

WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



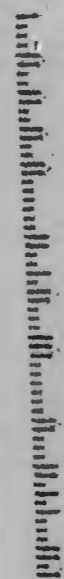
**GAME
SYSTEMS
INC.**

PO Box 160129 Miami, FL 33116-0129

forwarding & address correction requested



13601-2701 14



WORDS FROM THE WOOD

You know, I was lying in bed thinking the other night (yes, I do, on occasion, utilize my brain) that what we're really missing here at GSI and, in particular, ME-PBM, that would keep us current with the rest of the United States, is a tabloid talk show ala Oprah, Geraldo, Montel Williams, Ricki Lake and the rest. Wouldn't that attract more players to our fold? Wouldn't that keep our current players riveted to their turnsheets? Just think of the subjects that could be featured--The minions of Sauron and the women who love them. I was abused by my Orc father. Dragons--Mythical Beasts of Legend or Overachieving Gloryhounds? Ooooooohhhh!!! I get shivers every time I think about it. I know! We could call it The Sally Jessie Adúnaphel Show! I think we've got a hit.

Welcome to May, faithful readers! We've got a lot of ground to cover so let's get to it. First, I have to address some blunders that were made in the past couple of issues. First, I failed to give due credit to an author last issue. The article "The Keys to Neutral Victory" was written by William Chaasko. I apologize for omitting this, William, and I hope this rectifies the problem. Second, I gave inaccurate information in the March Oracle regarding movement without food. Please see this month's Oracle for the correct answer to the question raised in that issue. My apologies again for any confusion this may have caused. Lastly, I forgot to mention that GSI's 13th anniversary fell on April 1 1994. That's right, 13 years of bringing you the best and the brightest in Play-By-Mail adventures. We hope to be around for many more years to come.

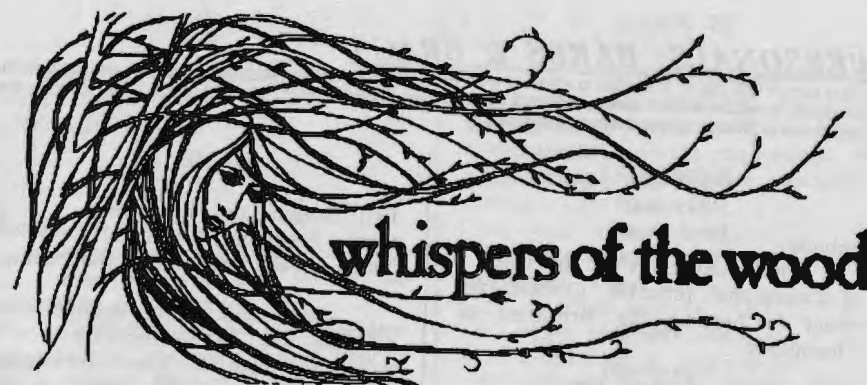
Now on to business. The first thing I'd like to address is the issue of inter-player communication. From time to time, some players find it necessary to step beyond the bounds of 'good taste' when communicating by 3x5 cards. The quantity of player messages exceeds 10,000 cards a week. In order to avoid the unpleasant requirement of higher turn prices to cover the extra labor involved to review all such messages, GSI can only review a fraction of these messages. Therefore, we rely largely on the maturity of our players to ensure that conflicts that arise within the game stay between the game personas and not carry over into personal affronts and offensive remarks. If you receive any such messages, rest assured that GSI does not condone such personal attacks, and simply return the 3x5 card(s) to our staff's attention.

In the same vein, if any name used for characters and/or population centers is considered to be 'offensive or vulgar' by our staff, then GSI will almost always refuse them. We appreciate your assistance in this matter so that we all can enjoy the Middle-earth setting by avoiding 'offensive or vulgar' names and trying to choose names suitable to the period.

The next order of business is player-generated turnsheets. Handwritten (or computer-prepared) turnsheets, used because of lost turnsheets, or to facilitate turnsheet handling for players' Email/Fax turns (or even regular turns) need to follow our normal turnsheet format as closely as possible, including your name, game and player number, due date, and security code. Please maintain the characters in alphabetical order, two orders each, side by side with the required information directly beneath each order, and with a blank line in between each pair of orders. For Faxes, leave at least a 1 inch margin around the document to prevent loss of data during transmission.

With the recent advent of free Faxing and free Email, many players are using many different formats. This increases the work that is required of our data-entry staff and increases the chances for errors - something we all want to

(continued on back cover)



whispers of the wood

ALONG THE PATHWAYS

Words From the Wood.....	Inside Cover
EDITOR'S COLUMN	
Personals.....	1
COMMUNICATIONS.	
The Art of War in Middle-earth	9
STRATEGY	
The Oracle Speaks	12
QUESTIONS	
Hall of Heroes	17
THE VICTORS.	

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.

Credits

Editor..... Stuart Taft
Staff..... Jason Duerstock, Shari Berkley, Harold Ford, Michelle Heath, Gisela Perla, Lorraine Rivera, Sean Taft, Anthony Vialon, John Wolf
Publishers..... Pete Stassun & Bill Feild Jr

Editor's Note: GSI neither confirms nor denies the accuracy of any figures or the efficiency of any strategies published herein.

This Month's Cover: "Spoils of War" by John Kisse

Volume XI Issue # 2
Published by GAME SYSTEMS INC
MAY 1, 1994
Copyright GSI 1994

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

Subedei,

The "contestants in the Contest of Champions" (chuckle, chuckle) are about to become the Breakfast of Champions.

Naurmegil

Shades of Madness

PS: Notice they sent their stuff BEFORE they challenged us . . . hoping to really get a lesser team perhaps?

EARTHWOOD THE SEA KINGS

GAME 41

As we four enter Turn 70 of this match, I'd like to congratulate all on a well fought struggle. Whoever survives, whoever dies, it's been an experience.

High Elven Warrior

Middle-earth™
PBM

GAME 5

Once
5 Free vs. 2 Dark
Then
4 Free vs. 2 Dark
Now
3 Free vs. 2 Dark

Come on Free People, if you keep dropping like this we will never reach Turn 100.

GAME 27

Evil: Dragon Lord, Long Rider
Good: Eothraim, Arthedain, Cardolan, Noldo Elves, Haradwaith, Dunlendings

Guess you nasty wraiths need to find the Ring--otherwise you're doomed, despite your seemingly strong positions, 'cause we're on our way . . .

The United Clans of Dunland

Khamul,

Read the writing on the wall. Oops, sorry, I had forgotten that I had knocked the wall down. Anyway, Mirkwood is going to burn with a cleansing flame!

El & the Vaders

GAME 35

Akhôrahil, how could you rename Minas Ithil as Blind Rat I? My forces will have to put an end to this immediately.

Baaltroc the hostage

The fate of the Dragon Lord, Blind Sorcerer and Cloud Lord is written in Harad's blood--you will be ground into powder.

GAME 43

Woody,

Beneoracer assassinated, Shea Fangs' army destroyed whilst asleep in the ruins of Buhr Widufiras, Osric's army swept aside, numerous pop centers falling before the evil tide . . . need I say more?

Uvatha, Lord of Rhûn (Ruin)

GAME 45

Has anyone seen my characters lately? Bueller, Bueller . . . Fry, Fry . . . Hallas, Hallas . . .

GAME 60

Dark Ones--

Rhudaur burning? Let's see . . . Started with 23 levels of population in 8 centers.

Currently have 54 in 23 centers after kicking you out a second time.

Angmar burning? Sure!

Rhudaur burning? NOT.

Rhudaur Reborn

GAME 61

Mahrcared,

Please do not whine. Stand tall, you've done well, considering the Easterlings' failure. Also, dwarves came. Many of us "rookies" caused ourselves more damage than Freeps. Mighty is your host. Mightier are our assassins.

Prepare for Death

Evil Eye

GAME 65

The end is not yet, but soon. Hordes appear, characters vanish. Behind walls and the Mantle, the Noldo hide. Come forth, oh Banisher of the Great Worm. Let's make it a fight.

Beginning to be bored!

GAME 70

Tarondor's Ghost--

Funny, you and your minions die in a variety of ways, and your realm is history, while my hordes rise anew, the Noldo fall at our feet in supplication . . . and I still live. Good riddance to you!

Zûhltar

GAME 72

I've assassinated over 40 characters and kidnapped over 15. Gee, in about four more Turns I will have taken out the equivalent of every starting Free People character.

Naurmegil

Cloud Lord

PS: That's funny, I don't see Dunland any more . . .

GAME 80

Crazed Dwarves, sneaky Sinda, stubborn Arthedain, back-stabbing Dunlendings, Assassin Northerners, flimsy Cardolan, the waves seem never ending but . . . I'm still alive!!!! (Barely)

Crimson Toad

Witch Orc

GAME 84

Howdy Folks!! Isn't life grand???

The Crimson Toad

Dunlend

GAME 85

Report to King Tarondor:

I don't understand what it is sire, but we can't seem to sell any of these "I survived a battle with Northern Gondor" T-shirts.

General Telumehtar

GAME 89

Elrond,

Thanks for the MT at Amon Sul. I have some more property in the Misty Mountains that needs developing if you're not busy.

Sispar

GAME 94

Your chance to finish us is gone! With the coming of the spring we are stronger than ever. Look to Mordor with fear, for the shadow

comes once again. Your ineptitude shall cost you dearly.

Ji Indur

The Hammer and The Anvil
have come to fix The Angle.
Radagasto

GAME 97

Well, here come the Corsairs. Must be nice to be rich. Hopefully Angamaitë and his minions will pay as Arfanhil and Broggha did. Mt. Gram has been avenged.

Ozzymodo

The Hunchback of Luglurak

Within Tyrn Gorthad, on barrows bereft of honor for three hundred years of the Sun, the High King of Arnor re-hallows the downs of the Princes of Rhudaur as one more is added.

Thus passes Arfanhil,
First Prince of Rhudaur Restored

GAME 100

To the Dark Servants, adieu!

We congratulate the Dragon Lord for his fortitude and fighting spirit. Next time, may the rest be better! Hang in there, Long Rider! To the Free People: Great TEAM effort. Rejoice! The Greenwood is cleansed. Mordor will soon be Free!

The Council

GAME 102

North Gondor has fallen, but the Dunedain are undefeated. In the North, Arnor rises from the ashes of Rhudaur. Harad suffers mightily, but crushes the treacherous Corsairs. The Eothraim maintain; the Woodmen march again. Dawn comes with the spring.

GAME 103

Celdrahil,

I protest your naming characters things like "Loriel". How am I supposed to make fun of you for letting me capture her if I can't tell if she's male or female? Please RSVP this information.

Ren

Now the waves roll. Take a deep breath, Free Peoples.

GAME 108

As the sun goes down, I move around
Keeping to the shadows
Life hangs by a thread
And I've heard it said, that I'll not see tomorrow.
You won't break me . . .
Under blood red skies.

Gondorian Bards
regarding King Tarondor

Urzahil stood before his commanders and gazed at each of his long-time friends. "Let the troops eat the last rations, drink the last ale, and sleep well tonight; for tomorrow we march one last time against our age old enemies. Tell all who go with you to look back once and remember, for we shall never return home again. For myself I swear more than one death ere I've breathed my last. Go now."

Helrazor

GAME 109

Uirdiks,

I am so sorry to tell you my lord and I will be a little late getting to Buhr Ailgra. It seems two small Free armies are inside Mordor. Uvatha has told me his pet is hungry and wants food NOW. You know how

dragons are. Please hold our reservations a little longer--Uvatha and his friends will not need much time to dispatch these pests. Have to go now--so many people to neutralize and just not enough time.

Yours in Darkness,
Din Ohtar

Let's see--Blind Sorcerer and Rhudaur gone, Quiet Avenger, Witching, Dragon Lord and Dark Lieutenants on the ropes. Both Gondors in Mordor, 12,000 troops on Morannon--who do you think is winning?

GAME 112

Harondorians breathe new sigh of relief as local witch doctors discover all new cure for the "Course Hair" hemorrhoidal inflammation: Pluck them clean out!

Harad Associated Press

Angamaite,

See ya! Wouldn't wanna be ya!
Haruth

GAME 114

SHHHHH

Be vewwy vewwy quiet.
I'm hunting Fwee Peoples.

Hahahahahaha
Ji Indûr

GAME 115

Who is this new Grendel showing up in Whispers? I've used this name in previous games (not in the personals). What if we end up in the same game, or if old enemies think you are me (he he)?

Grendel I

GAME 121

GENERAL PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT

The Dwarves are pleased to announce the opening of Dul Guldur to all Free People wishing a dangerous time in a rotten place. Features of our new found paradise:

Come See the Last Known Spot of at LEAST Three Free Peoples Leaders.

Come see the Bank Vaults that Empty Before Your Eyes.

Come See Lomelinde, who doesn't realize the city isn't his . . . Gad Zooks! Conquering's a rotten task . . .

The shadow spreads ever fast. The time of the FREE PEOPLES has passed. Only days remain until SAURON'S final triumph. I played a part in this. My master will reward me.

Dendra Dwar
Sauron's Third

GAME 122

Argeleb could tell you I'm evil. So could Hallas but they're both DEAD! Grakius, three veteran players to put out one rookie. I'll bet you're all real proud. Try this side of the Mistys, Yellow Dogs.

Arfanhil AKA Selur Rodrom

Stand Strong Nations of Light! The Long Winter is over. Nature is now on our side. Go forth and turn back the Shadow! And as you march onward, remember:

Fear not Death.

Fear only Shame and Dishonor!

Grakius

I'm coming for you Toad Dog!

The hounds of Dendra Dwar rest under the dark boughs of Mirkwood. Horse flesh makes them a tad lazy, but the hunger will return shortly. When my pack thirsts for blood again, what will you do, Free Peoples??

Crimson Toad
Dog Lord

GAME 123

The Dark Servants cringe and cower before the actions of the good Good players. We enjoy the mouthings of the others for comic relief. Very entertaining. I wish us all a good fight.

Grey Beard

GAME 124

To: Sauron and his "Ring Rabbits"
Run Rabbits Run--
to the four corners of the earth--
where the maps don't go
"You can't run away forever,
but there's nothing wrong with
getting a good head start."

People have round shoulders
From fairly heavy loads
And the soldiers liberate,
Laying mines along their roads
Sorrow paid for valor
Is too much to recall
Of the countless corpses piled up
Along the waiting wall.

Melting down all metals,
Turning plows and shears to swords
Shun words of the Bible,
We need implements of war
Chalklines and red puddles
Of those who have been slain
Destiny, that crooked schemer,
Says the dead shall rise again!
Er-Mûrazôr
(Quoting Megadeth)

GAME 125 CONTEST OF CHAMPIONS

Interesting! That 'Dark Servants most wanted' was written by Bosimyatas Reval, a Free People. Now why are they posing as us? Envy? Jealous? Maybe it is because they know that SAURON cannot be stopped!

Zarendarger (15)

Kurgan, Zarendarger,

It is nice to meet you again as well. Too bad we are against each other this time. At least there will be no endgame backstabbing between us.

Baaltroc

Alright, I've played around enough. Time to get nasty. (South Gondor, thanks for the ring. He-he-he)

The Crimson Toad
Dirty Ren

GAME 129

To the Dark Commanders:

Tarondor is touting mounting victories--I thought that losing all your troops in a battle was a defeat. Anyways, after the Eothraim' latest "mounting victories" we are retreating in the direction of the enemy.

General Gothmog

Action Report: Enna San Sarab killed in Personal Combat. Quote Bulrakur of Dog Lord, "So!? I stepped on a bug, so what!?"

GAME 131

Once more the passage across Anduin the Great has been held. The cost has been great, but the reward shall be greater still. Lords of carrion, your time is coming . . .
Onward, into Mordor.

Autai lome!
Tarondor, King of Gondor

GAME 133

An Easter wish to North Gondor from Hoarmûrath's Bards:
Here comes Tarondor Yellow-tail,
Running down the bloody trail.
Hippety-Hoppety, Ice King's on his way,
Bringing death and decay,
Making Tarondor run away.
Hippety-Hoppety, Ice King's on his way.

"Urzahil."

"Yes, Almighty Master."

"Tell my minions they have done well so far but I demand much more. Those that oppose me must not just die, but die horribly. My Nazgûl are too soft, too merciful. Tell them to redouble their efforts or I'll hang them from my standard. Victory is there for my taking. I will not be denied. Go, now, and extinguish the Light FOREVER!"

I wish I were a Nazgul, hooray,
hooray!
In Mordorland I'll make my stand
to live and die a Nazgul.
Hooray, Hooray, to live and die a
Nazgul!

from Uvatha's Bards
for Urzahil

King Tarondor came from Nantucket .

Uvatha's Poets

GAME 135

"You see, foolish men, what now comes for you. You are mine, Mahrcared and Uirdiks, and I seek to collect. Did you know that among the Nazgul I am known as Soul Catcher? Run while you can, Eothraim, for the Final Hunt has begun, and my thirst runs red."

Urzahil
The Mouth of Sauron

"AAAH!!! MEAT!!!"

Gothmog
Sauron's Warlord

GAME 136

Easterlings, such an untimely death of one of your "Kings", or whatever you call them. The Dunlendings have fallen, but it matters not. Gondor has been stalled entering Mordor. The Eothraim, Woodmen, Easterlings and Northmen pick up the small remnants of their armies. Sauron shall be victorious!

GAME 138

Teams of the Dark Servant League fumble in the Misty Mountains! Penalty: ten hexes. FPL's "Elrond" Johnson, hair in place, nodded at the outcome.

GAME 139

As of Turn 8 the Easterlings have no population centers north of the mountains of Mordor. Da Boyz don't get upset. We don't get even. We get ahead. Preferably Ovatha's.
Eoder the Northman

GAME 142

I'll get you Celdrahil. And your little dog too.

Adûnaphel

GAME 143

PAH! I have nothing to say!

Ya-hoo! This is one cool ride!!
Smash clump-rattle thump . . . the
Herd Slayer is loose!

The Crimson Toad
Ice King

GAME 144

PAH! I have nothing to say in this game either!

GAME 145

Attention All: Northern Gondor is up for grabs! Get a piece while you still can!

Tarondor: I'll see you soon . . .
The Dark Whisperer

Zanzabar,

When I called you stupid and said you mated with horses, I just publicly wanted to say, I meant every word!

Selur Rodrom

PS I love the way your pop-centers burn. Just right for roasting horseflesh.

I kill for pleasure,
I kill for blood,
I kill for artifacts,
But if you have none,
I'll kill you anyway because it's fun!
Vampula, Prince of Rhûn

GAME 147

Marching Song for the Forces of the Iron Wind

Grizzle n Grit is all we et,
Bones we be a nawin,
But soon we'll swim
In a sea of gold,
As Empires go a fallin'.

By the Orc Bard Iron Tongue

GAME 150

I'm Mister Heat-Miser
I'm Mister Sun
I forget this line
I'm Mister Hundred and One.
My Name is Heat-Miser and whatever I touch,
Seems to melt in my clutch--
I'm too much!

Fire King
Bad X-mas thing

Subedei,

Why don't you go ahead and drop. I'm not facing enough Free Peoples to really make this an interesting game.

Naurmegil
Angmar

GAME 151

Neutrals,

Do not make the mistake of sitting on the fence too long. Sometimes it is better to squash annoying neutrals than beg for their assistance.

The Dutch-man

GAME 152

Will the shadow lengthen or will the light shine through? Only the leaders know for sure. I wish both sides good hunting before and during

the storm.

Respectively,
Lord Enion
Dunlendings

As the first breath of spring touches the land and gives it life, the drums of war echo from the Witch-king's fortresses. The Arthedain always stand vigilant to meet the onslaught and help all that defy the Dark Lord's minions.

Argeleb II

Do not think that only by singing amid the trees nor even by the slender arrows of elven bows is this land of Lothlorien maintained and defended against the Dark Lord's slaves. We of the Galadhrim have many tools to defy the Dark Lord, we ask Elbereth for strength to use them wisely. Let the game begin.

GAME 153

Deep within the forest walls,
Deep within the hidden halls,
Beornings debate and Woodmen speak,
Private councils that none repeat.
Goals established, plans abound,
Sauron and his minions to cast down.

Let's all drink to Health and Stealth!
Ensam Harskare (1)

GAME 154

Scene at the War's Start. Luglûrak

Mardrash knelt before Akhôrâhil's throne.
" . . . but Lord, we cannot pay both Pochak's new commander and all the others!"
The shadowy figure nodded.
"Ah yes, someone incompetent will have to go."

"Who, Master?"
Akhôrâhil smiled.

Welcome Free Peoples and Dark Servants to another contest of wits, intimidation, and Special Service Turn Roulette. The five Neutrals await the performance of your play. We know we can wait until we see who plays best.

Bosimytas Reval

Greetings Fellow Free People,
The Sinda welcome all diplomats from Free and Neutral nations. Compuserve: 73777,3073 or Internet: Sinda@carew.com--3x5 cards are also welcomed.

Third Age Realtor's House Show! Come tour our new condos built right in the mountains of Mordor. All homes offer a lovely view of the border with Gondor! A perfect environment for the kids--they can watch history in the making as Mordor's forces take war to the Elves. Serious inquiries only. Doors can be adapted for trolls.

Shiva

"Imagine"
Imagine there's no good guys
It's easy if you try
No Dwarves or Hobbits
No pansy elves in tights
No more goodie two shoes
Just human sacrifice
OOO-OOO-OO-OO-OOO
You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
Come on Neutrals now and join us
And Middle-earth we will have won!

THE ART OF WAR IN MIDDLE-EARTH

BILL TALLEM

ME-PBM provides an excellent arena for exercising the art of war at its strategic and operational levels. Although I relish the mythic, diplomatic, economic, and role-playing aspects of ME-PBM, I am most deeply impressed by the subtlety and challenge of the military game. In this and subsequent articles I'll offer some advice by discussing the applicability to ME-PBM of some of the timeless principles of Sun Tzu's Art of War, the source (in the Griffith translation) of the quotations you will encounter below.

First, do not expect to master the military aspects of ME-PBM without first mastering the rules. You must understand the fine points of how and when armies and navies move; and how your forces interact with allies and enemies in all circumstances. Many of the numerical valuations and subroutines of combat resolution are not revealed by GSI, but careful study of the rules, question and answer forums, and your turn results will provide a dependable range of values and assumptions upon which to base your planning. Set your own general staff to study these particulars; I am too active a player to share with all you potential foes out there all of the fine points of the system which I have divined over two years of play! It should suffice to quote Master Sun:

"War is a matter of vital importance to the state: the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied...Appraise it terms of the five fundamental factors... The first of these factors is moral influence: The second, weather; the third, terrain; the fourth, command; and the fifth, doctrine."

Army morale, climate/terrain and troop terrain modifiers, commander rank, and choice of tactics: if you cannot assign reasonably accurate values to your own forces and the enemy's in these areas and the others that pertain, best disband your armies and play the agent game.

Tacticians will not prevail in ME-PBM battle. Battles in this game are usually won or lost before swords are crossed. When your turn result reveals an encounter with an enemy army, there is precious little you can do to influence the outcome. You can issue or refuse challenges to personal combat; you can choose a tactic for your troops in the coming fight; and you can attempt to decline or force combat with particular enemies based on your appreciation of relative strengths and weaknesses. There is an art to all of this, and occasionally it will make a difference; but against a clever foe, in all but the most evenly balanced confrontations, none of these elements will decisively alter the outcome that was preordained when your forces collided the previous turn. "Thus a victorious army wins its victories before seeking battle; an army destined to defeat fights in the hope of winning." In five games to date, I have lost only two battles. This is evidence of realism and calculation, not genius; when I am not confident of victory, I go to great lengths to avoid battle. I advise you do the same. "He who knows when he can fight and when he cannot will be victorious."

Lest you forget the over-reaching strategic and economic considerations in pursuit of a Napoleonic "decisive battle," let me advise you to keep a sense of perspective. It is all too easy to win all your battles, and lose the war. (Been there, done that.) Two considerations affecting the importance and utility of battle:

a. You must get some utility out of your armies every turn to justify their cost. They must be taking enemy locations, destroying enemy armies, defending your own against real (not imagined) threats, or at least threatening your enemy in ways that force him into a disproportionately expensive response. For if you can oblige your enemy to raise and maintain expensive armies, and use them in a purely defensive manner anticipating or reacting to your moves, you may hasten his defeat by impoverishing him at little cost to yourself. "Thus those skilled in war subdue the enemy's army without battle. They capture his cities without assaulting them and overthrow his state without protracted operations...Your aim must be to take All-under-Heaven intact. Thus your troops are not worn out and your gains will be complete. This is the art of offensive strategy." This logic also clearly (and literally) favors taking the enemy's populations centers by threat rather than capture; an added benefit to this is that your enemy is kept guessing about the size and make-up of your armies.

b. A battle lost, by accident or miscalculation, need not be a disaster. It always improves your balance sheet. And when the victor is so depleted that he can not exploit his victory by taking your population centers, he has gained little for his efforts. If he is forced to retire to rebuild his strength, you can do the same; or better yet, the forces which you could not get to the first battle can bring him to bay in his weakened state and destroy him. This bears thinking about on the turn you enter a hopeless battle. Deploy your uninvolved forces to intercept his post-battle move; don't neglect to sweep through the battle hex in case his commander either issues or refuses personal challenge, and fails to move after winning the battle.

When strategic and economic considerations and the correlation of forces do favor battle, ME-PBM rewards subtlety and calculation at the operational level. Knowing the strengths of your armies, and the capabilities of your immediate enemies, you must set out to lure them to battle under circumstances that guarantee your victory, and evade their efforts to do the same unto you. How do you do this?

a. "Agitate him and ascertain the pattern of his movement." Advance against him, without committing yourself, and watch his reaction. A clever player may screen his vital locations by carefully plotted moves sweeping through the hexes you must traverse to reach target; this can be as effective, and less exploitable, than moving directly to the location you threaten. This can only be inferred, not detected directly, due to the "musical chairs" nature of the turn sequence: you can only see where everyone is when the musical stops. Another player will not respond directly to your threat, but will take the offensive, hoping to distract you from your campaign by moving against your own possessions: he may feel it's easier to find a stationary population center than to catch your army on the move. Too many players adhere to a pattern of responses that have worked for them in the past, and you can learn their style by provoking them and observing their reactions.

b. "Determine his dispositions and so ascertain the field of battle...Probe him and learn where his strength is abundant and where deficient." Use all the means of intelligence-gathering that the game system provides: map data, nation messages, agent scouting actions, scrying by spells and Palantiri, reconns by higher-ranked Commanders,

detailed and timely information-sharing with your allies. Unless you are a true purist, collect the most current start-ups you can for all your foes, so you have a basis for your estimates of their strength. For instance, when Uvatha spots a dwarvish "army" south of the Sea of Rhun on turn 3, he should know it has to have come from 3916 and has to have recruited either once or twice before moving to get its strength up over 100 (the early threshold for an "army" vs. "small army." The worst case estimate of its capabilities would be based on its standard starting configuration plus either 200 or 400 new heavy infantry. Learn its commander's name, assign an agent to scout it, or obtain periodic population center reports, and you can track this army, and its recruiting opportunities, even after other dwarvish armies appear in the theater (may the Dark One forbid!), and so will be able to estimate its strength and constitution whenever you do choose to bring it to battle.

Conversely, you must deny intelligence on your forces, situations, and methods to the enemy. "All warfare is based on deception... Therefore, when capable, feign incapacity; when active, inactivity." Determine where the thresholds are that change an army's descriptor from "small army" to "army" or "large army" (they change in the course of the game!); hold your numbers just below or just above that threshold, depending on whether you wish to project an image of weakness or strength. A "small army" of heavy troops, steel/steel, with high training, morale, and command values, would be a nasty surprise to the overconfident enemy that gloatingly catches such a tiger by the tail! Other forms of deception can include:

a. When an army finishes several turns of recruiting at a population center your enemy can see, move it off all the opposition's maps or to a location already holding an allied army so that a new icon does not appear; and leave behind a cadre, or move another army into the recruiting center, to create the impression that your field army is still there.

b. Assume that your enemies know the strength of your starting armies; as soon as you can, and whenever an army has fought victoriously, giving the enemy a precise reading of its strength, change commanders to throw him off; send the original commander off with a raiding party of recruiting cadre, or switch him with another known army commander. Reinforce the army as soon as you can, whether by recruiting, transferring troops from another army, or adding spells, artifacts, or upgraded weapons and armor.

c. When a maneuver or a choice of tactics or orders in battle gains you victory, do not repeat the same formula for a while: "Therefore, when I have won victory I do not repeat tactics but respond to circumstances in an infinite variety of ways." For instance, the tactic vs. tactic modifier can be decisive in battle: I have seen cases where it approaches 1.5 times army strength for the advantaged side, and a nearly proportionate reduction for the disadvantaged side. There is nothing more dangerous than to reflexively choose the best tactic for your predominant troop type every time you fight; a shrewd opponent will soon learn to choose the best tactic against your standard choice, and can tip the scales drastically in his favor.

Next time, I'll delve more deeply into the tricks of the trade, particularly the fine points of maneuvering your armies to select the time and place of battle.

As the old boy said, "Nothing is more difficult than the art of maneuver. What is difficult about maneuver is to make the devious route the most direct and to turn misfortune to advantage." Meantime, I'm back to the laboratory of ME-PBM, where I will see you, I hope, before you see me.

The Oracle Speaks

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

MIDDLE-EARTH PBM

Well, faithful readers, the Oracle has erred. In the March issue of The Oracle Speaks, we presented an example of army movement explaining the 4/3 movement cost with armies without food. In that example, we stated that an army moving from 1614 to 0910, on the road, would only get to 1312. This is incorrect. You would, in fact, be able to get to 1212--each hex costs 2 movement points so you can move from 1614 to 1613, to 1513, to 1412, to 1312, and then to 1212--using 10 movement points. You would not be able to move to 1211 because the bridge adds an extra point, pushing the total movement points to 13. However, you would be able to Force March to 1211. You are not penalized twice for being without food (i.e., the cost is 4/3 the normal movement cost, but you get the full complement of movement points to work with -- you are not limited to the [estimated without-food] amount listed in the rulebook). We apologize for any confusion this may have caused. It seems, contrary to my own belief, that the Oracle is human (?) after all.

If I'm travelling without food and cross a minor river to enter a hex; is the cost of the minor river added to the cost of the ((hex-cost + minor river) x 4/3) or is it the cost of the ((hex-cost x 4/3) + minor river)? Example: Heavy Infantry entering a plains hex across a minor river: is the cost $(3 \times 4/3) + 2 = 6$ or $((3+2) \times 4/3) = 6.6$ or 7?

The answer to this question is the cost of the minor river is added to the cost of the plains and then it is multiplied by 4/3. In the above example, the second formula is correct--the cost of the move would be 7. This is true of any "hex-side" obstacles, i.e. bridges, fords, rivers, etc.

Assume that two opposing armies are in 3616. The first army is all infantry, the second all cavalry. Both plot to move west down the road. Since it costs cavalry 1 point per hex to move along the road in plains and infantry 2 points, would the cavalry outrun the infantry army by moving into and out of hex 3516 before the infantry finished moving into the hex?

No. Both would exit 3616 on the first 'day', and enter the adjacent hex 3516 on the same day. Because they are now in the same hex (other than the starting hex) they would end up stopping each other. If they were not enemies, the cavalry army would exit the hex 3516 first (because they would spend different number of 'days' traversing the hex).

Assume there are two opposing (infantry or cavalry) armies, one in hex 3518 and one in hex 3619. The first plots to move to 3418, while the second plots to move into 3518. Does the second army have any chance of moving into 3518 before the first moves out of the hex?

Not unless the army in 3518 gives 'h' for its first move. If the above scenario occurred during the course of movement (after day 1) then there is a 50-50 chance that army two would intercept army one in 3518. However, if the scenario described above had two armies moving exactly toward each other (3518-to-3619 and 3619-to-3518) then one of them (50-50 chance) would enter the other hex first and stop the other army - even on day 1.

A Gondorian navy is in hex 2733. Can the navy move into the town/harbor at 2833, then continue up river to 2933 in the same turn?

Yes, this is possible because of the major river.

Consider the reverse situation. Could the navy at 2933 move into 2833, then out to 2733 in the same turn?

Again, the answer is yes. Movement is permitted through the hexes that contain the major river.

Is it absolutely impossible under any circumstance for a foreign army to march into hex 3329? I heard of a rare encounter which allows this to be done ("You find a hidden tunnel leading into the mountains . . .").

An army cannot get to this hex. We have published NO such rumors . . .

If it is, why the fortifications?

Because, historically, there were fortifications at this location.

Would an army hired there be stuck?

Yes. But the army could still deter enemy emissaries...

It seems that if a nation has an easy time placing camps at the beginning of the game, it'll continue to experience such good fortune throughout the game. Conversely, a nation which runs into difficulty placing camps early on seems to experience problems later as well. Is this a function of game mechanics, or is it just a run of luck approaching the odds of winning the lottery?

Simply random luck. But, obviously, good emissaries affect the chances and this benefit may continue to hamper/help throughout the game.

Can a nation 'defend' a pop center owned by an ally if the defender has 'Friendly' relations with the ally? Or will the army stand by while the enemy burns the pop center?

Unless orders are given to attack, the ally will not automatically defend the pop center like the owner would. To be involved in the combat, the ally would have to initiate an attack.

When threatening a pop center with two armies from the same nation, does the required troop number need to be in each army or do the two armies "combine" for the necessary number to threaten?

The two armies would "combine" for the purposes of threatening.

Can a pop center be successfully threatened with less than the number of troops required as given in the rulebook?

Yes. Those numbers are simply guidelines. Threatening can be done with less, and can fail with more, troops.

Is the number of troops required to conduct a successful siege roughly based upon the number required to threaten the pop center?

The numbers are similar, but not necessarily the same.

Do the fortifications of a hidden population center stop enemy armies?

No--this would negate the hidden advantage. If an army were stopped by fortifications, it should be able to attack--thus nullifying the hidden status.

Can the army of a nation be fed at the hidden city of another nation?

No.

Does Perceive Secrets, spell #432, indicate whether a nation has exceeded 100% tax rate? Will it indicate whether a nation has been driven out of the game?

It can tell you if a nation has been eliminated from play but it will not tell you the reason it was eliminated (i.e. tax rate, no major towns/cities, etc.). Order 585, Uncover Secrets, can give you the same information, but it is not always reliable...

Some dragons can be recruited into armies. Is it possible to recruit one or more of the following creatures: balrugs, vampires, werewolves?

Yes.

Is it possible for two NPCs to be in the same hex at the same time (such as two dragons, neither of which is recruited into an army)?

Possible--yes. Likely--no.

Can a character from a dropped or eliminated nation have an encounter (such as with a dragon who wanders into his hex)?

No.

Is it true that certain NPCs will only react to a character who's in an army?

Some encounters are for armies only, while other encounters are for characters (without armies) only.

If a character is in the same hex as a dragon but has yet to encounter that dragon, can he "force" an encounter by issuing the 'Investigate' (290) order?

Yes, or the 285 order, 'React to Encounter'. If the dragon is otherwise busy, nothing will be reported. If not, then an encounter could be initiated.

If so, why doesn't this work with Sauron or Gandalf.

As stated before, some encounters choose to react only to characters and others only to armies. You can not force an encounter to react other than as they wish...

If a character is attacked by a dragon because he gave an 'unfortunate' response during an encounter, is it possible for him to win the ensuing combat (assuming he's extremely powerful)?

Yes!

If a character 'attacks' a dragon during an encounter, does he have a better chance of winning the combat than if he had personally challenged the dragon?

In some cases. But he certainly has a better chance than if he flees...

Is it possible to personally challenge Sauron?

Yes

Is it possible to personally challenge Sauron and win?

Possible--yes. Likely--no.

Do dragons aid in threats/sieges?

No. Only troops are considered for these purposes.

If two characters from different nations attempt to recruit the same dragon, can both succeed?

No.

If both respond correctly, who would get the dragon?

Whoever responds first--and that's determined randomly.

If a company has an encounter, does every character within the company get to react to the encounter?

Companies do not have encounters, only characters have encounters, but the answer is 'Yes'. Each character may react, but it will occur one character at a time--and only one character in the company will get the encounter message even though all may react.

If a company encounters a dragon and opts to 'attack' that dragon, do they have a better chance of defeating the dragon than any individual character in that company would?

No. Each reaction is handled separately.

Can two characters (not belonging to a company) but in the same hex both encounter the same dragon in the same turn?

No, they will not both get the encounter message. But, Yes, each may choose to react (if they're not with, or commanding, an army.)

If an artifact has a bonus in combat against a particular creature, does it provide this bonus automatically? Or must it be researched first?

Researching lets you know about the bonus, but you would receive that bonus automatically.

Are the secondary powers of all artifacts random, or do some artifacts generally end up with the same secondary powers game after game?

Both of these occur. Some artifacts have their secondary powers randomized while others have the same secondary powers from game to game.

Is it possible for an artifact to have more than one secondary power?

No.

Is it more difficult to locate and/or retrieve an artifact that's been hidden by a nation than it is to find a 'lost artifact'?

Yes.

Can an agent attempt to steal an artifact that's been hidden at a pop center?

Yes.

Does Guard Location #605 protect against Emissary action, for example #525, Influence Other's Population Center Loyalty?

No. Guard Location only works against other Agent orders.

Are some skills more effective at protecting against agent attacks than others? For example, might a 60 point commander be a harder target to assassinate than a 60 point emissary?

No. Skill level plays a part in how difficult it is to assassinate a character, but individual skill classes have no effect.

Assume you have two 50 point agents. Is it more effective to have both guard a single character than to just have one of those agents guard that character?

Yes. The enemy agent would have to get through both guards, as opposed to just the one guard.

Are two 40 point agents guarding a single character: A. More effective than a single 80 point agent? B. Less effective than a single 80 point agent? C. About as effective as a single 80 point agent?

The answer is B. Two 40 point agents are generally less effective than a single 80 point character, but that isn't always the case.

Does Stealth increase the effectiveness of 'Guard' orders?

Yes.

Are characters with high skill ranks more likely to show up on another player's pop center report than characters with low skill?

Yes.

Will the 'Scout Hex' order reveal ships anchored in the hex?

It can, as can the Scry Hex spell.

Will the 'Scout Area' order reveal anchored ships? How about the 'Recon' order?

No in both cases.

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

The Hall Of Heroes

STATE OF WAR-GAME #81 - #13 & #15

The Alliance for a Nuke Free America has swept the Federal Government from North America and has eradicated the other states vying for the domination of the United States. The Governor of South Carolina, player #15, is now the ruler of this new alliance. He was aided in his rise to power by player #13, the Governor of Virginia. Congratulations to both of these valiant rebels on their triumphant victory!

Game #82 - #2, #11, #18 & #20

The Governor of Pennsylvania, player #20, has led his confederation, The Nuclear Nomads, to the promised land of the United States of America. He gained control of the new government with the help of player #2, the Governor of Wyoming, player #11, the Governor of North Carolina, and player #18, the Governor of New York. As the beginning of a new era dawns in the United States, a hearty Congratulations to the Nomads on their victory!

ME-PBM Game #21 - The Free Peoples: #6, #7 & #24

The Lidless Eye has been blinded by the Light of the Free and his dark minions driven back to their prison in Mt. Doom. Sauron's blight has been eradicated from the land and the denizens of Middle-earth sing their praises to the Valar. Final standings are as follows:

#6 Northern Gondor - 2400

#7 Southern Gondor - 2200

#24 Rhudaur - 2067

Top Dark Servant: #19 Long Rider - 1234

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Elatar/Northern Gondor: 229

Highest Net Commander Rank - Elatar/Northern Gondor: 200

Highest Net Agent Rank - Drangurn/Northern Gondor: 125

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Celdrahl/Southern Gondor Bertha/Southern Gondor

Sleestal/Long Rider Roobert/Rhudaur: 100

Highest Net Mage Rank - Aszunder/Rhudaur: 134

Most Mithril - Northern Gondor: 3983

Most Artifacts - Northern Gondor: 30

Most Kills - Easterlings: 2

Congratulations to the Free Peoples!

Game #26 - The Free Peoples: #1, #10 & #4

Mordor broken, Sauron destroyed, Nazgul heads resting on pikes outside Free cities, trolls turned to resting perches for pigeons in Free parks--with the capitulation of the Dark, the Free People now take their leisure in planning for a Bright future. Final standings are as follows:

#1 Woodmen - 2117

#10 Noldo Elves - 2050

#4 Arthedain - 1700

Top Dark Servant: Long Rider - 1400

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Elladan/Noldo Elves: 210

Highest Net Commander Rank - Elladan/Noldo Elves: 148

Highest Net Agent Rank - Errenis/Southern Gondor Artamir/Arthedain: 131

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Fessig/Woodmen: 130

Highest Net Mage Rank - Caesar/Southern Gondor: 204

Most Mithril - Woodmen: 1095

Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 26

Most Kills - Eothraim: 8

Congratulations to the Free Peoples!

The Hall Of Heroes

Game #59 - The Dark Servants: #13, #14 & #18

Resistances have been broken and the leaders of the Free now languish in the hands of Sauron's favored, to be toyed with and tormented until their screams no longer amuse their Dark Masters. Final standings are as follows:

#13 Dog Lord - 2200

#14 Cloud Lord - 2067

#18 Fire Ling - 1983

Top Free People: Noldo Elves - 975

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Urzahil/Long Rider: 221

Highest Net Commander Rank - Uvatha/Long Rider: 182

Highest Net Agent Rank - Erennis/Cloud Lord: 136

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Ardana/Fire King: 95

Highest Net Mage Rank - Erennis/Cloud Lord: 136

Most Mithril - Dwarves: 394

Most Artifacts - Long Rider: 27

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 35

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

Game #64 - The Free Peoples: #6, #8 & #7

The Shadows have been dissolved by the Light which shines fiercely in the hearts and souls of those denizens who opposed Sauron in his struggle to dominate Middle-earth. The land and those who lived, fought and died in its protection can now rest easy with the knowledge that Sauron is forever banished. Final standings are as follows:

#6 Northern Gondor - 2300

#8 Dwarves - 2267

#7 Southern Gondor - 1900

Top Dark Servant: #19 Long Rider - 950

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 240

Highest Net Commander Rank - Thelór II/Dwarves: 147

Highest Net Agent Rank - Gildor/Noldo Elves: 125

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Haleth/Noldo Elves: 117

Highest Net Mage Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves Voisiol/Long Rider: 183

Most Mithril - Dwarves: 1526

Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 28

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 12

Congratulations to the Free Peoples!

Game #74 - The Dark Servants: #15, #21 & #20

Sauron's favored Servants join him in Mt. Doom to gloat and revel in the destruction of the Free. With the last of the Light banished from the land, the domain of Sauron is now secured, with his chief lieutenants as his overseers in a Dark Middle-earth. Final standings are as follows:

#15 Blind Sorcerer - 2183

#21 Corsairs - 2167

#20 Dark Lieutenants - 1875

Top Free People: #10 Noldo Elves - 1117

The Hall Of Heroes

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Celedhring/Dragon Lord: 234
 Highest Net Commander Rank - Araudsgûl/Cloud Lord: 175
 Highest Net Agent Rank - Ulduin/Dark Lieutenants: 132
 Highest Net Emissary Rank - Delina & Shardara/Blind Sorcerer: 93
 Highest Net Mage Rank - Celedhring/Dragon Lord: 162
 Most Mithril - Blind Sorcerer: 3245
 Most Artifacts - Dark Lieutenants: 17
 Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 22

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!!

Game #86 - The Dark Servants: #13, #11 & #14

Mordor has become a sea of Darkness watched over by the Lidless Eye, where his servants reap the souls of their victims as payment for their service to their master. Final standings are as follows:

#13 Dog Lord - 2300
 #11 Witch-king - 2100
 #14 Cloud Lord - 1825

Top Free People: #5 Cardolan - 700

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Grasty/Cloud Lord: 184
 Highest Net Commander Rank - Grasty/Cloud Lord: 139
 Highest Net Agent Rank - Calldaranna/Dog Lord: 149
 Highest Net Emissary Rank - Angûlion/Witch-king: 104
 Highest Net Mage Rank - Mûrezôr/Witch-king: 138
 Most Mithril - Dog Lord: 599
 Most Artifacts - Witch-king: 25
 Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 29

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!!

Game #91 - The Free Peoples: #10, #7 & #4

Part of the former glory of the Two Trees of Valinor has been captured by the Free as the Light from their actions shines over Middle-earth. The servants of the Valar sing to the defeat of Morgoth's greatest Lieutenant. Final standings are as follows:

#10 Noldo Elves - 1567
 #7 Southern Gondor - 1433
 #4 Arthedain - 1300

Top Dark Servant: #22 Haradwaith - 1017

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Glorfindel/Noldo Elves: 189
 Highest Net Commander Rank - Argeleb II/Arthedain: 135
 Highest Net Agent Rank - Dudannis/Northmen: 116
 Highest Net Emissary Rank - Erester/Noldo Elves: 96
 Highest Net Mage Rank - Morlammen/Long Rider: 113
 Most Mithril - Dwarves: 1355
 Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 18
 Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 8

Congratulations to the Free Peoples!!

avoid. We ask that all players endeavor to follow our normal format as closely as possible or we may have no choice but to impose a surcharge for such non-preferred turnsheet formats.

Please note that if you wish to confirm receipt by GSI of your Email/Fax turns, you may contact our office during regular phone hours (2-5 PM EST) only! Please do not call before 2 PM as the staff is busy trying to get turns run for that day. This is one good reason for trying to Fax your turns in early - so that you can call later that day to confirm should the need arise.

There have been some questions regarding when a turn can be Faxed to GSI for free and when there is a charge. The new policy (4/1/94) calls for Faxed turns to reach our office no later than one BUSINESS day (24+ hours) before 9 AM EST of the date due. For turns due on Monday, this means that Faxes must reach our office by 9 AM EST of the Friday before. Furthermore, if there is a problem receiving your Fax (incomplete, faint, no security code, etc.) then \$2 may be deducted from your account to cover the expense and extra handling required at our end to contact you to try and complete your orders. Be sure and fill out and keep your daytime emergency contact number current. This is another good reason for trying to Fax your turns in a day or two early - so that GSI has time to contact you and resolve such transmission problems. If the Fax arrives on the date due, we can not 'hold your game' awaiting word from you regarding completion of your turn orders.

We would also like to announce the modification of the Cast Lore Spell order. The use of the 940 order, with regard to the casting of the Artifact Lore spells 412, 418, and 428 spells is now slightly different. Chances of successful casting of the above listed spells is now further modified by the level of the target artifact. Thus, the more powerful the artifact, the harder it will be to cast one of these spells successfully.

Also, note that special abilities for starting characters on turn 0 will be explained just like they are for new characters created during the course of the game.

Finally, note that loyalty effects due to current tax rate are more randomized. Whereas the changes in loyalty due to current tax rate used to follow a regular amount, they will now be randomized within a certain range - the average of the range being exactly what it was before. If, with a certain tax rate, you received a 1 point loyalty increase, you may now get more or less than 1, with the average remaining about a 1 point increase per turn. This lends more uncertainty to this important element of the game for all players.

New game needs once again: We are holding spaces for two Free Peoples grudge teams to match up against two Dark Servants teams that have registered. We also have several Team games filling and have need of teams on both sides (FP and DS). As usual, we have a need for both single Neutrals and/or Neutral teams (size of two, maximum). We have put out the three week game we announced last month but are now filling a new 3-week game at this time. It is less than half-filled, so those of you interested in a slower game should contact us.

Finally, I would like to announce that there are no more announcements. We have come to the end of this column, so I'll see you in thirty.

Stuart