

# WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



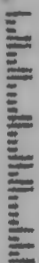
**GAME  
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## WORDS FROM THE WOOD

Spring has returned to the land, and with it comes teary-eyed home-comings. The Wood welcomes Michelle back to active duty, after her baby. The little nipper's doing just fine; he's got input and processing under his belt, now if we could just get him to talk!

The eagle-eyed among you may have noticed the name Stuart Taft there on the contents page under STAFF. Ring any bells? Think back. Those of you who have been with us for a looong time should have little light-bulbs popping on above your heads. However, for the benefit of those of you still a wee bit wet behind the years, an elucidation: Stuart is the old man of the Wood. In fact, he's the creator of the Wood, the Whispers part of it any way. About ten years ago (yes, I said ten), Stu became the first-ever GSI employee. Then a lowly high school student, he joined Bill and Pete in moderating the newly born Earthwood. The years flew by, GSI grew, and the rest of us one-by-one hitched up. But Stu was the first, the prime number, the big slab of velvet. It was he who first dreamed up the journal you presently hold and gave it life (of course it's mine now, heh, heh).

Stuart left GSI in 1988 to pursue his studies but the ever fickle winds of fate have blown him back our way again. Call it karma, call it destiny, call it dumb luck, but here he is and glad we are. Welcome home, Stuart!!

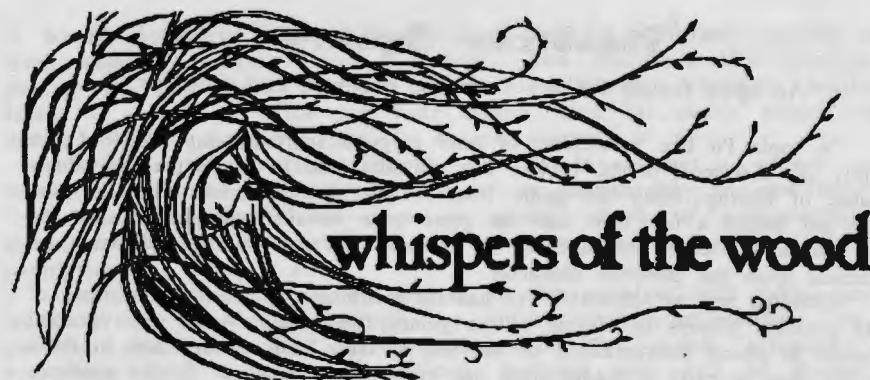
**We need Neutrals!** Single-player and grudge games stand poised to begin, lacking only those five crucial positions! Neutrals enjoy the enviable trait of fitting into any kind of game, granting them a quick starting time. Right now, we could use as many Neutral players as we can get, but there are a few restrictions we need to pass on. To be viable and to maintain game balance and fairness, Neutrals must truly be Neutral, with no pre-existing attachments or affiliations with the other two alignments. This means that we can not accept a Neutral position as part of a team that is otherwise requesting Good or Evil positions. Nor can we permit more than two Neutrals to join in the same game together as a team - by their very nature, Neutral positions emphasize an individualistic approach. Alliances can form once play begins, but not before.

**On a related note** - When assembling a team for a grudge game, try to make for a tight bond among the players. Unexpected drops from your team can spell rapid defeat for your side and seriously unbalance play. We will strive to place stand-by players in positions dropped early in the game, but the sudden introduction of a stranger to your team is probably going to have some negative results, even if that stand-by player is an experienced veteran. The better you can coordinate before play begins, the better you'll work together once the battle's joined.

**And on a related - related note** - once a stand-by player has been assigned to a game, there's no going back for the original player. If you tell us that you're dropping your position during the early turns of a game (before turn 12) we will move *that day* to place a stand-by. If you later decide to change your mind, sorry, it'll be too late. So be sure that you want to drop before notifying us.

Don't forget that next month is our special Free Peoples theme issue! We'll let the Light shine on June! The dead-line for Good articles, essays, etc is the 15th, so don't dawdle. Remember, all that is necessary for Evil to spread is for Good people to do nothing.

Until anon then, Dennis



## whispers of the wood

### ALONG THE PATHWAYS

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## Hobbiton Square

An open forum for the exchange of ideas and opinions.

"A topic I'd like to address in brief is good sportsmanship. While I can happily say that most of the players I've run into tend to be mature individuals capable of distinguishing the game from reality, this isn't true for everyone. There are indeed a few who take the game quite seriously, losing sight of the fact that Middle-earth has nothing to do with the real world and bears no reflection upon our personal character.

Although new to ME-PBM, I've had the misfortune of running into some of these problem players in several of the games I've joined. Aside from general rudeness in phone conversations or via letters, these bad apples seem to think that it's okay to carry a grudge from one game to the next, or defame another's character unjustly because they didn't like what that player did in a previous game. Worse still, they seem quite content to go to any lengths to exact "vengeance" for past wrongs done, even to the point of throwing the game for themselves and their allies. This not only makes the experience unpleasant for the target of their misguided and childish wrath, but also for their compatriots, who depend upon them to play rationally in order to vanquish the enemy allegiance.

I realize that GSI can do little to curb this sort of activity, and that appealing to such a player's better nature is, in all probability, a lost cause. Even so, I'd like to remind the more excitable players that regardless of how involved you get in the fate of your nation, it's nothing more than sheer fantasy; what we do in the game has no meaning in the real world. If you have difficulty distinguishing between the two, perhaps you'd be better off taking up some other hobby.

As a final note, I've come to understand that a number of the more experienced players have taken to gathering the names of these obnoxious souls and passing them around to new players, so that we may avoid the unpleasantness that they experienced first-hand. While I question this kind of "black-listing", problem players should be aware that they acquire bad reputations which follow them from game to game, making it all the more likely that even allies will refuse to have anything to do with them. It's a sad situation, but one I too am at a loss to resolve. I'd be grateful to hear if anyone's come up with an alternative."

Tom Walton

GSI responds - You bring up a topic that defies easy addressing, Tom. Being on this side of the game, the moderating/administrating side, we're not in a position to see a lot of the behaviors that you describe. There's a lot of player-to-player activity that's invisible to us and a lot that we are in no position to try to control. Certainly, any player who abandons the basics of fair play and good sportsmanship deprives a lot of people of an enjoyable experience, not the least of which is himself. We would hope that the majority of our players approach the game in the spirit with which it is presented; basically, for entertainment.

It's no surprise that many gamers "play to win" and will do anything that they feel is necessary to achieve that victory. We're not saying that this is a right or wrong approach, but anyone employing

it would definitely have different goals and a different playing style from someone playing "just for fun". And the fact that players are paying to participate in our games adds another strongly motivating factor - you want value for your money, and for many people, value means victory. Anything less is wasted money.

However, these facts should not be taken by a player as a license to run amok. Rudeness is just as inexcusable as cheating, and "personal vendettas" from game to game smack of immaturity. One would hope that the vast majority of our players are a little more sophisticated than that.

In the end, Tom, it sounds as if the problem will take care of itself. While we don't condone the "black-lists" you mention, we, as gamers, can understand their emergence. The worst offenders will eventually find themselves completely isolated and will be forced to change their offensive habits if they wish to continue to have other players to game with.

"In agreement with Subedei's observations in February's Hobbiton Square, I too think that much of the popularity of Middle-earth PBM stems from the fact that it's set in Middle-earth. The game mechanics are good, but they aren't great; a lot of work still needs to be done, especially with respect to the rule book. For novices, the poor organization of the book and the lack of examples of mechanics for a game this complicated is at best confusing and at worst, a prime contributor to getting knocked out of the war (how many of your plans have gone awry because of miswritten orders?)

In all, though, I do love the game, for all of its flaws. Hence the fact that I'm playing in seven of them (have I set a record here?) . . ."

T.A. Morgan

GSI responds - Anything that wishes to endure must by definition remain in a perpetual state of evolution, whether it be an individual, a nation, or something as simple as a game. ME-PBM has come a long way in the two years since its birth, and has undergone many changes. Reflecting this, the rule book has already entered its fourth edition, primarily to address those areas that you mention. Don't forget, T.A., that we're always open to constructive criticism, suggestions, advice, etc. In fact, we encourage it! It's this kind of input that makes us grow and change, that *will* ultimately make us "great". And we're accessible too. Any player who has a question or who finds him or herself confused can reach us in a variety of ways: phone, letter, fax, or via Compuserve's computer network. We will do our best to see that that player gets the info' they need.

So while we may not be "great" just yet, we sure aren't standing still either. And seven games could just be the record . . .

## 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.

### GENERAL

Ed. Note - When sending personals separately from your turnsheets, please remember to include your most recent security code!

## STATE OF WAR

### GAME 81

Kobar watches over the peoples of Massachusetts. Soon they will be free of Maine's arrogance. New Hampshire is weak. We shall survive and topple the imperialists.

Governor of Massachusetts

Middle-earth™ PBM

### GAME 3

Alert! Alert!

Lomelinde and Maerloth have found my capitol in exile! Evacuate now if you value your lives!

For Jessra, Thrindel, and Ulric, this message came too late. Calorn may have fallen, but the Khazad live on!

Baaltrac

\*\*\*\*\*

Dwarves,

Give in to the gentle comfort of death and defeat before I have to go out and buy a second binder to hold my turn results!

The Haradwaith

### GAME 6

Elrond has been assassinated! Two of my armies have been destroyed! Do not worry, for the Free Peoples shall still win. The odds are

good: #'s 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, & 24 vs. #'s 17, 19, & 22. Spring is here!

Baaltrac

### GAME 13

I still want to know why it is taking three dark Servants over one and 1/2 years to eliminate one former Neutral!

Ulfacs, Haradwaith

### GAME 20

Hey, Former Neutral Who Is Now A Free People And Has A Very High Score,

How about contacting some of your allies and letting us in on your great tactics. Your great score won't help you if the Dark Servants win the game. They are still very strong and dangerous and anybody can find the Ring.

\*\*\*\*\*

Outnumbered 3 - 1 since game start and still going. This match should have ended last Winter but you good fellows can't seem to get your act together. Thanks for the respite and I think we'll start hitting back now.

The Mirkwood Twins

### GAME 26

Warlord Telumehtar takes pleasure in announcing that reports of his death are somewhat exaggerated. Although he slew Herudar in challenge and was part of the three armies that took Dol Guldur and crushed Urgubal some months ago, he has been unable so far to corner Gothmog. We pity the Dark Servants, reduced to crowing about the conquest of Minas Ithil after 14 weeks of investment, just because

it was their last victory. We await you, rested and eager for battle.

\*\*\*\*\*

Vissini,

Are you having fun yet? For a genius and a tactical whiz, you sure are ignorant.

Bonus

### GAME 31

Oh no - Not one but two Dragons in that army!

### GAME 33

Cardolan,

Very smart of you to spend all your money each turn. This cuts down on losses due to thieves, however, what happens when your economic base is violently disrupted? One must ponder. Good luck. I'm aimed your way.

Vulcan 750

### GAME 34

The bones of Southern Gondor are being picked over. Enion and Arfanhil, you have chosen unwisely. Now your days are numbered.

Zarendarger (17)

### GAME 35

As Spring returns to the region, the Free Peoples mourn the passing of the Woodmen, the Eothraim, and Cardolan. However, the ones that remain (Northmen, Arthedain, N & S Gondor, Dwarves, Noldo and Sinda Elves) vow to avenge those who are gone.

Emgarion

\*\*\*\*\*

Ding dong, the witch is dead,  
The Wicked Witch is dead.  
The Wizard of Oz

\*\*\*\*\*

"And it came to pass that Mordor was razed by the combined might of the Eldar, Edain, and Khazad. After many years, the soil of Valinor was spread over the burnt lands and roses grew quite nicely."

So speaks the Sage

\*\*\*\*\*

Upcoming Dunland vacation spot:  
Mt. Gram.

### GAME 36

Dark Servants,

You really made me mad now. It is only fair to warn you:

**ELEPHANTS WILL ROLL!**

Haradwaith

### GAME 37

Moria is mine. Sinda and Dwarven blood stains my chains and their flesh fills my belly. Soon the West will be my slave and supper too.

Gothmog (Azaro)

P.S. Sorry, Minotar, but you were trespassing.

### GAME 38

Hey, Pig Master,

I mean Hound Master. Bain knew perfectly well that he would die. He was, however, only a figurehead for the real power. As for what I will do next, well . . . You know now!!!

Those Crazy Dwarves

\*\*\*\*\*

Gosh, those Sinda just can't seem to hold on to #1. Thanks for retrieving it and bringing it back to your capitol

in time for us to steal it and then kill a Dwarf commander and dissolve his army.

Sauron's Stealthy Servants

\*\*\*\*\*

The nation of the Blind Sorcerer would like to thank Southern Gondor for assisting us with our recent budget crunch. Reducing our maintenance while increasing our income has proved to be a BIG help.

#### GAME 40

Will no one accept my challenge?!

16 really annoyed Noldo  
Still at 3520 (Azro)

#### GAME 41

Got a nagging character problem? Our experienced staff (15 assassinations to date) is available for hire.

Rates:

Army commanders - 10,000 gold  
Other characters - 5,000 gold  
Or send me 10,000 per character and I will refuse commissions on them.  
Ji Indur

#### GAME 42

The Dark Shadow sweeps over Middle-earth. The Dunlendings, Rhudaur and the Easterlings have seen the dark face of Sauron. The Woodman and the Eothraim are dead and the Sinda and the Dwarves are near their last breath. Darkness has spread over Mirkwood and soon all of Middle-earth.

The Black Hand

#### GAME 43

So called Lords of "Good",  
This message goes out to the leaders of the "Free" People, and

especially to the one so cowardly as to send me an anonymous message in February's Whispers - sending money to anyone I please is a neutral act. I was a Neutral, and as a Neutral nation, should have been treated with respect. Instead, the "Good" nations either ignored me completely, or gave me empty promises. No effort was given to curry my favour except by the Dark Servants, who at least *speak* to me as an equal, not as a larger nation who demands tribute and gives none.

Hear the words of Haruth Raman, True Lord of Gondor: "We shall see who the "twit" is! First the Corsair dogs and their masters, who are no better than dogs! The nation of the Haradwaith has seen the Light and found it to be the Gleam of the Evil Eye! All hail Sauron, Lord of Darkness! I give my life and my kin to your cause!"

\*\*\*\*\*

Dunland claims a "mis-communication" is responsible for his ongoing assault on Cardolan. We were unaware that Santa and the Easter Bunny were working for Dunland's foreign office. However, we're sure a few thousand Dunadan troops can evict those rude strangers.

#### GAME 45

Blind Sorcerer,

I see you! Did you think to march on Dunadain territory unchallenged?? Southern Gondor is down, not out! Prepare yourself!

Baranor of the Free Peoples

\*\*\*\*\*

Middle-earth Century 21

For sale: Carn Dum - SOLD!  
Dol Guldur - SOLD!  
Goblin Gate - SOLD!  
Osgiliath - SOLD!  
Mordor - ????

\*\*\*\*\*

The Mirror of Justice returns the injuries those servants of Evil inflict upon others. Is it unjustified for a thief to steal from a thief?

The Wandering Prophet

#### GAME 46

Easterling,

Your bitter attack is uncalled for, considering how you have been treated by us. You will be repaid in kind. I'm sure Elrond will be there to help you. In pieces, that is!

So shall it be written

#### GAME 47

"The tides of war  
Come crashing down  
On walls of wood and stone  
Into the breach  
With blood for mortar  
The blocks of flesh and bone  
Now all is crimson  
Burning ruins  
And only the spirits moan"

The Fireside Tales of Ren

\*\*\*\*\*

"Shadow armies  
Want to dance?  
Will free folk catch us?  
Not a chance  
Into their cities  
And their towns  
Mischievous, mayhem  
Will abound  
Watch behind you  
Look ahead  
Moving shadows  
Shnick . . .you're dead."

The Bad Boys' Shadow Dancing Club

#### GAME 48

The scum, Uklurg and his followers have paid the ultimate price for trespassing on Gondor soil. They

were beheaded as a warning to all Evils . . . Be gone or be dead!!

So Says Kurgan (7)

\*\*\*\*\*

With my earlier victories over two N. Gondor armies, Cardolan dares to send his forces against me. Tis but a foolish gesture at best.

Gothmog

#### GAME 49

At first, I was not that pleased with my standby position, for it was in terrible shape. I have decided to stay, however, so come and get me, Tarondor!

Baalroc the Unclean

\*\*\*\*\*

Cardolan,

We extend congratulations to you and your ally for the removal of the foul Witch-king armies. The Dwarves and Woodmen shall be torching Mt. Gundabad's meager slain resistance as you read this. Dul Guldur and Goblins Gate have long been feasting halls for Sindar, Dwarves, Northmen, and my Beorning peoples. The last Dark Servant army seen in Mirkwood was around New Year's. The Dark has been pushed further than you think; like east of the Greenwood.

Beoraborn, Woodmen

\*\*\*\*\*

A message to the Cloud Lord from a secret admirer,

Ask not for whom the bell tolls ...

#### GAME 50

We waited for more horse meat, but decided to get some of our own upon invading the Eothraim!

Pass the barbecue sauce!

The Mouth of Sauron

P.S. All of Mordor awaits your foolish attempt, Tarondor.

### GAME 53

Overheard from the walls of Mount Gundabad, as Commander Carlon squinted against the glare of still-unmelted ice towards the Dwarven army in its orderly ranks and shiny armour:

"Oops."

Ulfacs grimaced. "Yeah - and we don't even dislike them. Sigh."

### GAME 54

Because of their foolish attempt to resist their rightful master, despite his recent offer of mercy, Murazor has declared and carried out a death sentence against the nation of Cardolan. Who will be next? For strategic reasons, Murazor will not disclose that, although he has stated that his offer of mercy still stands and that no so-called Free Persons should feel safe from his wrath.

So speaketh Angulion,  
Spokesman of Murazor,  
The Witch-king

### GAME 56

We have seen the light. Literally! The deciding Dark Servants shall be paid back in full. Easterling honor has been stained, now it's time for redemption.

Zarendarger (25)

### GAME 57

Vissini,

Are you having fun yet? I'm coming to see you. I've never met a real live genius before.

Bonus

### GAME 58

Vissini,

Don't take this personally, but there are 15 people in our game who don't like you. And I hear there are more.

Bonus

\*\*\*\*\*

In the Beginning

Good always overpowered Evil  
But in time, their Nations grow weak  
And their city's fell to slums  
All the while my Evil grew strong  
And in the dusts of Barad Dur  
Lurked the Blackest of hates  
For he whom they all feared has come  
Now they lay destroyed and beaten  
Only the corpses of Nations  
Ashes of dreams and blood-stained streets

So begins a new age of Darkness  
Stormbringer

### GAME 60

When Julius died, there was Augustus. When Johnston fell, there was Lee. When Rome burned, the Empire collapsed. When Richmond burned, the South was no more. So ask yourself, who is winning this war?

\*\*\*\*\*

And in the last days of Vagaig, they came by night out of Mordor, over the passes of the Mountains of Shadow, and took Minas Ithil and made it a place of such dread that none dared to look.

Ren

\*\*\*\*\*

The Dark Servants' Master Plan  
(Revisited)

1) Everyone throw everything at the Woodmen.

2) Pay no attention to Good armies sacking Evil capitols.

3) Send lots of scary notes to Whispers of the Wood.

4) Repeat.

\*\*\*\*\*

Despite Dark threats, Rhudaur is proud to be Free. Was sending Angmar's might East supposed to be a show of strength? Did you think we would join you when you tipped the balance of power towards Good??? Fools!

\*\*\*\*\*

Sick of all those pop centers, armies, and gold reserves? Then Khamul's Military and Economic Strategy School is for you! With Khamul's help, your nation will be an impoverished smoking ruin in record time! Murazor says "By turn 8, I had only 2,600 green troops, two free pop centers, and Carn Dum and Mt. Gram were undefended and surrounded by Free armies. I owe it all to Khamul!"

### GAME 61

Minas Ithil has fallen before the might of Ren's well-trained trolls and goblins! Some watch-tower! Enjoy your last few weeks of life, Caranthir. You and your measly 600 troops are as good as dead!

The Unkempt Nazgul

\*\*\*\*\*

To the Undecided:

The Dark Realms are expanding! Northern Gondor and the Woodmen are the first to feel their might. Join us now and help sweep all the land unto the Lidless Eye. There are artifacts to be had!

Akhorahil

\*\*\*\*\*

The circular chamber, deep within Mt. Doom, had not been entered in eons. It had remained remarkably intact. Its walls were still painted with the blood of enemies past and the dull, pulsating glow that emanated from the deep purple divining altar stone reminded Sauron of better days. The black, domed ceiling still hung ominously above as the Dark Lord sat in a small throne near the altar.

"Now," he hissed, "we shall see all."

What Sauron did see pleased him somewhat. "The obedient ones have done well and my power grows, but I am not whole without the Ring."

Evil Eye

\*\*\*\*\*

Argeleb,

I have decided not to take your advice. The dance at Cardolan's capitol is too exciting to miss. As for your army that relieved me of a worthless village, it will be extinct by the time that you read this.

Noldo, why did you say that you attacked me when it was Arthedain? Are you clones or something? You know where I am whenever you get tired of talking and decide to act.

Murazor

### GAME 62

The hooded man crept to Hellas' side.

"What of Angulion's message," Hellas asked.

He studied the wizened man and responded, "Angulion knows that his victory at Weathertop was pyrrhic. The fall of Murazor is a loss which they cannot surmount."

### GAME 63

Dear Khamul,

Are you ready to lose your last army and Dol Guldur? The honour will

be mine when I rid thee from Greenwood.

Waulfa, Nation #1

\*\*\*\*\*

#### BE IT KNOWN,

The Lords of the Sea have entered the war. The Corsairs now proudly serve under the command of Sauron. Free Peoples, beware.

#### GAME 64

Well then, it seems that we must report the activities of the evil nations in our area. Hmmm . . . Well, there you have it. There *are* evil nations out there somewhere . . . right?

The puzzled Northmen Nation

\*\*\*\*\*

Eldanar, Angsul, Gundabad, Larach, Duhnnan, Angren, Enedhir, Cillien, and Wularen have all fallen. The armies of Cardolan sit astride the north and all tremble at the rumor of their approach.

Hallas, true heir of Elendil

#### GAME 65

##### For the Record

- 1) Evil has been purged from the Plains of Rhovanion.
- 2) The Dunlandings will be dead soon.
- 3) Dwarves convalesce from violence.
- 4) Someone said fighting two fronts is bad, so I'm fighting on four.

Threlin (Azaro)

#### GAME 67

Free Peoples,

Hey! What's this nonsense about winning in 15 turns? Did somebody let the original time table slide?! I'm disappointed.

Warlord Mahrcared, Eothraim

\*\*\*\*\*

Q. What do you get when the Harad, Rhudaur, and Dunlendings all turn Good before turn #5?

A. A bunch of spineless Neutrals who should stick to games such as "Go Fish".

P.S. Thanks, Harad, for the gold, you dork.

#### GAME 68

From the war journals of Lord Uvatha:

"Apparently, Gaerendil has taken Dilgul back while I've been away. There is no sign of his forces - they are probably fortifying Shrel Kain. My troops are starving. I wonder how Northmen taste . . ."

\*\*\*\*\*

It was nice of the little folk to send an army to help the Northmen. Such a touching display of friendship (sniff). I'd like to shake Azaghal's hand, if only I could find the body . . .

The Long Rider

#### GAME 69

Enjoying the party at Imladris, Celedhring? I see you brought company in Murazor. Too bad Wodurishak slipped on his guts. Let me introduce you to a friend, Marendil. He knows how to party!

Zarendarger (10)

\*\*\*\*\*

The Lords and Ladies of Rhudaur claim manifest destiny of Angmar. We are prepared for the assassin/thieves of Mordor. So let the war begin for Rhudaur. Murazor, I hope that my knife feels good in your back.

The Lords and Ladies of Rhudaur

#### GAME 70

Thuringwasthost: Gisulf captures it, is taken hostage, his army disbands. Athaulf and Thuidimier stick around. Athaulf taken hostage, army disbands. Thuidimier stick around. Thuidimier taken hostage, army disbands. Eothraim - horse lovers, some call them persistent. Some call them thick.

Zuhlitar (20)

#### GAME 71

The Sinda are pleased to announce the timely demise of Gothmog - Dark Lieutenants' warlord, and of Bulraker - aspiring Dog Lord minion. We also extend our invitation to the Neutrals with one caution - the Light will shine in Mordor. Don't get caught in the shadows!

#### GAME 72

Neutrals,

Actions speak louder than words! The inappropriately named "Good" peoples have attacked the neutral Easterlings at four locations - these included challenges. The "Evil" forces have offered and delivered aid. If the choice of neutrality is cause to be attacked, one must wonder - which freedoms the "Free Peoples" respect.

Ovatha II, now a good "Evil"

#### GAME 73

Dwarves scurry West  
Sinda hide somewhere.  
Eothraim offer their best  
Then run to home lair.  
Easterlings no help  
Uvatha picks my bones.  
Win or lose, I'm no whelp  
Even though I fight alone.

Dark Soul of the Northmen  
Sauron's Bane

#### GAME 74

The armies of darkness moved quickly into Mirkwood, only to be repelled by the swords of the Woodmen and Dwarves. Good job, #1 and #8! These Woodmen are almost as good as the ones in game #49.

Sinda

#### GAME 79

The nation of the Woodmen greets all Free and Neutral peoples. Diplomatic contacts are invited, all contacts will receive a reply.

You're welcome, Wally Woodman

\*\*\*\*\*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let the fun begin. All bad boys are invited to 2924. We will walk the walk and talk the talk all over your face. Northern Gondor, eat lead!

Mrs. .58 Cal

\*\*\*\*\*

Free Peoples unite to smite Dark Servants! Further details to follow. This has been a special bulletin from Wally Woodman, your man on the scene . . .

#### GAME 80

Once again, it all begins. And when it ends, I will be there. So sayeth Khamul, the Dragon Lord, second to none.

\*\*\*\*\*

Neither Evil nor Good  
Can contain the despondent fear.  
Where true despotism stood,  
Is frighteningly right here.  
Rampaging along the plains,  
My powerful cavalry runs free.  
Watch for tears of rain,  
And Easterlings behind every tree.

Dark Soul the Neutral

NOTE - Opinions expressed in the following article are those of the author's alone. Game Systems neither agrees nor disagrees with the author's viewpoints.

## BLOOD AND GLORY

### Warfare in Middle-earth PBM

by Tom Walton

In Middle-earth PBM, nations live and die by the sword. Agents, emissaries, mages, and artifacts are all very nice, but in the end it is the common soldier who's going to bring the enemy to his knees. Everything else is just window dressing, tools to be used to soften up an opponent before you storm his cities and enslave his people. This article is directed at newer players who've yet to master the quirks of the game. The information presented here is meant to reduce the advantage that veteran players have gained through hard experience.

#### Troops: The Best Buy for your Money

In a nutshell, heavy is better than light. GSI has thoughtfully given the heavy versions of cavalry and infantry exactly twice the strength of the lighter versions along with a correspondingly doubled maintenance cost. This means, regardless of which version you pick to recruit, you pay the exact same amount of gold per strength point each turn.

This situation gives the heavy troops a distinct advantage over the lighter. First, you can recruit heavy troops just as quickly as lighter ones, which means that it takes less time (and less orders) to whip up a force of sizable strength. Second, heavy troops don't eat any more than their lighter brethren do, allowing you to feed twice as many strength points for the same amount of food or city support. Finally, equipping heavy troops with metal arms or armour is much more cost-effective than doing the same for light troops. For example, giving a light infantry soldier bronze armour will increase his defensive strength by 30%, for a total of 1.5 points. Giving that same armour to a heavy infantry soldier will result in an increase of 3 points (30% of 10). In effect, you get twice the increase for the same cost. This also applies to weapons, but the overall benefit is much smaller.

Archers represent an anomaly in the game system, having a high offensive but low defensive strength. They also come with their own steel-equivalent weapons, which means that you don't have to waste gold arming them. If you're pressed for resources or don't have the funds to maintain more heavy infantry or cavalry, archers are a good short-term solution to the recruiting problem. Don't count on them to provide the backbone for your army, however, because their low defensive capability insures that they'll be wiped out in droves. Instead, use them to fill in gaps in your forces, or for an added "punch" in battle.

Men-at-arms are the cannon-fodder of ME-PBM. It takes five men-at-arms to match the strength of one heavy infantry soldier, and these troops will cost 25% more gold to support. Worse, they'll eat five times as much food, a serious consideration for an army on the march. Unless you're one of the few nations that has a significant advantage in recruiting men-at-arms, don't bother with them; better still, unless you expect to enter battle right away, disband them and replace them with something more cost-effective.

#### Arms and Armour

If at all possible, never waste your time on the "Make Weapons/Armour" and the "Upgrade Weapons/Armour" orders. Instead, buy or transport bronze or steel to the place where you're going to recruit, then specify the specific

weapons or armour in the recruiting order itself. By reading the order description carefully, you'll see that the weapons and armour will automatically be made from city stores and given to your troops, without your having to issue any extra orders.

Armour has a much bigger impact on troop strength than weapons do. Bronze armour raises troop defense strength by 30%, while steel armour raises it by 60%; this is a straight, across-the-board increase. Weapons, however are factored in with a number of other things (such as training levels), reducing the actual difference that the weapons make to offensive strength. A reasonable strategy for the allocation of arms and armour is to give your troops bronze weapons and bronze/steel armour, but not steel weapons (the one exception might be heavy cavalry).

As far as leather and mithril weapons or armour goes, forget about it. Leather is better used in creating cavalry and dumping on the market, while mithril is far too expensive to be given to troops. Mithril costs 5 - 20 times as much as steel (sometimes more), but is only 67% more effective.

#### Blitzkrieg, Middle-earth Style

Cavalry is expensive. Unless your nation produces an excess of leather and mounts, or you have gold to burn, it's nearly impossible to field an all-cavalry army. In addition, setting up to recruit cavalry takes more orders, as you not only have to get your bronze/steel to the appropriate pop centers, but also the required mounts and leather. Most nations don't have the gold or orders to spare, especially in the early game.

For those few nations which can afford to do so, recruiting cavalry is more than worth it. First off, cavalry is slightly more efficient in terms of maintenance costs (2.67 strength points per gold piece, compared to 2.5 strength points per gold piece for infantry). Second, and more importantly, it's much more mobile. An all-cavalry army can force-march seven hexes in clear terrain in one turn, while an army containing infantry can only march four hexes. In rough terrain, such as predominate in Harad, cavalry can move four hexes, compared to infantry's two.

The difference in movement capabilities leads to a wide range of possibilities. A cavalry army can always outpace or run down an infantry army; it can also respond to threats more quickly, allowing a player who invests in cavalry to maintain a smaller garrison force. This is especially important for nations like the Easterlings, the Northmen, or Northern Gondor, all of which have widely separated pop centers in clear terrain, or who possess good road networks. For these nations, a cavalry force can race from one end of the nation to the other to meet enemies approaching from different directions.

A cavalry army also has the advantage of better armour modifiers. A single heavy infantry troop given bronze armour will have its defensive strength increased by 3 points; the same bronze armour given to heavy cavalry will result in a total increase of 4.8 points. For weapons/armour upgrades, heavy cavalry is the most cost-effective troop type in the game.

Finally, a large all-cavalry force is great for springing surprises on an enemy, striking fear into the hearts of the most powerful foes. If the enemy believes your army to be mostly infantry, imagine his surprise when you race past his defending force to lay waste to his nation. And, once you're in his territory, you'll be impossible to catch (unless he's also built a cavalry force).

### Training Troops

The best way to increase army effectiveness is to train troops. This not only has the benefit of raising your overall offensive strength, but also improves the command rank of characters with the army. Training troops is most productive when the army consists of entirely one troop type.

For example, assume that you have an army that's all heavy infantry. The army commander issues the "Army Maneuvers" order, while the secondary commander gives the "Troop Maneuvers" order, specifying heavy infantry. The army commander will raise his own skill 1-5 points, his sub-commander's skill by 1-5 points, and his army's training rank by 1-5 points. The sub-commander, in turn, will raise his own skill rank by 1-7 points and the training rank of the heavy infantry by 1-8 points. In all, the army commander's skill will increase 1-5 points, the sub-commander's skill by 2-12, and the army's training rank by 2-13 points (since it's all heavy infantry). In a few turns, you can create some good commanders and an effective fighting force, all at the same time. Best of all, it doesn't cost anything.

### Battle Basics

He who gets there with the most wins. This is as true in ME-PBM as in any other game. If you want to win battles, splitting up your armies and sending them in all directions is the absolute worst thing that you can do. Many players get defeated because they can't effectively concentrate upon a single goal, or because they insist on defending every village they own. Don't make the mistake of spreading yourself too thinly; pick one target and throw everything you have against it, then move on to the next one. Conversely, only defend against one enemy at a time.

Information is intelligence. Surprisingly enough, very few players effectively use the "Scout" orders to find out how strong enemy forces are, or what characters are traveling with the opposing armies. Without good intelligence, you risk the chance of being defeated in a debacle that'll make the pages of *Whispers*, not to mention leaving your nation open to conquest. Always do as much scouting as possible before you actually enter battle; this allows you to pick and choose the fights that you are assured of winning, while avoiding those which favour the enemy.

Don't fight to lose. Monty Python said it best: if you can't win, RUN AWAY! Contrary to common sense, many players fight battles that they know they can't possibly win. Running away allows you more time to pick up more troops to even out the odds, or perhaps convince another player to help you out. At the very least, your army will be a constant thorn in the enemy's side, since he can't know what you're going to do with it; and he might waste many fruitless turns chasing it around the map. The only exception to this rule is when fighting the battle may hurt the enemy so badly that he can't take a pop center that he's trying to grab.

Speed is of the essence. When trying to conquer a nation, speed is imperative. The longer it takes to bring an enemy to his knees, the more time he'll have to raise reinforcements, make alliances with other players, or improve his defenses. Each turn of unnecessary delay makes it that much more likely that something will happen to force you or your allies into withdrawing, or even turn the tables

against you altogether. When you invade, move as quickly as possible and knock the enemy out as soon as you can. Don't allow him time to prepare, or give your neighbors the opportunity to capitalize upon your preoccupation.

The real prize. The real prize in any war is a nation's major towns. Take his major towns and he has no place to put a capitol; it'll knock him out of the game. Don't mess with the smaller towns, or worse yet, the villages and camps; they'll only waste troops that could be better used against other targets.

To siege or not to siege. The siege and threaten orders are the most unreliable and unproductive combat orders in the game. Unless you have an extremely large army led by an excellent commander, or the pop center is small and lacks fortifications, sieging/threatening probably won't work on the first try (or second or third). Don't use these orders when fighting an active enemy, unless you're almost sure of success; instead, capture or destroy the pop center. It's best to use the siege/threaten orders once the enemy's already been defeated and you don't have to worry about being attacked in the interim.

The best defense. If you can't stop an enemy invasion, don't try. Let him waste time and troops capturing your towns; he'll become weaker while you continue to recruit and train your armies. Once he's lost a few thousand men, take the battle to him and destroy his forces, then recapture what you've lost. Let your pop centers and fortifications do the fighting for you.

Scorched earth. As a counter to the previous tactic, if you've made an invasion and you can't reasonably expect to hold on to what you capture, then don't capture it - destroy it. Granted, you don't get any revenue or production from ruins, but neither does the enemy. If you're forced to make an invasion that you can't complete, blast as much of the enemy nation into rubble as you can before withdrawing. It'll wreck his economy and make it much more difficult for him to fight you the next time around.

Use the terrain. There are a number of natural features on the map which can channel movement through particularly critical points. Grabbing these features can either provide a point for invasion, or narrow your defensive front down to a very small area. If at all possible, place a camp at the location and start building fortifications to block enemy movement. If this isn't an option, having a sizable army standing by to defend it is an acceptable alternative.

Improvise. Take chances. Throw the rules away if they don't work for you. The only true test of battle is whether you win or lose; everything else is just so much hogwash. Unlike real-world commanders, we have the opportunity to try out silly schemes with wild abandon, so go for it! Remember, if it's crazy and it fails, it's stupid, but if it's crazy and it works, it's brilliant. You can't be brilliant unless you're willing to look stupid.

## The Hall Of Heroes

### Middle-earth Play By Mail

Game #8 - The Dark Servants: #14, #20, & #21  
The forces of Evil win the day once more, banishing  
life in 40 turns. Final standings are as follows

#14 The Cloud Lord - 2350  
#20 The Dark Lts. - 2184  
#21 The Corsairs - 1884

Top Free People: #10 Noldo - 1158

#### Interesting notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Hoarmurath/Ice King: 212  
Highest Net Commander Rank - Gothmog/Dark Lts.:152  
Highest Net Mage Rank - Adunaphel/Quite Avenger: 166  
Highest Net Emissary Rank - Athrazoc/Dark Lts.: 118  
Highest Net Agent Rank - Kirock/Dark Lts.: 143  
Most Mithril - Dog Lord & Cloud Lord (tie): 4145  
Most Artifacts - Ice King: 22  
Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 28

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

Game #24 - The Free People: #7, #21, & #23  
Goodness resurges, casting off the Dark cloak in  
only 28 turns! Final standings are as follows:

#7 South Gondor - 2267  
#21 The Corsairs - 2050  
#23 The Dunlendings - 1917

Top Dark Servant: #19 The Long Rider - 850

#### Interesting notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Earnil/Cardolan: 156  
Highest Net Commander Rank - Earnil/Cardolan: 136

## The Hall Of Heroes

Highest Net Mage Rank - Morarthdur/Blind Sorcerer: 113  
Highest Net Emissary Rank - Belbethrin/Cardolan  
Gragash/Blind Sorcerer (tie):87  
Highest Net Agent Rank - Temper/Southern Gondor: 121  
Most Mithril - Dunlendings: 548  
Most Artifacts - Southern Gondor & Long Rider (tie): 12  
Most Kills - Long Rider: 11

Congratulations to the Free Peoples!

Game # 25 - The Dark Servants: #11, #21, & #19  
Who's laughing now! The Servants have certainly  
proven their mettle these past few months. 28 turns sees them  
once again in control. Final standings are as follows:

#11 The Witch-king - 2117  
#21 The Corsairs - 1842  
#19 The Long Rider - 1550

Top Free People: #7 Southern Gondor - 1300

#### Interesting notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 235  
Highest Net Commander Rank - Tarondor/North Gondor: 158  
Highest Net Mage Rank - Murazor/Witch-king: 184  
Highest Net Emissary Rank - Xerox/Witch-king:114  
Highest Net Agent Rank - Din Ohtar/Long Rider: 136  
Most Mithril - Witch-king: 1138  
Most Artifacts - Witch-king: 24  
Most Kills - Witch-king: 24

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!