

WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



JOHN WOODY

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INC.**

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WORDS FROM THE WOOD

Summer's on the wing and that means two things: Origins and GenCon! Oh yes, faithful ones, we shall be there! This year, Origins is being held home, home on the range in Dallas, Texas from June 30th through July 4th. GenCon remains, as always, in Milwaukee (one of the friendliest cities I've been too) from August 19th through the 22nd. We'll be up to our usual mischief on the dealers' floor and hosting our legendary game seminars. This year's seminars promise to be the most intense ever; ME-PBM mania is at a fever pitch and everybody wants the inside scoop. Discussions will cover rules, game mechanics, and upcoming game scenarios. Plan to get there early! Dates and times are:

Origins GSI Seminar: Saturday, July 3rd, 9 PM

GenCon GSI Seminar: Friday, August 20, 8 PM

Summer also will see the dawning of Middle-earth PBM's second anniversary. To commemorate this landmark event, we want to do something a little different: announcing our "*ME-PBM CONTEST OF CHAMPIONS!!!*" If you are a past game winner, or a long, long time GSI player, submit your qualifications today. We'll place the top players, the highest rank of GSI elite, in a no-holds-barred, one-on-one (no pre-set teams), no-position-request-totally-random-drawing battle to the finish. We'll settle once-and-for-all (gosh, that's a lot of hypens!) the age old question of who is the best of the best.

We're considering a special pricing structure for this event: A one time, up front fee of about \$175.00 covering the entire run of the game, including set-up costs. This pre-payment plan would encourage long-term participation and basically give you free play after turn #25. Let us know what you think of this idea when you send in your applications. Address them to "Contest of Champions" and please include your phone number.

Whew! After those two announcements above, we could all use a little breather. Well, while you're quickly catching your breath, grab a pen and jot down some important news: The cost for faxing out a turn has been lowered! The previous \$8.00 domestic fee has been dropped to just \$5.00 and the \$16.00 overseas rate has been reduced to \$10.00. This price change is effective immediately.

A few more changes have also been made to Middle-earth PBM in response to our players' demands for greater balance and starting position variety: New games will feature some beginning character skill randomization. Although similar, Elrond will no longer be the same as every other Elrond in every game. Individuals will now be individual! And just think - new skill levels mean new challenge ranks. Hmm. And new spell potentials. Food for thought.

Artifacts also are getting a bit of a face lift. They'll have their associated powers slightly randomized from game to game. So what you thought was so well known, so tried and true, is now new once more.

Parting Notes - Thanks for the terrific response to our need for three-week players. We were able to start up two new three-week games this month, bringing May's total for new games starting to ten! Quite a busy month. However, we still need teams of Free People for multi-player and grudge games. Teams of three to five or full sets of ten would suit our needs just fine! And as always, we've got slots open for Neutrals. See our "Game Start Policy Statement" in this issue for all the details on quick and easy set-ups!

That's the news for this month, we'll see you in 30!

Dennis



ALONG THE PATHWAYS

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WHISPERS OF THE WOOD is a monthly publication primarily for the use and enjoyment of GSI players of STATE OF WAR, and ME-PBM™. Subscription rates: \$15.00 for one year (12 issues) or \$25.00 for two years (24 issues). Individual issues cost \$1.75. GSI reserves the right to change these prices without prior notice of any type.

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GSI Game Start Policy Statement

William Feild

Many players have inquired about what considerations go into our position placement when setting up a new ME-PBM game. This question defies a simple answer and brings into focus several important, related issues. We'll discuss all these issues in an attempt to clarify our policies and procedures and, hopefully, to help you or your team to make the right choices.

We start many different types of ME-PBM games: **single-player**, **multi-player** (or team), and **grudge** games. Single player and grudge games are available in either two or three week turn rounds. We'll explain the criteria for each.

Generally, a single-player game will consist of players joining by themselves. In some cases we'll permit two players to join together in such games, but we usually separate these players geographically (or by allegiance) so that the potential cooperative advantage is minimized. Furthermore, one of the two players is usually new to ME-PBM. In rare cases, we might permit three players to join together, but only if each plays a nation with a different allegiance.

A multi-player game will consist of players joining in teams of three to five (i.e. teams of 3,3,4=10, 5,5=10, etc). In some instances we might place a single player or a two-player team in such games in order to balance out the ten nations for each side (i.e. teams of 3,3,3,1=10, 4,4,2=10, 5,4,1=10, etc). In such cases, these players are usually more experienced veterans and/or previous game winners. The reason for the five-player limit is to ensure that no 'team' on either side is able to dominate play simply because of its size. Teams of six to nine may split into separate games or they may split into separate teams on separate sides of the same game.

A grudge-game will consist of ten players joining as a team, facing a similar ten-player team. Positions may be pre-selected by the team. In rare cases, and only in grudge-games, we might allow one player to play two positions in order to complete the ten-player team. GSI takes care of securing the necessary five Neutral positions.

Our number one concern regarding new games is ensuring, to the best of our ability, that each game starts fairly for ALL players. We recognize that we can't always do this; we don't know the exact strengths and abilities of each player, nor do we know what the player interactions will be like. However, there are some things that we can do to ensure that abuses do not occur. In the two team-type games there's considerable attention paid to the Neutral positions to be sure that those players truly are neutral. We don't want a team inserting a 'ringer' into the game, posing as a Neutral. For this reason, we're reluctant to discuss how soon a pending game will start. It's not because we don't want to tell you, it's just that we feel that protecting the integrity of the game is of primary importance. Because Neutrals are supposed to be neutral, multi-player game

position requests may NOT include Neutral positions, only positions on one side or the other. Furthermore, we do not permit teams of Neutrals in excess of two. This is to ensure that even if a Neutral team has made up its mind ahead of time which side it plans to join, the remaining (majority) Neutrals are still available to be persuaded to balance the allegiances. Generally, if two Neutrals do join together, they will not be assigned geographically contiguous nations.

So, how can you or your team best get started?. Although GSI can not guarantee any position requests except those accompanied by 'Game Winner Certificates', several factors will contribute to a fast start with preferred positions.

1) Provide at least 4-6 position requests. We'll do our best to satisfy as many of the first choices as possible. If you'd like to try either allegiance (usually leading to a faster start), then give choices for each side. If you'd prefer a Neutral position (they seem to start the fastest!), then indicate your preferences among those five.

2) Teams should send in all their new game requests together. This avoids having one slow player delaying the entire team's new game. As above, if your team will play either side, provide preferences for both allegiances (but no Neutrals).

3) Grudge-game teams should be very sure that they will get along throughout the whole game. More than one grudge game has ended because one team broke up, as opposed to being defeated fairly and squarely.

4) Many teams would like to hedge their chances of victory by selecting 'blocks' of positions that share some fundamental advantage (usually geographic proximity, but could be other factors). This would probably be a fun game for them if they could get those positions. However, to ensure that ALL players start with as fair a chance as possible, GSI can not honor such blocks of position requests. Simply list the preferences for each team member, independent of what positions the others receive.

5) In order to minimize the time it takes to start new games, GSI can not guarantee (although you may request) specific 'due dates' for new games. Additionally, GSI can not allow a player to 'wait until a position becomes available'. If no alternate positions are specified, then the player risks receiving a position that is not to his or her liking.

6) Although 'Game Winner Certificates' do permit selection of particular positions, if used with a team, be aware that the usual restrictions still apply with regard to the composition of the team positions.

GSI appreciates the needs and desires that are associated with new games. We'd like every player to receive just the position they want and for every game to be perfectly balanced. However, we know that isn't possible. Remember, our primary concern is ensuring, to the best of our ability, that each game starts fairly for ALL players and that the wait for game start is minimal. This often means that we're forced to implement policies that limit the flexibility of individual players in exchange for maximizing the potential of ALL players.

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

There are ten Shades of Madness and we seek ten Fools of Freedom to torture, humiliate and destroy in the name of our Great Lord Sauron, may his eye never need an optometrist. Are you fool enough?

Subedei Bahadur
Mordor

STATE OF WAR

GAME 81

Poor New Hampshire
Poor state of Maine
You both attacked me
Now feel the pain
Vengeance is here
And soon you'll be gone
My flag flying proudly
Where yours once belonged.
Gov. of Massachusetts

Somehow the smell of burnt flesh is sweeter when it comes from the body of a weak and cowardly New Hampshire soldier. Dark clouds hover over you, Maine. You are charged with conspiracy and sentenced to death!

Massachusetts

GAME 82

Peaceful mid-Atlantic state seeks other states for possible alliances and fun victories. No losers, Brucers, or users please. We don't aim to please, we aim to kill. Green Goose around? Reply in confidence to Player #1

Gov. of Maryland

The system that we learn says that we're equal under the law. But the streets are reality - the weak and poor will fall.

We'll strip the power barons, tear down the crown. Educate the masses. We'll burn the White House down!

Speak to me the pain you feel. Death to the infidels! So sayeth the Lord, so doeth the flock!

Onward, Christian soldiers, revolution calling! Utah is free!

Gov. President Jebidiah Jones
Nation of Utah

Middle-earth™ PBM

GAME 3

Before the end, I have fifteen more Dwarven heroes to mourn:

Daggan - killed by a vampire.
Morbain - killed by Lomelinde.
Angabeleg - killed by Haruth Ramam.
Thrar III, Mithrang, Ulric, Della - killed on guard duty.
Kanobeleg, Bain I, Gain I, Nimguilina, Jessra, Thrindel, Dain, Gloin - assassinated.

Baaltrac

Where did the Khazad go?!

As forces of the Long Rider, Fire King, and Dark Lieutenants ravage Arnor and the Gray Havens, small bands of Dwarven raiders show up in Gondor! Amazingly tenacious . . . but doomed non-the-less.

The Flamelord

GAME 6

Yo, Ringwraiths!

The following are your emergency orders:

A) Put your empty skulls between your cadaverous legs.

B) Kiss your auras good-bye!
Now signing off,
Sauron

GAME 13

Question: How do you get Free Peoples into Mordor?

Answer: Provide free pine boxes . . .

Compliments of the Mordor Hit Team

GAME 18

Dwar,

Was it a worthwhile exchange? Enjoy them while they last.

Baruk Khazad Khazad Ameinu

Hey Noldor,

Who holds Gondor? I've taken both his sons, and if the faerie will stop running, I'll end his days in this Veil of Tears. The only purge you could accomplish is with vinegar and water. I'll see you in Mithlond-West.

The Dark Knife

GAME 20

To the "Good" nations,

Be happy that the game continues. Four dark Servants dropped almost immediately and the Neutrals all went Good right after. The only reason we still fight is your own ineptness. The "Neutrals" deserve their higher ranking. Have you actually defeated anyone?

GAME 21

Harad,

I salute your tenacity but I think that I have you on the run.

Celdrahil

Carlou,

While your counter attack did destroy two of my armies and also recaptured a pop center, that is all it did. Meanwhile, we've taken more pop centers and I killed Ejenna, Hastings, Roos, and Shabla.

Baaltrac

GAME 23

All hail the dark Servants who (without the Long Rider) swept to victory. I praise the cooperation shown and the noble play exhibited by Sauron's minions. Also, a salute to the Dwarves, who fought to the last.

Duran, the Dragon Lord

GAME 27

To my friends in the west, I can hold out no more. Well played, Dog Lord, may we meet anon. I'll fight to the last, but I think that that day has come.

Best fortune, all!
Mahrcared

GAME 28

General Camlin said proudly, "Tormog? BAH! Why should I fear Tormog! I, the victor of 14 battles, while my victorious army surrounds me, my Regent/Rogue guards me. Tormog? BAH!"

Anyone knowing where Tormog has taken Camlin, please contact:

Subedei, Gondor

GAME 31

Arfanhil resigned himself to the inevitable as Smaug and Lamthanc decimated his army. But initial reports seemed to indicate the Dog Lord army was destroyed as well.

Good fights on as the tide of Evil rises.

The Blind Sorcerer was in a rage - two of his high level emissaries were assassinated. Why don't these fools watch their backs?

GAME 34

Gondor is in ruins. The road leads to the towns of the Dunlendings. Soon they shall be in ruins also. The wrath of Sauron carries all before it. Argeleb II is dead.

Zarendarger (17)

GAME 35

With Cardolan, Rhudaur, and the Witch-king gone, Arnor is once again united under the leadership of Argeleb II. The war has been very successful so far. Now I must march on Mirkwood and Mordor.

Baaltrac

How I pity blind fools!

Your end is at hand and you don't even realize it. Prepare for your doom and I shall make it mercifully quick.

Elrond, Thranduil's skull made a nice chamber pot. I wonder what we can do with yours?

Ji Indur

All the residents of the camp peered fearfully from behind boulders to watch the outcome of the meeting between Murazor the Witch-king and Throkmau the dragon. Would the mighty dragon join him, or would they duel to the death?

GAME 37

With the fall of Dol Amroth, so begins the rein of Evil. Soon the light will be too weak to pierce the night and darkness will rule the world.

Congratulations to all nations for one full year of play!

Angamaite

Death, like a thief, comes without a warning. Those who rest comfortably and securely shall be rudely awakened long enough to glimpse the knife in their belly. So it is written.

The Wandering Prophet

GAME 38

You silly Elves,

I can't see why you're so proud and happy over disbanding an army composed of 100 archers. You're running around threatening camps while we have an army in the middle of Mordor!

Nuff said,

Those crazy Dwarves

Well, looks like the Mordor-West development project is going along quite well. South Gondor, you're next (you humble guy, you!)

Blind Sorcerer and his Pals

GAME 41

Waa - waa, South Gondor is picking on me. No fair, no fair, do over, all ye-all ye in come free, no fair, do over. If I can't win, I'm not going to play, so there!!

Haradwaith

Looks like it's eight or nine Dark Powers versus just the Noldo and Gondor. Hang in there, good guys, I haven't killed half of the characters I want to yet.

Ji Indur

Dark Servants,

Is this how you treat one who has done nothing to you and has remained Neutral as to his word? I would have gone Evil but you have done nothing to help me and now you steal my treasury dry. Enjoy it while it lasts.

GAME 43

Hey Uvatha, did you forget something?

While you are running around pretending to fight, the West has fallen. Northmen rule at Rhudaur's capitol, Arthedain strip-searched Murazor, and the Dragon Lord hides. By the way, thanks for the kill, it saved me from bankruptcy.

Eoder

"A lunge and a feint, a parry too late
A cut to the chest and you're down
Seeing the stain then feeling the pain
Feeling the sweat on your brow . . ."

(Iron Maiden)

The Man on the Silver Mountain

To "Big Brother",

The Eothraim have lost four camps, a major town, two characters, 7649 troops, and 33,734 gold in the struggle against Darkness; we have destroyed two camps, captured two towns, and helped destroy over 11,000 enemy troops. All this with almost no assistance from our "allies". Yet you, hiding behind a false name, brand us as a traitor? Pfah! We do not ally ourselves with the dark. We merely rest. We may rest for a long time, if you are any example of our "friends"...

The Horseclans

Famous Last Words, Part II

Ovatha: "Does . . ."

Ingar: "Does this . . ."

Celdhril: "Does this wine . . ."

Meriot: "Does this wine taste . . ."

Sarkar: "Does this wine taste funny . . ."

Gingrich: "Does this wine taste funny to you?"

Odagavia: "I haven't tried it, yet."

Since Haradwaith seems to think my anonymous posting of a message to him in Whispers indicates a lack of guts - what have YOU done, bud, besides play the part of the Quiet Avenger's stooge? You think I don't know why those navies at 2734 and 2833 are there? (Guarding His capitol!!!) Better start looking to your OWN defenses, because Corsairs, North Gondor, and I are going to make your demise our personal pet project for as long as it takes.

Celdrahil of South Gondor

P.S. Players who hide behind a work address and phone number shouldn't bitch about "anonymity".

GAME 45

Home, home on the range
Where the deer and the antelope play
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word . . . except today . . .

Pochak discovered the definition of stress and the might of the Free Peoples came upon him . . .

Hero Chronicles, Chap. One

The wandering Prophet asks:

Where are all the Free People characters going?

GAME 47

"Arca est iacta"

By now I will be stacking dead Gondorians at the Morannon, or in some serious trouble (at least it won't be dull).

Kudos to Gondors for a war well fought - if they're really gone, that is...
Dendra

Well, what can I say?

The Gondors, Siamese twins joined at the brain, have made things more difficult than expected. Congratulations! Still, they have many enemies, and despite recent threats, Gurthlug and I are currently alive and well. Would that I could say the same for Elatar, Andumehtar, Loryan, Kalen, Elladan, Elrohir, Glorfindel, Cirdan. . . Who will be next to join their ranks?

Regards,
Dendra

GAME 48

Thanks for the personal, Gothmog, but you're a little misguided. Gothmog was destroyed by Cardolan and Arthedain; I whacked Feagwath. (Actually, ALL armies were destroyed in both battles.)

Kurgan (7)

P.S. Where'd you get those pesky dragons?

GAME 49

It's the Quiet Avenger's term. Maybe he'll be thinking of the Witch-king. Hope the preparations make things more exciting this time - WK was too easy.

Thrandur III

"Freedom's forces build inexorably in the West behind a misty dam. Soon they will flow East, flooding the plains with light, lapping at Mordor's door."

2nd prize, Cardolan Fifth Grade Literature Contest.

GAME 53

Folk of the Elder Races:

Harken - do you not hear? The time of Men is here. Sail across the Sea, into the West - or dig deep into the Mountains - but hide, for the time is near. Darkman comes. Know fear.

GAME 56

This is a cruel world that we live in. Free Peoples and Dark Servants show no respect toward Easterling might. So be it! Until respect is shown, we, the Easterling people, shall crush all whom we meet. No quarter is to be given or expected.

Zarendarger (25)

GAME 61

The battle for Cardolan's capitol is on. Four good armies versus three Neutrals and one Evil. Film at eleven.

Elsewhere tonight - storms ravage the coastline at the Sea of Rhun, pop centers ordered to evacuate.

And on the lighter side - Elrond has been elected pacifist of the year!

Stay tuned, more to follow,
Orion World Watch

"Your report," snapped the shadow. The Nazgul is familiar to the Dark Lord's foul mood when his enemies attack him in his lands and not on theirs, as it should be.

"The news is grim, my Lord, we stand in defense. The Easterlings, also, are pressing for territory in Khand," replies the wraith.

"Why are my orders disobeyed? Destruction, I said!! Total, complete, obliterating destruction. That is your order."

Evil Eye

GAME 62

Hey Gondor guys
Look into my eyes
Here by intervention
I want your attention
It's pumping cross the bridges
Like never so before
A cola manufacturer
Is sponsoring the war

Duran and Pals

GAME 63

Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock, time is running short for the two Evil (snicker!) players up in the Northwest. They have devised a creative way to kill me off . . . Bore Me To Death!

Supreme Ruler, Argeled II
P.S. Canada Rules!

Dragons are a real pain. That is all I have to say.

Waulfa the Unlucky

Blacksilver slipped from the shadows of the court. The wretch, Hoarmurath, sat passively upon his throne, hands resting on the polished skull surfaces. Blacksilver strode mightily at the foul demon, Anguirel in hand. Hoarmurath laughed. It was a laugh that would mock him as he was smitten 'cross his crown. Laughter turned to shrieks of anguish as his wraith form dissipated and he left to be consumed by the anger of Morgoth, his evil master. Blacksilver slipped into the shadows with a smile of satisfaction.

Blacksilver, Lord of Shadows

GAME 64

"Whattaya mean they attacked us?!"

"Just like I said, the combined forces of the Sorcerer, the Rider, and the Easterlings took over major towns

at the Sea of Rhun, sir."

"(Sigh) Ah well, send in the Eothraim. They have been whining about getting some beach-front property anyway."

The Almost Upset Northmen Nation

GAME 66

I am Ji Indur, created from the darkness of the "Land of Shadows". Mordor is my home and the night is my realm. All those who stand against the Ring-Maker will find my knife in their backs or my poison in their bellies.

Ji Indur

Report by Prince Celdrahil to the Gondorian General Staff:

While clearing a hostile camp from the borders of Mordor, we located three Dark Servant armies nearby. The enemy made no attempt to consolidate forces, and we annihilated 1800 under Gothmog of the dark Lieutenants with minor losses. Of course, such disloyalty is to be expected from the slaves of Sauron. Nevertheless, I feel it would be premature to assume that all the dark Servants are led by incompetents.

Rejoice! Carn Dum has fallen!

Rogrog was slain in a personal challenge he egotistically issued. Goblin-gate has fallen! The mighty dragon Uruial was killed in the devastating battle. The traitorous Corsairs will rue their decision!

Whitefire

Hey Evil Dude!!

When are you going to attack?
I'm sick of agents. If you won't come
to me, I'll come to you. Respectfully,
North Gondor

GAME 67

Hail, Free People from Seattle!

Sauron invites your armies to
visit Mordor - we need to get properly
introduced. Eothraim, your noose
tightens. You don't have long. You will
have attained an accomplishment -
first player out of the game!

GAME 69

Welcome to Mithlond-East,
Dancu. Do leave your troops at the
gates. Gaerdae's boys need some target
practice. Mighty nice of you to stop
and play. Hopefully we'll have a
merrier time than Imladris.
Zarendarger (10)

The funeral fires of King
Tarondor have long since gone out, but
mighty armies and heirs continue the
tradition. The entire Fire King and Ice
King armies have been smashed, the
east bank of the Anduin is still ours,
and the seas are ruled by North
Gondor and the Sinda Elves. The death
of so many Corsairs, Haradwaith, and
Southern Gondorian men, heroes, and
navies has saddened many hearts
south of the 26th parallel. By Summer,
we'll be in Mordor.

Ellestor, Son of Tarondor
King of North Gondor

A great storm rose up out of the
east, thunder boomed, the wind
howled, and lightning glittered upon
the Mountains of Shadow. Let the Dark
learn why they fear the light.

Storm Bringer

GAME 70

"Put a camp on swampland,
imported sand fleas, shaved the
populations' heads, and called it Parris
Isle. I think the boss reads too much
fantasy. . ."

Overheard in the castle of Ovatha II

Dark Agents unite!

It's time we stopped these "Free"
folk cold. Theft, kidnapping, sabotage .
. . . no risk is too great, nor effect too
small, if we act as one now!

Scaramouche

GAME 77

Overconfident nations will be
surprised and laid low but victory
does not go to the timid.

Free Peoples, unity is our
strength!

GAME 79

May the worms devour ye soon,
Din Ohtar; that was indeed a well-
delivered blow. Congratulations.

Marahil

Dragon Lord and Witch-king
armies stomped by the
Woodmen/Sindas Alliance, Dwarf
blows Goblin Gate away. Dragon Lord
moves armies one hex out of Dul
Guldur and . . . sits there! Go figure ...

Wally Woodman

GAME 80

A warning,

Deceit will be dealt with
severely. Evil will not be tolerated in
the Misty Mountains.

"Peace Loving" Dwarves

Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

His royal pompousness, the
Emperor of Rhudaur is now accepting
applications for 2nd and 3rd place . . .
Hobbitz and Nazgools to the back of
the line - please!

Flights of fancy, thoughts of Elves
The Dark Servants take too much Pride
in themselves

Here they've threatened to take me
Out

Their hollow threats don't have much
Clout

For the Light of Arda leads us on
Til all Servants of Darkness be gone
Whomever thought to scare us with
Their non-rhyming wit
Needs to re-enroll in Mordorian charm
School to be a hit.

"The Long Rider drops a navy,
than an army to Eothraim at Dilgul.
Two Quiet Avenger navies with
commanders sink beneath Southern
Gondor in the Bay of Belfalas. Will the
REAL Dark Servants please show up?

Ensam Harskare (5)

GAME 83

I was hoping to play a Dark
Servant in this alliance game, but I
just can't get that Dunedain blood out
of my veins. Prince Celdrahil shall lead
the Free People to victory.

Baaltrac

Here we go. Ten on ten with Five
on the fence. We're ready, are you?

Kurgan (8)

GAME 84

It starts again in Eru's world
The music of the heavens unfurls
The banners of nations

Contesting for control of Eriador
Let us unmake the Ring and all evil
Things

Living free from fear once more.

Ensam Harskare (7)

GAME 85

I will pledge my allegiance to the
highest bidder. Until I get a good offer,
I will stay Neutral.

General Chang of the Easterlings

Drums beat
Boots march
Axes sharpened in secret fires
The Khazad have gone to war.

Gates smashed
Nazgul bleed
Mordor quails
Hail the mighty Khazad

GAME 86

A Mordor Medley
From the halls of Barad Ungol
To the shores of Osgiliath
We shall burn and plunder everything
That we find in our path.

When Ren comes marching home
Again, hurrah - hurrah
He'll have Tarondor's head on a pole,
Hurruh - hurruh
There will be no white tree nor seven
Stars
And all the palantirs will be ours
Yes we'll all feel gay when Ren comes
Marching home.

Hobbiton Square

An open forum for the exchange of ideas and opinions.

Tom Walton's comments last month on good sportsmanship have generated a bit of commentary in the Square this month.

The opinions expressed in May's "Hobbiton Square" concerning good sportsmanship were valid in many respects. Mr. Walton wrote an excellent piece and while what he said is not necessarily wrong, perhaps just a definition or two were off.

There is no such thing as a "game persona". A PBM game is not a role-playing game where a persona is developed. Middle-earth PBM is a game involving 25 individuals, not 25 personas, who each communicate, ally, and grow to trust one another. The players are real life people who respond to letters, speak on the phone, and perhaps even choose to meet outside the game environment. It is improper to assume that when one person breaks faith with another, that that offender is not dealing with another individual person.

This is where an individual's personal integrity comes into play. A player's sportsmanship is derived from his or her own sense of integrity, not the other way around. Good sportsmanship is a willingness to play within a fair and equitable set of rules or standards, to accept victory or defeat with a gracious smile, and to present a hearty congratulation to an opponent for a job well-done. An amiable player, who endorses and practices a high level of integrity on a continuous basis, generates an attitude of good sportsmanship.

Any negative carry-over to another game is therefore not a "grudge", but rather a choice by a victim to not communicate, to not cooperate, and to not work with the past offender. Why? Because when you show up, he is not there. This is not poor sportsmanship on the part of the victim; it is smart gamesmanship. An old saying goes: "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me."

Of course, the only true way to avoid such events is for everyone to conduct their play with integrity at all times. Never promise something which you have no intention of delivering, never foster a trust when you plan to break it in the future. Play fairly, play honestly, play well, play with integrity.

Aaron Cox/Dark Soul

Thoughts on Mr. Walton's comments concerning good sportsmanship. While I agree wholeheartedly with his comments about the vendettas some players carry from game to game, I must disagree with the idea that a player must play rationally because their compatriots depend upon them. History, both "real world" and that of Middle-earth, is replete with "win at all costs, promote my interest" type people. This is an acceptable manner in which to play this game. I may have a tougher time because one of my allies is not a team player, but that's what keeps the world interesting.

The main thing to remember (and this is probably what Tom was saying anyway) is that personal attacks are ALWAYS unwarranted. The Dwarves can sneer and call Thranduil a pompous ass, the Cloud Lord can assassinate Gothmog to gain value for his nation, the Neutral that takes too long to decide can be detested by those that have been committed since the beginning. These are all within the game and a part of the game. But John calling Freddy a jerk and telling Bob that Freddy is never to be contacted because he's not a team player is out of line. So ends the wisdom of Subedei Bahadur.

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

Blood and Glory, Part II Warfare in Middle-earth PBM by Tom Walton

There's nothing quite so satisfying as rolling over an enemy nation, slaying its leaders and putting its people in chains. Better still is the gloating one can do over the corpse of an opponent, proclaiming your skill while disparaging his own. In ME-PBM, the path to self-aggrandizement is through battles and conquest.

Like *Blood and Glory, Part I*, (published in last month's issue) the purpose of this article is to help newer players avoid common pitfalls when conducting a war, and to plan effectively against the tactics used by veteran opponents.

Sailing into Victory

For some nations, fleets are of little consequence and can safely be ignored; but for others, the skillful use of fleets can mean the difference between winning and losing the war. The key word here is "skillful", since employing them effectively can be extremely tricky.

Fleets can only sail into harbor, ports, or shore hexes; attempting to move into other terrain will only meet with failure. Even should the hex contain a harbor or port, you can't sail directly from one coastline hex to another that contains prohibited terrain. Thus, a fleet couldn't move directly from 2137 to 2136, even though both hexes contain major towns with harbor. You first have to move out to sea (e.g. hex 2138) before moving into the harbor at 2136.

River movement is sometimes difficult, since the rules on the subject are a little garbled. In essence, you can plot movement through any series of hexes connected by a major river, even if those hexes contain prohibited terrain (forest, rough). When writing out the orders, you determine the direction of movement exactly as if the fleet were an army marching into the hex (ignore the direction the river is traveling in). However, since you can only land in allowed terrain (harbor, port, clear), the fleet may be unable to disembark in the hexes you're sailing through. On the brighter side, if a fleet can't land in the hex to attack enemy targets, neither can it be attacked by unfriendly armies.

With the exception of the Corsairs, sailing in the open seas tends to be dangerous. Storms and other events can result in the loss of warships and transports, not to mention the men aboard those transports. Worse, the danger increases for each open sea hex traveled. This limits most nations to hugging the coastline in order to preserve their navy, at the risk of interception by unfriendly forces. This risk tends to be relatively high between warring nations, since the enemy can predict your route of travel fairly easily.

The Vikings!

Other than quickly moving reinforcements from one place to the next, a favorite use of fleets is to make a naval invasion of an exposed enemy coastline. A number of nations are particularly vulnerable to this sort of tactic, making them perennial favorites of abuse.

When plotting a landing, choose a battle where victory is assured. If you lose, your ships will be anchored on the spot and most likely wiped out by the next enemy naval commander who happens by. Even if the enemy doesn't manage to destroy them, the anchored fleet will probably be very difficult to retrieve.

A common mistake among new players is the failure to realize that once you do make a landing, your ships become anchored and your navy turns into an army. In order to become a navy again, the commander of the force must issue the "Pick Up Ships" order. If you don't give this order and try to sail out of the hex, you'll only grab enough transports to move your troops, leaving everything else behind. This can have some embarrassing consequences (like accidentally sailing into a naval battle with only transports, which I did once).

The requirement to "Pick Up Ships" is the greatest failing of navies. An army commander can attack an enemy army or town, then move to another target all in the same turn. A navy commander, on the other hand, can't effectively attack a land-based target and move in the same turn. He must attack, pick up his anchored ships, then move (three orders in all), meaning that what an army commander does in one turn takes a navy commander two turns. It also leaves the navy exposed to an attack by a defending fleet which responds to the threat. Players using a navy need to take this into account.

One way to get around this restriction is to attach two leaders to the navy. The navy commander gives the attack order, then splits off his army to the secondary leader. Since "Split Army" comes before "Pick Up Ships", the secondary commander can then grab the ships and give a move order to sail out of the hex. Of course, this assumes you don't have anything else that you need to do (like "Refuse Personal Challenge"), and it means you'll end up leaving part of your forces and one of your commanders behind. Not good if you expect retaliation.

Naval Tricks

Destroy the harbor. If you're worried about being invaded and you have a number of towns with harbors or ports, remove those where the town isn't in shore terrain. This will make it impossible for the enemy to land directly at the pop center.

Another way to use harbor destruction is to do it to a town that you've just captured. This prevents the previous owner from retaking it by sea. Since "Remove Harbor" and "Remove Port" come after battle, you can do this on the same turn that you capture the town. Remember, though, that if you capture a major town (thus reducing it to a town), any port that's present will be reduced to a harbor automatically, meaning that "Remove Port" will fail (since a port is no longer present). Similarly, any town reduced to a village automatically loses its harbor.

Convoy. If you're concerned about interception, split your navy into two forces: one with a single transport and warship, another with the real force. Have the first navy sail into the enemy fleet to block its movement, then have the second navy sail around the first two forces. Expensive in terms of characters, but it usually works when you're trying to avoid battle (like when you're badly outnumbered) or trying to pin down the enemy.

Convoy, part 2. If the enemy navy outnumbers you and you expect to lose your fleet, you can delay an invasion by splitting your fleet into several smaller forces and throwing them at the enemy one at a time. He'll still win, and you'll still lose the ships and characters, but it'll force him to fight for every hex of movement. Used wisely, you can give yourself turns of time to reinforce the coast or convince other players to join you for a real naval battle. A tactic of true desperation.

A special note is required concerning naval combat - For reasons unbeknownst to even the most skilled players, small navies tend to inflict more casualties on larger navies than can be reasonably be accounted for, considering the disparity of strengths between the two forces. By splitting your navy into several forces and throwing them at the enemy one at a time, you can actually end up doing more damage to him than had you sent the entire fleet against him at once. Another game quirk that's definitely NOT outlined in the rules.

"What the heck is Elrond doing at Osgiliath?" Navies can move long distances in a single turn. If the enemy is watching your every move, you can use your navy to bring in reinforcements from distant pop centers. Since they'll be off his regional map and probably far from the site of battle, he might be taken completely by surprise when he finds himself facing an army far larger than what he counted on. This can be especially devastating if a distant ally pulls it off.

Tharbad, home of the Corsairs. A corollary to the above tactic is that navies allow you to operate in distant theaters far from home. This not only turns the enemy's hair white, but also allows you to keep the war out of the region in which you live. A Corsair landing in Cardolan, for instance, will probably bring sighs of relief from both Gondors, and perhaps an "under the table" agreement to ignore the conquest of their distant ally.

Patrol. If you expect an enemy to make an attack along a fairly narrow stretch of water, you can have your fleet patrol the area in an attempt to intercept hostile forces. If more than one hex can be travelled through, have the navy sail back and forth through the target hexes before returning to port. If the area is limited to one hex, sail directly to that hex and use the "Home" move to remain there for as long as possible.

Should you be blessed with certain knowledge of the location of the enemy fleet, you can plot out the fleet's movement to see where it will be during each point of its move. This allows you to sail to the target areas at the same time that the fleet will be passing through, minimizing the chance that it will slip by your patrol. Of course, this assumes that the enemy won't make use of the "home" order himself to throw your timing off.

(It should be noted that this tactic works almost as well for armies.)

Fortifications

There's nothing better to slow down an enemy invasion than fortifications. Hard to destroy and expensive to storm, fortifications can make an attack extremely costly. They also block enemy movement, making road travel less than ideal unless you own all the castles along the route of march.

Fortifications have an additional advantage, in that their strength is increased by the loyalty of the pop center that they guard. For example, if a pop

center has a castle with a strength of 10,000 and a loyalty of 50%, the strength of the castle is increased by 5,000 (50% of 10,000) to 15,000. A citadel and a city, the strongest combination in the game, has a base defense of 29,000 (citadel 24,000 plus city 5,000); but if the city has a loyalty of 100% (not uncommon), the strength of its defenses is doubled to 58,000! Fortification strength is often so daunting that enemy forces will avoid trying to capture well-defended population centers for fear of losing too many troops.

Sieges and threats are also far less effective against fortified pop centers than unfortified ones. Indeed, unless the enemy army is very powerful and/or lead by a skilled commander, virtually any level of fortifications will make sieges and threats very difficult to pull off. If you want to protect key pop centers from being taken by these tactics, upgrading fortification levels is the most effective thing you can do.

Fortifications do have their drawbacks. First, they're extremely costly, both in terms of timber and in gold. Unless you possess a nation which has an advantage in fortification construction, building castles and keeps will probably be out of the question during the early part of the game. Also, timber has a number of other uses, such as producing ships and war machines, so choices will have to be made about how to best allocate your limited resources. Only the lowly tower (1000 timber) is easy and relatively inexpensive to build.

Another drawback is that, unlike armies, fortifications can be seized by the enemy and used against you. This means that you might have almost as much difficulty recapturing your former pop centers as your opponent had in taking them from you in the first place. Worse still, the enemy can invest in war machines and level your precious castles in a single battle, turning them into expensive rubble.

Fortification Uses

"What do you mean, he says we have to pay a toll?" Fortifications are great for blocking road movement. If you want to control the flow of traffic upon a particular route of travel, place a camp on the road and build a fort there directly afterwards. Forts aren't very expensive and they'll stop almost any army, unless it's small and moving evasively. Used well, this will give you an extra turn's warning (or more) to react to a possible invasion.

The Gap of Rohan. There are a number of terrain features on the map that restrict movement and force the enemy to follow certain well-used paths. By seizing these terrain features and building fortifications on them, you can bottleneck enemy assaults, or secure a critical point from which to launch an invasion. Examples include the Gap of Rohan, any one of the passes through the Misty Mountains or into Mordor, and any bridge over a major river. Some road intersections also lend themselves to this tactic, if the surrounding terrain is difficult to move through.

Bleed them dry. Building a fort over an unprotected pop center increases its defense value by 2,000 points. Do this for all of your exposed towns and villages in hard-to-defend areas, and the enemy will literally bleed himself dry trying to capture them. Indeed, he might ignore many of the smaller ones if he's unwilling to sacrifice the troops, preserving your production base.

The Final Defense. A number of nations have poorly-protected capitols which will fall fairly easily to an enemy assault. Upgrading the fortification level of the capitol is of critical importance if you can't guarantee the safety of your nation. This applies particularly to nations with only one major town, or where other major towns are too close to the capitol to provide a safe back-up out of enemy reach.

Rear guard. If your army is in full retreat from an enemy force and you really don't care to stand your ground and get destroyed, try to retreat through one of your own fortifications. You'll be able to march right through the hex, but the enemy will either have to stop in it or go around. This will give you a couple of extra hexes of distance and if timed correctly, could put you a full turn ahead of your pursuers. You can also use this tactic when retreating through a fortification belonging to an ally. This is especially effective if you retreat through a fortification that wasn't present at the start of the game, and isn't on the enemy's regional map (since he probably won't know it's there).

Trenchworks. Fortifications provide a defensive bonus to troops stationed in their hex. Exactly how large the bonus is is somewhat unclear, but it's always better to fight over one of your own fortifications than one that belongs to the enemy.

And a Final Note

In the previous Blood and Glory article, the "Troops Maneuver" order was listed as increasing the training rank of troops by 1-8 points. This was an error; as stated in the rule book, "Troops Maneuver" increase troop training rank by 1-10 points. Apologies to all the new players who thought GSI was the one who made the mistake.