your turn spends in transit as well as simplify our internal procedures. It will also allow a little more room for those of you who mail more than one turn at a time. Well, what more can be said, except--get stuffed!

I know I've touched on this subject before, but necessity deems I mention it again. If you are going to fax or phone-in your turn, **PLEASE** try and do it at least one day before the game is due, rather than the night before it is due. This allows time to address any problems which might arise and it facilitates your games being processed faster, thus getting them in the mail to you sooner. We understand if there is an emergency or you just couldn't get it in early--all we ask is that you try. It makes our job in serving you much easier.

It's time once again for--you guessed it--GAME NEEDS!! This month, we've just started filling a three week game, so any interested parties should feel free to sign up. We're also looking for three Free People teams to fill grudge matches currently pending. If there are any willing Free People teams out there, we've got your ticket, so step right up and join the dance.

I'd like to close by wishing everyone the very best year that 1994 can be. I'll talk to you roughly the same time next month.

Stuart



ALONG THE PATHWAYS

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PERSONALS: BARBS & BRAGS

Every current GSI player is entitled to a free 40 word personal in this column each issue, for each game they're in. Submissions require a \$2.00 charge for each additional set of 40 words (41-80 is \$2.00 etc.). GSI reserves the right to edit or refuse material deemed unsuitable.

Middle-earth^{cm} PBM

GAME 13

Standing amidst the smoldering ruins that had once been the Sinda city of Esgaroth, the dark lord of the victorious troops turned his bat-winged helm to the south. Toward Mirkwood.

"Soon . . ." his voice rasped from behind the hideous helm. "Soon . . ."

Turning to his lieutenants, he ordered, "Take what you can, carry and destroy the rest. Then, bring us fresh horses. Tomorrow, we ride!"

Like a phoenix rising from the flames, the nation of the Ninth Nazgûl had returned.

GAME 20

Mean men come to burn our homes
make us starve, break our bones.
We suffer much but build and grow
march in lines, learn to throw.
Now we march to hurt mean men
to kill them bad, tear and rend.

GAME 21

The king is dead! Long live the king!
Tarondor was defeated by Morlammen in personal combat. The new king, Elatar, says that even the use of Elrond's ring will not help Morlammen next time.

Baaltroc

GAME 31

Foolish sentry never even saw me, laughed Din Ohtar to himself--it was almost too easy. Wait! What was that noise? Too late, he was knocked forward by the arrows--"Now I am the fool" were his last thoughts.

GAME 43

Stronger than reason.
Stronger than lies.
The only Truth I know,
Is the look in your Eye.
Ren the Unclean

GAME 45

All I want for Christmas is--
--a subscription to Elves
Illustrated swimsuit edition. (Ooo--
Nimrodel!)
--a helm of Nazgul control.
--and a palantir of dragon
dispersal!

Cardolan
Merry Christmas

The men of Harad throw off their
ancestral oppressors. Let the evil
Barad Dur fall! Let the men of Indur
tremble in Umbar! Be wary, oh my
foes!

GAME 48

Notice:

Herudor, like Uklurg before him,
has lost his head for Sauron. No evils
shall trespass on His Majesty's soil for
free. Blood will be the payment, and
death the reward!

So says,
Kurgan of Gondor

GAME 56

The LIGHT shines upon MORDOR!
Only a few places left, where shadow
reigns. Uvatha and Hoarmûrath, only
your capitols remain but the siege
begins. Your agents are only thorns
now.

Zarendarger (25)

As we mourn mighty Vinyaran,
victim of the coward's hand, we issue
warning: Anduin fields will not bear
the Eastern stain. Begone hordes!

GAME 59

The dogs are out
Flooding the Plains.
Armor will drown
From the canine rains.
Running at will,
Eager to kill.

Valiant Free People:

Give up the fight. Your pitiful
position is hopeless. Holed up in the
far west is degrading. Sauron's victory
is nearly complete. Why embarrass
yourselves further?

Urzahil
Mouth of Sauron

GAME 60

NOLDO

I'm not impressed. Elrond, you send a
boy to do a man's job!

Urzahil

A personal challenge anytime you say
when and where.

Hats off to my most worthy opponents,
the Dark Servants; alas that we were
enemies and not allies. Mayhap the
next time we can pound the Free
together.

Those Crazy Duns

GAME 66

Those who refuse to choose sides may
soon find themselves unwelcome on
either side. We will not allow anyone
to skulk to victory behind our efforts.

GAME 67

Dendra Dwar's dying words: "At least I
was able to go down to the dock and
wish Elrond a fond Bon Voyage."

Piece o' cake. The Witch King and
Dragon Lord were easy and Mordor
hardly slowed us. The only reason the
Dunlending won is because he sat on
his thumbs and didn't help at all.

Thranduil, Fashion Warlord

GAME 68

Hey Tarondor, you misbegotten son of
a goat!

I'm Samiel, not the Easterlings!
Freeeps--what do you think of our
Cloud Lady? Isn't she the greatest?

Haruth Ramam,
Emperor of Gondor

GAME 70

Dragon Lord, your persistence is
amazing. How many times do I have to
kick your butt before you finally drop
this game?

A very frustrated Bain

GAME 76

As of Turn 18, the Free People have
lost Osric, Waulfa, Zimrathon, Eoder,
Parras, Atagavia, Mahrcared, Uirdiks,
Argeleb II, Meneldir, Morwen, Sarkar,
Coriander, Brandilynn, Merkatur,
Aethelan, Elatar, Tarondor,
Telumehtar, Veantur, Argirion,
Marahil, Kendrahil, Taurnil, Elladan,
Ellrohir, Cyren, Arfanhil, Sispar, Huz of
Amov, Hardin Orn, Gildor, Udrath,
Tadondor II, Saerol, Thuidimer,
Retsub, Bluesnow, Hallas, Terragon,
Darkin Bryn, O'Phel, Nazrog, Boris
Rumbleguts, Cirdan, Tros Hesnef,
Odagavia, Barlin, Baranor, Beoraborn,
Nadia, Dael, Aseret, Alandur, Vinyaran,
Elphe, Piaget, Dunsol, Jarrad, Gundor,

Falin, Threlin, Helphin and Ovatha II.
War is Hell
da Boyz

GAME 78

The Ice King's a puddle
The Easterlings are out
The Dog Lord has rabies
The Lts are in doubt

The Cloud Lord needs Clearasil
Khamul is in drag
And Renny and Stimpny
Have stepped in the bag!
Mr. Reelheet

Dear Servants of Sauron,
We regret to inform you that due to unforeseen circumstances, several of the Free People will be leaving the game. This puts us in the unfortunate position of having to concede and end the game. As this has been our first game, we appreciated the lessons you have taught us (not all pleasant!) and, those of us who will play in other games, look forward to meeting you on other battlefields.

Well played!
Sincerely,
The Free People

GAME 79

Now the time is near
The hunt closes in
Warhounds howl for living flesh
My prey is trapped
In panic he dances seeking escape
But there is none
Yes I can smell it now
There is blood in the air . . .

GAME 81

The Battle is joined. As Tharbad and Metriath fell, so shall the others until the coming of Sauron!
Anonymous

GAME 82

Here we are at the turn of the Season,
The last few turns have not been Pleasin'.

But now it's the Nazgul's nards that we're squeezin,
And yes, Dark Servants, it's you that we're teasin'.

The Undaunted Woodmen

Deck the halls with trolls and orcs,
Fa la la la la, la la la la.
'Tis the season to be dorks,
Fa la la la la, la la la la.

The Jolly Sinda
(It's our time of year!)

GAME 83

Noldo Elfs:

While enjoying his blissful daze that had built up from 14 turns of uncontested and unresisted success, the K-9 Prince was rudely awakened by the news that his beloved Field Marshall Skaldedrear had been viciously martyred in front of his men. Initial anger experienced by the Prince soon changed, as he felt the "Foam of his Ancestors" begin to ooze out the side of his snout . . . "Alas the game is afoot!"

We honor thee, Elrunt--
"Evil PIGDOG"

GAME 85

Long Rider,

Must you recruit another dragon before you face me again? If you won't come to me I guess I'll have to hunt you down before I kill you.

Tarondor

GAME 86

Hey, Erester, where you at?
We got a dinner date--
And you're on the plate!
Don't be late . . .

As for Elrohir--
Your time, too, is near . . .

The exhausted messenger made his way through the nervous crowd. Adumir stood watching the young messenger from near the throne at the front of the Great Hall. When the messenger finally arrived in front of the throne he knelt. Everyone in the room fell deathly silent.

"Sire. My lord Angamaite has died at the claws of the treacherous fairies! The one that calls itself Cirdan stabbed him in the back, after he threw him in a cell!" Suddenly realizing what he just said, the messenger threw himself flat on the marble floor and awaited his new lord's words.

Adumir hung his head in a moment of silence. When he slowly raised his eyes to meet his subjects, some said they were aflame with anger. Others said his eyes were pitch black and as icy as Sauron's heart. He steadily met the gaze of every single noble in the hall. His next words were felt as far away as Esograth, where the pitiful Northmen curled up in bed and cringed in fear.

"We will set sail today, and we will not return until we can ring Havens of Umbar with Noldo Skulls!" The cheering was thunderous and didn't stop until even the Nazgul felt pity on the Elves.

That waps you up, you wascally Woodmen!

Hehhehhehhehheh . . .

The Dwagonword

Wanted: Any Free Pop Center upon which to lavish army in need of a

morale boost.

Lost: Large cav army. Last seen wandering Near Harad in search of a good time.

Send replies to: Capitol Building, Khand

GAME 91

Arfanhil:

I appreciated your earlier "lesson" so much that I just had to show you what a quick study I am. I guess Valadan's artifacts are a graduation present? Any way I so enjoyed your teaching that I invited some of my closest friends to your home so you could teach them too. Treat the Dwarves, Northmen, Cardolan and Arthedain as kindly as you treated me.

Cirdan

Enion:

Too bad you refused to communicate with any of us. Your silence talked you into the early death you have earned. Maybe next time you will not be so arrogant.

Cirdan

GAME 93

The Dog Lord is the sole king of Mordor, all others are mere pawns in my master game plan.

GAME 96

Múrazôr,

Did you really think your petty armies could stand against the wrath of the Dunedain? You teeter upon the edge of ruin. You are now the Camp-kingdom of Angmar.

Khamul: The Dwarves enjoyed the dragon steaks.

Arthedain

GAME 97

Wouldn't the coming of winter make it easy for the Ice King to keep the temperature in Mordor?

Wrong . . . fool left his door open! Now we have a southern draft blowing in! Will someone please shut that door!

Hoarmurath

The decision of Arfanhil and Broggha is made.

"Rhudaur rejects the entreaties of the Dark Servants forcefully and irrevocably.

"We shall earn forgiveness for the War of 1356 and re-entry into greater Arnor through valor on the field of battle."

Diaries of a Hunchback,

Curses, foiled in my bid to rule the world by Angamaitë. If I see that big bully again I'm going to pull his nose-ring right out! Curses? Wait, I've got it! I'm off . . .

GAME 98

It is **OVER!** The greatest team to ever play this game has crushed not only their opponent's armies but (as evidenced by last month's columns) their **WILL TO FIGHT**. An absolute victory on every front. The key to it ending this quickly was, of course, diplomacy. Far from spending hundreds of dollars in phone bills I merely called 3 of the 5 neutrals a total of 9 times in 11 turns, sent many 3x5s, two letters and (here's the key gentles) dealt honestly with them. Of course, it is easy to be honest when you're as good as the Shades of Madness and what you have to offer is simply: If you want to win, join us--and they did! Our record will, undoubtedly, stand for many years to

come.

The Darkest Shade of Madness,
Subedei Bahadur

GAME 99

ATTENTION ALL EVIL LACKEYS:

I seem to have misplaced my Ice King. While about as useful as a bag of rocks, I'd still like him back. He owes me five bucks.

The Emperor of Gorgoroth
Sauron's Favorite Toadie

GAME 102

I have heard the call of the war drums and I shall answer. Grow afraid all who serve the Dark Lord. Grow very afraid.

So speaks Haruth Ramam
Lord of the South

Barad Dur rumbles and the earth shakes
Black clouds spread from the east
Darkness marches west on hobnailed boots

All at once or one at a time
The Free shall be made slave
And the world thus ours.

Mr Heatmizer

GAME 103

The eye has turned its attention to the Noldo. Beware, for your days are numbered.

GAME 105

"Let it be known that Rhudaur has joined with the First to stem the flood of light! Unlike the Dungalenders, we do not cower at the might of the Free! Argeleb, your throne is mine!"

Arfanhil,
Lord of Eriador

"At last, I have it! The One Ring! I'm . . . ah, darn it. It's just ringworm. You didn't write that down, did you?"
"No, honest."

Obu, First Scribe
to Sauron

GAME 107

The Prince of Darkness walks the land and blood washes over the fields of Eriador.

5300 of the Cloud Lord's minions die, and Araudâgûl is captured while the Fire King's army sits and watches.

Hope they didn't pay much for the tickets . . .

Tarondor

GAME 108

He paused amongst his men as they continued their grim task. The battle had gone well and in a few short days they would continue east, to bring the war to them.

He surveyed the scene about him. Sturdy men piling dead to be burned. Thousands of the enemy had perished that day and were now being stacked like cordwood. Already several piles were aflame but it was the smoke that caught his eye. As it drifted upwards toward the sky, it formed a column of pure white. A good sign to send to his beloved Saryon. We live, we fight, for the men of Gondor were at war.

Smoke rises from the battlefield in front of the keep of Dol Guldur. The broken bodies of the Dark Servants lie stiff in the red grass.

Darkness is leaving Mirkwood. Now we shall focus our attention south-eastward.

There once was a Nazgul of doom,
Who would often ride out on a broom.
He'd begin to fly
And then sweep up the sky.
"Why?" you ask? He's a loon!
Gondorian Bards

They had turned out by the thousands to bid good-bye. People silently lined the docks and hills overlooking the tranquil port, the only sounds coming from the gulls that screeched overhead. The hopes of a nation was setting sail.

With not even a flourish the lines were cast off as a fresh breeze filled the sails to slowly push the fleet to the beckoning seas. As the flagship reached the mouth of the harbor, a flag was smartly ran up. A strong wind caught the banner and stood it full as a cheer that developed to a roar, rose from the crowd. She turned as the fleet did to face east and smiled as she saw the smoke still burned white. Today the waves belonged to GONDOR!

GAME 109

Battle Field Report:

As yet another Dark Servant army is destroyed, the vice tightens around Mordor!

GAME 110

Hello . . . You have reached Northern Gondor.

We're busy exposing ourselves to multiple invasions and assassination attempts right now, but if you leave your name, number, and nation we'll be sure to ignore you.

Thank You
BEEEEEEP

GAME 113

Beavis (Witch-king): Hey stupid, let's attack Cardolan.

Butthead (Dunlending): Cool, but doesn't he . . . like . . . have allies?

Beavis (Witch-king): Doesn't matter--we're . . . like . . . so dense, they can't hurt us.

(Chorus): Heh eheh eheh, Heh eheh eheh . . .

GAME 115

Dark Enemies--

For the treacherous deaths of Azaghal and our kinsmen Bain, you will surely feel our wrath. Soon the axes of the Dwarves shall fall on your iron-shod necks and your screams of terror will fill the land.

Thrar

GAME 116

Long Rider:

How's Drurgandra?

GAME 117

The price to keep Mordor encircled is heavy. But the supporters of Freedom are willing to pay what it takes!!

WARNING:

Due to the current overpopulation of Mûmakil roaming through our streets, coupled with a shortage of large shovels, the avenues of Harondor pose a serious health risk to pedestrians. Please watch your step.

The Harondor Sanitation Department

To All,

Send me money!
Rhudaur

GAME 119

Gee, I wonder how the Mordorites are doing now that Winter has set in--

especially with some of their camps missing . . .

By the way--Dendra, your economy will not support all those cavalry; trust me, I've been there.

Morwennyn Iceblade

GAME 120

"And so King Trotsky the Traumatizer treated the treacherously truculent trollops of Angmar to a trebly tremendous trouncing with his trustilly trenchant truncheon before trowelling the truncated truants into the trash to trundle home triumphantly."

Cardolan Predatory Epics
(Cheeky period)

It has come to our attention that various dissident factions doubt our might. Well! You should know that if all 24 other positions were to be eliminated, we'd have at least a 30% chance of winning! So there!

The Woodmen

GAME 121

Mahrcared, catch me if you can. See if you can guess which of your major towns I will hit next. It's not too hard, only 5 to choose from . . . err, 4 . . . err, 3.

Zarendarger (13)

P.S. Woodmen, road bumps don't work.

Do you hear the drums echo through the lands? Armies march forth, and Mordor must fall! The Morkris have received word from the Dax-yn, and the Wheels of Doom roll on! Who shall stand in their way? Who shall die the noble death we deal? Who shall have sense, and flee our might?

GAME 122

"Sinda. Sinda? Anyone. Anyone?"

Andie

Overheard in Carn Dum:

"Hey! Didn't you used to be the Witch-king?"

Overheard from the Witch-king:

"I'm melting! I'm melting! What a world! What a world . . .

Andie

Run Monkey Boy! Run!

Big Booté

GAME 124

To All Free Peoples and those who would be free,

We must unite ourselves in the common cause of freedom, and we must do so very soon, lest the slaves of Darkness destroy us separately!

In Freedom's Service,
Húrin Thalion

GAME 125

Contest of Champions

The best play against the best,
And for some there'll be no rest.
Strategy, enmity, casualty, shame,
await you when you face the Eothraim.
This time we play not for fun,
'Tis for honor 'till its done.

The 'Contest of Champions' is afoot now. May the will of Sauron rule in the end. As his fifth, I shall do my part to bring this about.

Zarendarger(15)

Let the contest begin! I had hoped to be a neutral, but at least I don't have the blood of the Dúnedain in my veins like my other three games.

Baaltrac

The Easterlings are not by nature a peaceful nation and we desire the luxuries of the West. Everyone has a price. Get it?

So Says,
Kurgan the Easterling

GAME 126

Dark Servants:

We await your atrocities. Good luck, and may the lucky team lose.

Lord Baranor (7)

GAME 129

The gathering of the five tribes has begun and the blue robed one yet again dwells among us.

The Easterlings (25)

GAME 130

Fire leapt from Mt. Doom in a blazing torrent and quickly spread to the surrounding lands. The fire grew and soon enveloped all of Middle-earth. Seas boiled and lands burned as the Free Folk watched the destruction unfold, trying pitifully to control what could not be. When the last of the flames finally subsided, the Lord of Fire raised his arms into the air in triumph . . . And on Mt. Doom, Sauron smiled.

GAME 131

O Mighty Long Rider!

You bloated sack! Avast, ye scurvy dog! If you advance on me, I

will destroy you!
 Harken to him, Captain Invincible
 Lord of Rhudaur
 True Air of Isildur

Kick my butt or I'll kick yours!
 Captain Invincible
 Corsairs

Population Center Development
 by
 Brian D. Mason

ABSTRACT

One of the most important aspects of the early game is deciding where to create or post camps. While many nations lack the emissaries with the necessary skill level to create camps, despite it being an easy skill, almost all possess one or more commanders with the skill level necessary to post camps, an average difficulty order. One of the most difficult decisions in the early game is deciding where camps should be located. This article will discuss some of the reasons behind the placement of camps: which type of character should do it, resource production, financial considerations, and security. Then the strengths and weaknesses of various nations will be discussed, as well as some possible camp locations.

1. Who Should Place the Camps?

Many of the nations have commanders who, when travelling with an army, have the command skill which would allow order 552 (Post Camp) to be executed with a very good chance of success. Also, very few nations have emissaries with even the modest skill level needed to execute order 555 (Create Camp) with a good chance of success. Despite this, those nations without good (> 30) emissaries would be advised to create one using order 725 (Name New Character), and then subsequently have that emissary execute order 734 (Name New Character as Emissary) as many times as necessary. Having a character in an army posting camps is not advisable for several reasons: one, it does not improve the command skill of the commander; two, when posting camps rather than training troops or training the army, the commander does not improve his command rank, and the training rank of the army or troops is not improved; and three, it costs twice as much. For the additional cost of posting three camps you could name an additional character and have gold to spare. A stable of about three good emissaries can be used at all stages of the game, in creating camps when their skill levels are low, in improving population centers and bribing/recruiting characters or double agents when their skill levels are moderate or high. As it becomes more difficult to place camps at later stages of the game, it is important that you create emissaries fast and get your camps created quickly, especially if you start the game with few good emissaries.

2. Resource Production

The most important factor in camp placement is determining what types of which resources you need for production, and where in nearby hexes these can be located. The spell 'reveal production' is relatively easy to research (if you do not already have a character who can cast it) and this can determine locations which can supply the most needed commodity. Another option is having an

agent 'Scout Hex' (915). However, that has the detrimental effect of only determining production value of one hex (although with much greater precision). Another disadvantage of the Scout Hex option is that it takes an agent into a hex with no objectives where he may be unable to cast a skill order on the following turn. It is usually better in the early game to have agents improving their ranks or out performing more specialized agent tasks. Below is a list of the mean production of each hex type taken from several games, and setups of many different nations, as well as additional contributions from other players. The production has been modified such that this is the production value of a camp in warm weather (that is, 100 percent production values). Keep in mind that the climate in your area will affect these mean production values and that mountainous terrain also will typically have one or two grades cooler climate than surrounding plains. The first column gives the resource type, the second column describes the rows, the first row being the terrain type, the second row the number of sites in the sample. Within each production type the first row is the number of sites in which that product is present, the next row the average of those sites and the final row the average of all sites. Some of these (especially desert terrain) may suffer from small number statistics, so the results may be skewed. Also, note that no information is given for swamp hexes.

Table 1. Statistical Treatment of Resource Development

Commodity	Terrain	Plains	Desert	Forest	Rough	Mountains
Leather	No. Sites	138	8	62	108	87
	No. With	138	8	5	31	0
	avg. per	363	294	408	302	0
	total avg.	363	294	33	87	0
Bronze	No. with	0	0	8	32	86
	avg. per	0	0	366	295	304
	total avg.	0	0	47	87	242
	No. with	0	1	4	33	48
Steel	avg. per	0	290	144	189	219
	total avg.	0	36	9	58	97
	No. with	0	0	0	0	45
	avg. per	0	0	0	0	26
Mithril	total avg.	0	0	0	0	11
	No. with	138	0	62	43	0
	avg. per	138	0	1223	956	0
	total avg.	1138	0	1223	381	0
Timber	No. with	0	0	59	51	0
	avg. per	0	0	426	365	0
	total avg.	0	0	405	172	0
	No. with	135	8	4	61	0
Mounts	avg. per	80	76	108	74	0
	total avg.	78	76	7	42	0
	No. with	0	0	3	82	82
	avg. per	0	0	1733	1753	1857
Gold	total avg.	0	0	84	1331	1410

Clearly, from inspection of the list, the type terrain with the most varied production type is hills/rough, which can produce all types of materials except mithril. For nations which are relatively weak in metal production for armor

(primarily the Free Peoples) the most profitable terrain type are mountain hexes. However, mountain hexes often contain dragons, which rarely have good effects on the loyalty of Free People population centers, or the health of the Emissary posting the camp. Sometimes a safer strategy is to place them in hill/rough hexes which have been already determined to produce the desired resource. Another advantage to the hill/rough option is that those hexes typically have better climate which has the effect of increasing production.

Looking over your production and estimating needs for your nation and then placing camps to produce what you need is often a good plan. If you start with few mounted troops and few sources of the supplies that are needed to build them (mounts, leather, bronze or steel if desired for armor and weapons) it is unlikely that you can get that all cavalry army you want on the field anytime soon. However, if you are fighting someone who is aware of your nation strengths and weaknesses, then planning to build them in later turns might be an good plan.

3. Financial Considerations

Sometimes camps can be placed to make resources to sell. For many nations, selling supplies is a vital (and sometimes necessary) means to float your economy. Despite the initial outlay, almost all hexes can produce in just a couple of turns the supplies which could be sold to pay for themselves, even if they do not produce gold directly. Some nations can choose one or two resources which they can use to buy and sell on succeeding turns to drive up and down the price of that commodity. This "playing of the market" can be most effective when several nations cooperate to buy all of a commodity and then sell all the following turn when prices are high. Increasing production in this commodity will allow you to generate larger profits, or give you the production you need to develop on the one hand, and execute buy/sell orders with, on the other.

Gold production does not decrease with increasing population center size. However, other resources do. Each increase in the size of a population center will require a few turns to recoup the losses for development. Listed below are the turns needed to "break even" on population center improvement at several various tax rates. In considering a break even cost, it is necessary to not only consider how long it takes you to recover the cost of investment, but also how long to catch up to the amount that the population center would produce.

Table 2. Turns to Recoup Cost of Improvement

Pop Center Type	Cost	40 % Tax	60 % Tax	80 % Tax	100 % Tax
Village	4000	4.00	2.67	2.00	1.60
Town	6000	6.00	4.00	3.00	2.40
Major Town	8000	8.00	5.33	4.00	3.20
City	10000	10.00	6.67	5.00	4.00

In addition to the time needed to "break even" on the cost is the lost production over the interval. Depending on the commodity the production loss may or may not be trivial. It is generally a good idea to improve population centers whose production type you do not need.

4. Security

Another important consideration in improving population centers is the safety of the population center. Don't improve population centers you cannot

hold. There is no need to improve population centers for your enemies to take. Also, in developing population centers, try to put them in locations which are hard to get to or not on the maps of other players (especially neutrals and enemies). If you have a surplus of secure areas then allowing your allies to develop in some of them is often a good idea for team play. Also, population centers without fortifications, characters, or armies present will begin to disintegrate if the loyalty drops too low.

5. Nation Strengths, Weaknesses, and Camp Placement

Now, a short rating for each nation is listed below. Ranked as good, average or poor are emissary strength and possible camp placement as well as a short listing for where might be good locations to place camps for that nation. Locations can be rated as good, average, or poor based on their relative security from enemy nations. If this region is not on your map (where you can keep an eye on it) the location rating is downgraded. Also, if you are competing with many other nations over a small area to develop (e.g. many of the Dark Servants in Mordor) the location rating is downgraded.

Table 3. Rating Population Center Development

Nation	Potential Population		
	Emissary Strength	Center Development	Suggested Locations
Woodmen	Average	Poor	West of Anduin and South of Lothlorien
Northmen	Average	Good	North of River Running
Eothraim	Poor	Average	Same as Northmen
Arthedain	Average	Average	West Downs
Cardolan	Average	Average	Southwest of map and West Downs
Northern Gondor	Average	Good	Future Rohan, North of White Mountains
Southern Gondor	Good	Good	South of White Mountains
Dwarves	Poor	Average	Far West in and around Blue Mountains
Sinda Elves	Good	Poor	same as Woodmen
Noldo Elves	Good	Good	same as Dwarves
Witch-King	Good	Average	North of and in Northern Misty Mountains
Dragon Lord	Good	Poor	Somewhere in Mordor, or isolated part of map
Dog Lord	Average	Average	Somewhere in Mordor
Cloud Lord	Poor	Average	Somewhere in and slightly South of Mordor
Blind Sorcerer	Poor	Average	Somewhere in and slightly East of Mordor
Ice King	Poor	Poor	Somewhere in Mordor
Quiet Avenger	Good	Average	Far South
Fire King	Poor	Poor	Somewhere in Mordor
Long Rider	Average	Poor	East of Mordor

Dark Lieutenants	Good	Poor	Somewhere in Mordor
Corsairs	Good	Good	Southwest of Map
Haradwaith	Average	Poor	Near Current Locations
Dunlendings	Poor	Good	Southern two-thirds of Map
Rhudaur	Poor	Average	Between pop centers and Misty Mountains
Easterlings	Poor	Average	Far East

An alternative strategy to selecting secure locations would be to select locations far from you and not appearing on any other nation map. These locations, if developed, could serve as jumping off points for campaigns.

Obviously, cooperation is needed among the Dark Servant players in deciding what parts of Mordor to develop. Care must also be taken that the very good emissaries of the Witch-King and the Dragon Lord have somewhere to develop. Also, the Free People pairs of the Woodmen and Sinda, Noldo and Dwarves, Arthedain and Cardolan, Eothraim and Northmen also need to cooperate in developing population centers. Most of the Neutrals can work independent of others with the possible exception of the Haradwaith and Corsairs.

6. Conclusion

Population centers can have noticeable effects on your nation's place in the game and effective placement of these population centers can dramatically effect your outcome.

The author gratefully acknowledges the contributions to Table 1 and the comments of Tom Walton, Glen Mayfield and Jeff Holzhauser.

THE USE OF CONTACT CARDS IN M.E.P.B.M.

by
Gary Campbell

There is a valuable resource available to all ME-PBM players that is often overlooked in the heat of battle. I am referring to contact cards; those little 3' x 5" index cards that we all send to one another along with our turn sheets. Most players use these cards to exchange name, address and phone number information with other players in the game; usually players of the same alignment. This is great! Gather information on as many players as you can in your game. Check zip codes and addresses; you may find players who appear to be working together. You will gain an edge when dealing with these players if you are able to consider the best interests of their particular alliance. Using your network of contacts, you may also be able to gather enough information to determine if your game has any unfilled positions. If you find that a nearby enemy position is unfilled, you can turn your attention to more pressing confrontations elsewhere. Also, population centers of unfilled positions, regardless of their alignment, are ripe for the picking-there is no one to offend.

Contact cards can also be used to spread rumors. Rumors, both true and false, can be useful in a lot of ways. Send notice to a population center that your army is on the way; then strike somewhere else. Do this a couple of times, then follow through and arrive where you said you would. Keep them guessing. Give false information to neutral players and see if it winds up in your enemy's hands. You may be able to find out which way some of your neutrals are

leaning. Send false information to an enemy-make it look as if you sent it to the wrong player by "mistake." Send a false message to an enemy commander boasting of a victory over one of his allies. Rumors will cast a doubt in the mind of your opponent, and cause him to spend time chasing around for verification.

Contact cards have another very important function in ME-PBM. They can be used to carry on communications between characters of different nations. This is my favorite part of the whole game - this is the role playing part. Just remember, these are not real people. These are characters talking to characters. Never let them get into personality conflicts with other players; this will lessen everyone's enjoyment of the game. Remember, this is just a game, no matter how wonderful it may be. Address your cards to characters by name and title; everyone likes to see their name in print. Inflate your title and importance. Don't just be Captain Flash of Gondor, be Captain Flash, Commander of the Royal Horse Guard of Minas Anor; Grand Army of North Gondor! Same guy, more irritating.

I find that sending a personal barb to an enemy commander just before battle may cause him to act irrationally and perhaps choose a more aggressive battle posture that he normally should. This can only work to your advantage. After the battle, let the character know what your army commander thought of his performance in combat. Praise him if he deserves it-a little well aimed respect can go a long way. Be sure to chastise him if you can. He may throw himself at you again before he has properly regrouped-once again, advantage to you.

Be careful not to divulge vital information. I once had an enemy agent tell his exact location while bragging about his successful pilfering of my treasury. He was so proud of himself that he tried it again on the following turn and nearly paid with his life.

Another character, whom I had been communicating with, was so irritated with my commander by the time we met in battle that he issued a personal challenge unwisely, died gloriously, and lost the battle (and an army) unnecessarily.

I don't know if the good people at GSI have taken precautions to prevent one player from sending a card in another player's name, so be careful. Guard against it by using passwords when communicating with allies to ensure the authenticity of your message. When communicating with characters, take care to keep it light hearted and fun; don't just call names. Be humorous when you can, sarcastic when you can't. Act pompous, overbearing, obnoxious; make him angry. Act incompetent; he'll become overconfident. Do whatever you want-just have fun with it. But remember, these are only characters, not real people!

Contact cards can add a lot to a game. Give it a try- I think you'll like it!!

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. 'Tis nobler in the mind...

The Hall Of Heroes

Game #69 - The Free Peoples: #22, #6 & #10

Sauron screams in eternal torment at the knowledge that the Free folk now control Middle-earth, the land free of his dark minions. Final standings are as follows:

#22 - Haradwaith: 1967

#6 - North Gondor: 1550

#10 - Noldo Elves: 1434

Top Dark Servant: #11 Witch-king - 1075

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Gothmog/Dark Lieutenants: 203

Highest Net Commander Rank - Gothmog/Dark Lieutenants: 176

Highest Net Agent Rank - Gurbal/Daragon Lord: 110

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Angûlion/Witch-king: 100

Highest Net Mage Rank - Mûrazôr/Witch-king: 135

Most Mithril - Eothraim: 240

Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 17

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 15

Congratulations to the Free Peoples!

Game #98 - The Dark Servants: #25, #21 & #22

Lord Sauron now rules the land through his new-found minions who have usurped the positions formerly held by those who sat in Mordor. Final standings are as follows:

#25 - The Easterlings: 1601

#21 - The Corsairs: 1575

#22 - The Haradwaith: 1500

Top Free People: #7 South Gondor - 750

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 163

Highest Net Commander Rank - Argeleb II/Arthedain: 122

Highest Net Agent Rank - Jî Indûr/Cloud Lord: 100

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Gorgûn/Dark Lieutenants: 81

Highest Net Mage Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 120

Most Mithril - Dunlendings: 121

Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 14

Most Kills - Cloud Lord/Easterlings: 2

Congratulations to The Dark Servants!