

WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



**GAME
SYSTEMS
INC.**

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MIAMI
FL 33116
U.S. POSTAGE
0.32

WORDS FROM THE WOOD

While contemplating the nature of the universe the other day, I came to the realization that Elvis is, indeed, dead. I know, I know, you all are saying "Elvis CAN'T be dead. He's the King, man!" But it's true. I know because I talked to him while contemplating the previously mentioned universe. He said he was dead and working as a sausage stuffer in Heaven. Evidently, sausage is a BIG delicacy in Heaven and Elvis learned some tricks from his mother. He did say that he couldn't believe that Lisa Marie married Michael, but the news of their impending split sent him to Seventh Heaven. Now wait, I know what you're thinking. I thought the same thing, but Seventh Heaven is evidently a nightclub in Heaven where the King performs when not sausage-stuffing. It's good, too, because he performs as the lithe, cool, young Elvis, not the bloated, hopped up old Elvis. But he wanted me to pass on the message that he is, indeed, dead, so there you have it. Just remember--you heard it here first.

The first order of business is to announce that Middle-earth™: The Wizards has been released. From what I hear, the game is a hot one. And we have it for you. That's right, GSI is the place where you can purchase your very own starter decks and booster packs of Middle-earth™: The Wizards. If you want any of these, simply let us know and we can charge your account. Starter decks are \$9.95 and boosters are \$2.95. If you prefer to send a check along with your order, you can include it with your turn. So if you want a copy of the hot new collectible card game from I.C.E., we have what you want!

Now that the 2950 scenario has been out for almost a year and a half, we want to know how many of you would be interested in a Contest of Champions. This would be similar to the Contest of Champions we are doing in the 1650 scenario (which, by the way, is still going strong). Those interested parties should contact GSI. We will be able to gauge the feasibility based on the responses we get. So if you would like to test your mettle against some of the best in the game, drop us a line!

I'd like to take this opportunity to discuss dropping a game. Now we all know that dropping a position is something none of us like to see. But it does happen. What I'd like to talk about is the procedure of dropping. Many players have sent in orders and asked to have the orders run and then drop their position. Unfortunately, we cannot run orders AND drop a position on the same turn. We will be more than happy to run the orders and then, on the next turn, drop the position. As it stands, however, we cannot do both in the same turn. If we receive orders and a request to drop, we will assume that the player wants the turn run, so we will run the turn and then drop the position the following turn. Please keep this in mind if you decide you have to drop a game (and we hope this never happens!).

Once again, it's time to come to you, the erstwhile reader, to ask for submissions. We have been getting submissions but we can always use more. This is the way to keep the mag healthy and running. If you have a particular strategy you want to talk about, an aspect of the game that hasn't been explored much, or just general tips, put it down on paper and shoot it off to us. Remember that strategy articles get a free set up and that fiction gets a free turn. So this is a good way to express your views AND get some GSI credits in the bargain. You can't lose!

(CONTINUED ON P. 13)



ALONG THE PATHWAYS

Words From the Wood.....	Inside Cover
EDITOR'S COLUMN	
Personals.....	1
COMMUNICATIONS.	
Special Abilities in Middle-earth--One Man's Opinion.....	5
STRATEGY/OPINION	
The Most Devastating Attack Known to Man, Dwarves, Orcs.....	12
STRATEGY/OPINION	
Hall of Heroes.....	14
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.

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This Month's Cover: "Out of the Frying Pan" by John Kissee

Volume XII Issue #11
Published by GAME SYSTEMS INC
February 1, 1996
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PERSONALS: BARBS & BRAGS

Every current GSI player is entitled to a free 60 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 (61-100 is \$2.00 etc.). GSI reserves the right to edit or refuse material deemed unsuitable.

PERSONAL

ATTENTION FREE PEOPLES:

Sauron is awakening once more! A serious team of Free Peoples is needed to combat the forces of darkness once again. A team who is committed to finishing the game without dropping positions. If interested please call GSI. Game style: 1650, 2 week, Grudge game, mixed experienced evils.

Middle-earth™ PBM
circa 1650

GAME 95

"Good news sir. Our mages report that the Free People have lost the One Ring."

The Cloud Lord knew this was their last hope for victory. Three troops to go and Sauron will rule all.

GAME 125

CONTEST OF CHAMPIONS

Ashburgnul finished shoveling the last of the dirt in the hole. He stood, stretched and then spat on the grave of Dwar.

"Dwar," he yelled, sorrow filling up his craw, "you blasted fool. You said wait and our brothers would send messengers, offer sacrifices and protect our backs. But who is dead? Who is it who sacrificed his kingdom a year and a half ago? Who is it that is fallen? Rest, my teacher, for you alone I will honor and follow."

With that, Ashburgnul, follower of Dendra Dwar the Dog Master, threw the tattered flag to the ground, scattering his people to the four winds.

And Dwar's ghost wailed, knowing his fellow brothers had forgotten him.

GAME 178

DURTHANG is burned to the ground. Alas, at heavy cost I fear. Yet another Dark Servant capital put to the torch. Where shall we go next? Ah, nothing like MORDOR in winter.

ZARENDARGER

My dearest Mr. Z,

Alas, while it pains me to correct a fine tree loving gentleman such as yourself, I must say: While your army has died and your commanders were killed and captured, my population center remains undamaged.

Thank you,
Sneaker (16)

P.S. I shall recover the cleaning costs of my city walls from the hides of your commanders.

P.P.S. I hope you noticed, while my troops were poorly trained and led, they were without doubt the best dressed in Middle-earth.

P.P.P.S. Next time, bring shovels.

Who are you that would strive to keep the Greenwoods free from infestation? You certainly are not an ecologically minded creature or you would know about the food chain. Let it be known that the Greenwoods are still infested and can never be cleaned up.

Yours truly,
The Roachlord of Mordor

GAME 181

Nazgul,

That is not your dark cloud floating west. It is your shadow, the sun rises in the east. Oh, do turn around and see death. I ride a pale pony.

El & The Vaders

I'm beginning to wonder if there are Free Nations left. We of the Lidless Eye are few, but our might is great and growing. Mordor has grown dull. I feel it is time for expansion. Mirkwood seems like a nice place to start. Beware. We are coming!

Ji Indur

GAME 191

Though the decision was made months ago, it is time to take a stand. Soon the Gondors shall feel the wrath of a nation gone undeclared, and the numerous sailors whose lifeless bodies lie at the bottom of the Anduin avenged. The nation of the Lidless Eye.

Carlton, Shah of Harondor

GAME 194

Humans of Mirkwood:

You could remain subservient to your elf and dwarf oppressors. You could await domination from the coming orc and troll hordes. Why not join us men from the East in ridding the land of subhuman masters?

Long Rider

GAME 195

You have everything to gain when your loosing it all. Hail BAIN II, Lord Marshal of the west, Hail THRAR, Lord Marshal of the east. TO THE END!!!

Bain turned and looked into the faces of his generals, subordinates, comrades and friends.

"My brothers, we stand alone against an impossible force. We all face death; even as I go into the dragon's den, I shall have hope."

He turned around and looked across the valley below. His mountains stood over him with their crown of white. Then he said, "May we die with honor and swords in our hands."

Several hours later, after the council was dismissed, Bain felt a hand on his shoulder.

"You know, Elrond my friend, when an assassin's blade finds me I shall pretend it's you to take me home."

"Come old friend. Pray it never be so. Your people of all fight with valor. For mine withered away and left across the sea. I was honored for you to ask me to stay. I shall face the wraiths beside you till the end."

So it be written the alliance of Dwarves and Elves. May their struggle be remembered on the tongues of the wind.

Lord Enion, how long until the petty squabbling of the Nazguls let the dwarves set foot in the land of our new master? My lord Haruth Ramen says to take the west for you alone deserve it.

Carlton

GAME 197

We, the Freeps of #197, wish to apologize to the Dark Servants for the lack of any challenge. Between the drops, the newbies, the clueless and the ones who wouldn't know a phone if it bit them in the nose, it is a miracle we lasted this long. While the evils showed excellent concentration of

force, we had all the coordination of a dead squid. Wait til next time . . .

Signed,
Anonymous

GAME 199

Today we join our intrepid naturalists Celedhring and Orduclax in the hills around the Misty Mountains... on today's episode of Khamul's Wildlife Studies.

Khamul: Well, guys... what are we going to study today?

Orduclax: Kham, in today's episode we are going to search for Middle Earth's rarest entity... The Active Free People.

Celedhring: That's right Kham, we know they existed because we have found their telltale signs. However, because they are so shy and passive, studying them is very difficult.

Khamul: Very interesting guys, what strategy are you using?

Orduclax: Well, destroying all their population centers, stealing all their gold, attacking their armies, and killing their characters didn't work, so we only have one option left.

Khamul: And what is that, Ord?

Orduclax: Getting \$12.50 together for a new set-up.

GAME 203

"Hello? Is anyone out there? Middle-Earth calling the Dark Servants, come in, please. Are there any of you left? And if there are, would you please make a threatening Whispers submission so I don't become bored?

Greenfather #1

GAME 209

Lord Vagaig,

Your words are eloquent and wise, you show respect for your superiors even though they're your enemies. Due to recent events, your nation is doomed. I shall kill them all except you. Your eyes shall see your nation fall.

Yours truly,
Ji Indur

P.S. Tell South Gondor "Bad choice."

Who would have imagined a rag tag bunch of slaves could slow down your great armies of Gondor? Why do I all of a sudden feel like a bug?

Hukor

GAME 210

Teldûmeir sat mesmerized by the huge unblinking red eye which embedded his thoughts. He could feel images of power and conquest leap unbidden into his psyche. "Sail and conquer all those who resist the Eye" was whispered by unseen mouths.

Yes, he thought, ye . . . SUDDENLY Teldûmeir's concentration was interrupted by a gentle, almost indiscernible, rapping on his door.

"Your pardon Speaker," explained the messenger, "the sail maker has delivered the new sails for our fleet."

Good, thought Teldûmeir as he dismissed the messenger. But he was also troubled. The eye had blinked!

GAME 212

The Dragon Lord lives on borrowed money and Witch-king on borrowed time. Dog Lord muzzle has been fastened. Long Rider's navy, glub, glub. Rhudaur dropped. Dunlendings eliminated. Turn #10 comes quickly, Harad, Corsairs, and Easterlings.

Hallas Dunsbane

GAME 214

"They did what ?!" screamed Ovatha with his face turning red.

The Corporal swallowed hard, "Yes, sir it's true. High command found it necessary to notify the local dignitaries."

Ovatha dismissed the Corporal and began to pace the floor. Sudden changes like this are going to be the death of me he thought to himself. He took a deep breath and entered the council chamber and briefed his commanders on the unexpected turn of events.

"It appears that High Command has found it necessary to notify Noble Gisulf and Eoder of our intent." The commanders exploded and began to swear and shout.

"Be as it may," bellowed Ovatha over his commanders, "our task has not changed. Our position is clear. The intent has not wavered. Our resolve not weak. Instead of hunting rabbits we shall be hunting lions in their den." His eyes drew narrow. "And I shall enjoy this," he said in a low tone.

All his commanders knew that they would be victorious, for no one is more dangerous than Ovatha when blood was on the line.

The Scribe of Observance

GAME 216

Ūvatha's laughter echoed throughout Tol Burûth. Báin's capture had provided him with potent artifacts and eliminated the dwarven force in Rhûn; Hargrog's victory over Thuidimer's force had removed an Éothraim annoyance, and his "loss" to Odagavia had been balanced by the deaths of Béawyn and Dudannis and the subsequent capture of Odagavia and dispersal of his troops. The Easterlings had seen the weakness of the "Free" and acted accordingly. Surely Sauron will be pleased . . . Now it was time for some actual conquests! Meanwhile, in Ithilien, time to

"remove" a few thousand Dunedain warriors . . .

GAME 218

Cloud Lord--

Stealing gold from a neutral!? Treat all the neutrals like this and you can expect a quick game.

Easterlings

GAME 223

At last war has come and I await the first attack. Come then, my enemies, let the battles rage!!!!

Orillion Darkblade
Knight of Gondor

Middle-earth™ PBM
circa 2950

GAME 26

The Rhûn area has been overrun. Small pockets of resistance still exist but they disappear one by one. Winter is upon us, time for a new offensive to liberate Rhûn. The land shall be free once again.

Zarendarger (5)

GAME 33

To all remaining Dark Servants,

If the last couple turns are your best shot, give it up without a fight. Oh yeah--like you've been doing!

Bard

GAME 35

Winter's cold wind blows. But stand close to your pop centers, the flames should keep you warm. Just don't turn your back on the night. It's cold wind cuts like a knife.

Dwar of Waw

GAME 37

The horns sounded for an incoming scout. Bain I, captain of the army based at Lest, quietly scanned his assembled officers while waiting for the runner. Almost all of the Northmen commanders had been drawn to Lest, to investigate the rumors of a strange old man, influencing the troops and populace of Lest in a decidedly beneficial way. Only Commander Koldana and his trusted advisor Swithulf, had encouraged the man, but both had come away with new knowledge of the upcoming situation. In fact, the runner was operating on information the old man had provided.

Finally, the lone scout came into the clearing where the officers were waiting. "Well", Bain inquired, "what of the old man's information?"

"'Tis true, my Lord, there is an enemy army coming up the

Rhovannion Road, closing straight on our settlements! Unfortunately, they saw me, and chased me away before I could get an idea of the size and strength of the army."

Quickly deciding on a course of action, Bain instructed his commanders to move out. "We shall not sit here and wait for the enemy to come to us. Instead, we will take the battle to them! Fortunately, our allies are also here, represented by Lord Dain II. Both armies shall sally forth to destroy the enemy, before any harm can come to our towns and villages. Just remember, we fight for freedom, justice, and truth. Never shall we be overwhelmed by the shadow! Now, move out !!"

GAME 41

To all those Nazgul who are feeling cold--don't worry. The heat will be turned up real soon.

Special Abilities in Middle Earth...One Man's Opinion

by
Marc Parker

I'd like to present some opinions regarding the current set of special abilities available in both scenarios of Middle-earth PBM. Below are all of the nation special abilities known to me. I will try to rank their effectiveness based on the following criteria:

1. How many times the ability will be used in the game by a nation
2. The relative strength of each of the abilities (advantage each of the abilities gives)
3. The usefulness of each of the abilities in the context of play from an experienced gamer's view
4. The cost to a nation to take advantage of the ability

Each ability below has a letter in behind of it, ranking it on the following scale:

- A - Outstanding; one of the most desirable and useful special abilities
- B - Excellent, but not outstanding due to some limitation
- C - Average, but could live without
- D - Not really useful, but could come in handy on occasion; could definitely live without

Before beginning discussion, please remember these rankings are based on my experience in play both on my side and against me. Also, it is possible that a specific style of play can help optimize the use of one of the above in conjunction with other abilities, but this discussion is directed toward ranking each of the above separately, and independently of the others.

Type I - Bonus to Starting Character Skills

- a. Name 40 Commanders, Emissaries, Agents, and Mages (B)
- b. Chances of a Stealth Bonus (A)
- c. Heal at double the normal rate (C)
- d. +20 to kidnap/assassinate (A)
- e. Chances for a Challenge Bonus (D)

Type II - Bonus to Scouting

- a. Double all scouting/recons (A)
- b. +20 to all scouting/recons (B)
- c. All characters scout/recon at 50 (A)

Type III - Army Morale

- a. All armies begin with 40 morale (D)
- b. Armies force march with 1-2 morale loss when force marching (2-5 without food) (F)
- c. Armies without food gain 1-2 morale points when stationary and lose 1-2 when marching. (F)
- d. Armies force march with no morale loss (F)

Type IV - Troop Bonuses

- a. All new recruits start with a training rank of 20 or 25 (D)
- b. Hire armies for free (B)
- c. All Heavy Infantry recruits start with a training rank of 30 (D)
- d. All mercenaries start with a training rank of 25 (F)

Type V - Learn Lost List Spells

Ability to learn one of the following: Conjure Food (C), Conjure Hordes (C), Conjure Mounts (C), Fanaticism (F), Fearful Hearts (F), or Summon Storms (B)

Type VI - Timber Uses

- a. Build ships at 1/3 or 1/2 cost (D)
- b. Build fortifications at 1/2 cost (C)

Type VII - Other

- a. 20% market adjustment on buys and sells (A)
- b. Hidden pop centers (B)
- c. All characters uncover secrets at 40 (C)
- d. Ships never suffer storms or are lost at sea (E)

- c. All characters uncover secrets at 40 (C)
- d. Ships never suffer storms or are lost at sea (E)

First, let's cover type I. Naming characters with an extra 10 points of skill is definitely an advantage, but only when naming characters of that certain type. Therefore, this is the limitation preventing an A rating. The addition of stealth, as I understand it, is one of the best abilities, since it counts as agent skill and also on the chance of a character being seen in opposing pop centers and by scouts. One would have to consider downgrading this ability if you had to do a stealth "roll", which added (.01-1.00*stealth) only a part of the stealth rank to agent rank, but personally, I feel stealth is "in use" for a character at all times, even for non-agents. The +20 kidnap/assassinate is also applicable every time these orders are used. Although this is effective only with agents, I feel this is such a destabilizing effect on play that it still merits an A grade. Lastly, in my experience, very few of the characters receiving the challenge bonus actually fight in challenges, with the exception of army commanders in military nations. In that usage, I'd upgrade to a C, since you gain some flexibility (like not having to refuse) for the characters who receive the ability if they are an army commander.

Type II looks like this. In my opinion, the bonus to scouting is a very destabilizing ability. Why? Imagine always being able to see all characters in a hex...none of those annoying "unknown free people male" messages. And of course, the people who show up as "unknown free people male" are the ones whose presence you really need to know about. This order can free up other character orders as well, like mages casting Reveal Character or Locate Artifact to try to track certain powerful characters. How many times did you ask if a Woodmen or Dragon Lord or Quiet Avenger agent was available to support one of your character offensives? If you're smart, many. Granting all characters the ability to scout/recon at 50 is extremely useful, since usually the number of characters able to perform this task are limited, and the ones who do it well are the characters you want in action roles rather than support roles. This allows much more information to be gathered. A great second order for a commander, mage, or emissary training in a pop center. The +20 ability is still great, but not as good as the other two.

Analyzing Type III involves first analyzing the effect of morale on combat in the ME-PBM combat engine. As currently set up, the morale modifier, along with command rank of army commander, nation climate modifier, and nation terrain modifier, averaged equally together compose the Average Army Modifier, which is then multiplied as a decimal times the attack strength of the army in calculating the total army troop strength. Basically, the interpretation of this, is each four points of morale results in a one percent gain of your attack maximum army strength. Therefore, if the total MAXIMUM army strength is calculated to be 16,000, the gain for each four morale points is 160, or one percent of the maximum. So in the three type three morale savers, it would take several turns to accumulate a meaningful amount of additional strength.

Generally speaking, many, if not most armies, are killed within a relatively short time of creation (perhaps 8-10 turns at most in my experience). Therefore, if say 2 morale points can be saved each turn, a total of 16 to 20 morale points would be added, resulting in a 4 or 5 percent gain of maximum strength for that army, if it lasts that long. As you will find out, this is a best case scenario, especially since this effect is lessened further (in gross terms) by the Average Troop Modifier. In the grand scheme of things, whether you agree or not, mathematically speaking morale in an army is just not that significant a

factor unless armies of opposite sides have a tremendous disparity of morale. At least if all new armies start with 40 morale, this allows a 30 point morale boost (resulting in a 7.5% gain) over a normal starting army (10 morale), but only a 10 point morale boost over a normal split army (2.5%). It is not to say these gains are "nothing", but in my opinion, the added value over the long haul is much less than most other starting nation abilities, so I would enjoy virtually every other starting special ability over the morale based ones.

This brings us to Type IV abilities, which are really similar to the Type III's since they merely modify a similar Army Troop Strength component, the training rank. This, along with weapons rank, troop terrain modifier, and troop tactic modifier, averaged make up the Average Troop Modifier, which is treated much like the Average army modifier, but used specifically for each troop type. All of the abilities mentioned here, with the exception of hiring armies for free, modify the Army Troop Strength calculation the same as the morale component above, and hold, in my opinion, little value for the same reasons discussed above.

The hire armies for free is a pretty nice benefit, especially since this can result in a large number of recruits in a very short period of time, especially if you have several closely packed pop centers. If used in a position like Haradwaith in the 1650 scenario, this can be considered an A ability, for its ability to destabilize, since a large number of troops can be brought to bear much faster than would normally be expected. In addition, regardless of one's gold reserve, an army can always be hired, versus having potentially severe military problems if all one's gold is stolen before being able to hire an army. The only truly useful of the Type IV abilities appears to be the Hire Armies for Free.

I assess the Type V in the following way; some of the spells are useful while others are virtually useless. Fanaticism and Fearful Hearts only provide a slight morale boost, and we know from above what that means. The conjure spells can prove useful, since they can provide both military and economic benefit. However, a pretty good mage is required to get the full effect of the spells, and unless your nation is Mage heavy, this cannot be done on a grand enough scale to have a truly devastating impact.

The Summon Storms spell is interesting, since it forces any opponent into the standard battle tactic. This at first seems insignificant, but the Troop Tactics Modifier is a direct modifier to Army Troop Strength. This means, with adequate knowledge of tactics (like which pummels standard the hardest), a significant military advantage can be achieved (I have heard some predict it to be as high as 40%). This is therefore potentially a much greater influence on battle outcome than any of the spells affecting troop skills or army morale. It is not an A due to the amount of time it can be used.

Type VI abilities are simple to analyze. Very few nations can compete in a naval buildup due to several factors; nation's location relative to the sea, pop center attributes (like if a port is present), production (what if you make no timber), ship strength, economic standing (1,000 gold per ship to build, and much more if timber must be bought), and opposition (why build warships with no one to kill?). In almost all games which I've seen or heard of, naval tactics have been almost solely limited to having a portable dock cart troops around, and the attempts to sink such by warships. If naval units could, for instance, reduce pop center size by bombardment, the naval option would conjure many more strategies and uses. As it sits, unless a nation REALLY needs portability (Gondors and Corsairs in both scenarios), the navies really do not play as big a part in the war as many other factors. With all this being said, on the rare

occasion in which navies must be built, the reduced timber cost is nice, but probably not the difference maker in the entire war, as armies would be on a consistent basis. As you can tell, I don't feel the naval advantages are very significant, but could only be helpful on very rare occasions.

The build fortifications at 1/2 timber cost is much more significant, as every nation is likely to use this at some point. In addition, this may actually be a REQUIREMENT for some nations (like the Sinda in both scenarios, having to fortify major pop centers in close proximity to enemy lines), and certainly welcomed in others. Arguably, this is a B attribute, but the extent of use is often a question, since some nations begin with many or all strategic pop centers fortified, or cannot fortify in enough time or size to prevent conquest.

Type VII abilities are varied, as they cover all the other abilities not included elsewhere. It contains perhaps the biggest advantage of all, which is the 20% cash adjustment to all buys and sells. Read that again: "A 20 PERCENT CASH ADJUSTMENT TO ALL BUYS AND SELLS". This essentially gives you an extra 20% cash on all non-tax base and gold transactions. This can make a nation very powerful, and can help a nation which may otherwise have trouble supporting itself. In addition, this nation will gain market manipulation abilities by having its buying power inflated by 20%. Also, if the market spread between buy and sell comes in too close, the nation possessing this may gain instant profit on buys and sells without having to risk broader market factors by waiting a turn to see if manipulation/arbitrage was successful. Many people consider it the single biggest asset in the game, especially since it is an ability which can be used very often with no incremental cost to the nation involved.

Hidden pop centers are also a great advantage, and would be an A if they could not be unhidden. As it is, it takes a nation substantial resources to unhide a hidden pop center unless it is very lucky and begins with the reveal pop center spell. All of this assumes the un hiding nation has a decent mage to begin with.

Some don't like the Uncover Secrets at 40 or better, but I do. This can be a useful order at times, and especially if your nation is emissary light. An agent in a company could issue this as a second order, and you'd be surprised at what you may find out in some of these excursions. Things like capitols moving, nations dropping, and a potential rival's victory conditions are all potential information points. This is also a great order for that nation who is not in great communication with other nations (not generally recommended), since it could be the only source of information besides the map and nation messages.

Ships never suffering storms or being lost at sea really has very little consequence for most nations to start with, and even sea faring nations tend not to stray far from shore, even with this ability. There are still pirates on the seas, as well as sea monsters, so this ability really does very little, considering its specialization and minimal depression of bad circumstances.

The views above are really my own, and I am actually open minded to feedback regarding the above, as well as open to being enlightened with some new strategies to take advantage of abilities I may have overlooked, or even new strategies to take advantage of already beneficial abilities.

Which nations are the "winners" and "losers"? Here is a table of all nations in both scenarios. Listed is their abilities, and total points of special abilities (A is 4, B is 3, C is 2, D is 1, and E is 0)

1650 Scenario

Free people

Woodmen	I.b	I.e	II.a	III.b	III.c	12 Points
Northmen	I.a	IV.d	VI.d	VII.a		10 Points
Eothraim	I.a	III.d	IV.a	V Cj Mts		6 Points
Arthedain	I.a	III.b	IV.a	VI.b		6 Points
Cardolan	I.a	II.b	III.a	IV.b	IV.d	10 Points
NG	I.a	III.b	IV.a	VI.b		6 Points
SG	I.a	III.b	IV.a	VI.b		6 Points
Dwarves	II.c	III.d	IV.c	VI.b		8 Points
Sinda	I.b	III.b	IV.a	VI.a		7 Points
Noldo	I.b	III.d	IV.a	VII.c		8 Points

Dark Servants

Witch King	I.a	III.b	III.c	V fh	V ch	5 Points
Dragon Lord	I.b	II.a	III.b	III.c	V t	13 Points
Dog Lord	I.b	III.b	III.c	IV.a	V cm	8 Points
Cloud Lord	I.a	I.b	I.d	VII.c		16 Points
Blind Sorcer	I.a	V ss	V ch	VII.e		8 Points
Ice King	I.a	I.b	III.b	III.c	V ss	11 Points
QA	I.a	I.a	II.a	VII.c		13 Points
Fire King	III.b	III.c	III.d	IV.b	V f V ch	8 Points
Long Rider	I.a	III.d	IV.a	V cm		6 Points
Dark Lts.	I.a	III.c	V ch	V fh		4 Points

Neutrals

Corsairs	I.e	VI.d	VII.d			2 Points
Harad	I.e	IV.b	IV.d	VII.c		6 Points
Dunlendings	I.a	I.e	II.a			9 Points
Rhaur	I.a	I.e	III.d	IV.b		7 Points
Easterlings	I.a	I.e	III.b	III.c		4 Points

Totals

Free	78 Points	Average 7.8
Dark	92 Points	Average 9.2
Neutrals	28 Points	Average 5.6

How can this distribution be explained? First, the game must be balanced, or else no one would want to take the side at the disadvantage. The Free People have a large advantage in economics and in military force. In order to combat this, GSI has tried to do some things to even the sides. For instance, Dragons help to offset the free army advantage. However, the economic advantage is a long term one, so GSI uses two items to balance this.

First, artifacts are used to help balance the game. Almost every DS nation has multiple artifacts; by and large these are powerful. The Free have no where near the same number of artifacts. Of course, some of this is historical, but the actual powers of the artifacts are open to some subjective opinion.

Secondly, nation abilities are used to help counter the Free economic advantage. In looking at the data, you can see specific individual nations are helped. For instance, the QA and Dragon Lord have some of the best special abilities in the game. This is certainly to offset the large number of foes immediately surrounding these nations. One might respond, "But what about the Witch King; his special abilities stink and he's surrounded." Good point, but keep in mind how good WK starting characters and artifacts are (as well as a sound tax base, relative to other DS).

(Woodmen). If you remove the Woodmen and Northmen, the Free average is only 7.1. This gives, on an adjusted average, an almost 50% advantage to the Dark Servants. Like I said earlier, this is to try to compensate for the enormous Free advantage in economics.

Neutrals. Why are their abilities so horrid? Well, to combat the biggest advantage in the game; deciding what alliance to join. I'm sure this is why the neutrals have little in the form of artifacts, and on average, poor starting characters. All of these things counter the fact that the neutrals have several turns to farm or just see how things are going before deciding to jump in on the winning side. These neutral disadvantages aren't hurting enough; neutrals have won about 30% of the games to date.

Now the 2950 Data:

Free people						
Woodmen	I.b	I.e	II.a	III.b	III.c	11 Points
Northmen	I.a	IV.d	VI.d	VII.a		10 Points
Riders	I.a	III.d	IV.a	V Cj	Mts	6 Points
Rangers	I.b	III.b	IV.a	VI.b		6 Points
Silvan	I.b	III.b	VI.a	VII.b		9 Points
NG	I.a	III.b	IV.a	VI.b		6 Points
SG	I.a	III.b	IV.a	VI.b		6 Points
Dwarves	II.c	III.d	IV.c	VI.b		8 Points
Sinda	I.b	III.b	IV.a	VI.a		7 Points
Noldo	I.b	III.d	IV.a	VII.c		8 Points

Dark Servants						
Witch King	I.a	III.b	III.c	V fh	V ch	5 Points
Dragon Lord	I.b	II.a	III.b	III.c	V t	13 Points
Dog Lord	I.b	III.b	III.c	IV.a	V cm	8 Points
Cloud Lord	I.a	I.b	I.d	VII.c		16 Points
Blind Sorcer	I.a	V ss	V ch	VII.e		8 Points
Ice King	I.a	I.b	III.b	III.c	V ss	11 Points
QA	I.a	I.a	II.a	VII.c		13 Points
Fire King	III.b	III.c	III.d	IV.b	V f V ch	8 Points
Long Rider	I.a	III.d	IV.a	V cm		6 Points
Dark Lts.	I.a	III.c	V ch	V fh		4 Points

Neutrals						
Corsairs	I.e	VI.d	VII.d			2 Points
Rhûn East.	I.a	I.e	III.b	III.c		4 Points
Dunlendings	I.a	I.e	II.a			9 Points
White Wiz.	I.a	I.e	IV.b	IV.d		7 Points
Khand East.	I.a	I.e	III.b	III.c		4 Points

Totals		
Free	77 Points	Average 7.7
Dark	92 Points	Average 9.2
Neutrals	26 Points	Average 5.2

Once again, same result in the 2950 game, and for the same reasons.

Once again, same result in the 2950 game, and for the same reasons.

This is only one man's opinion. Feel free to write a response to this, as I'm sure there are several ways of interpreting this data.

As a side note, you may decide to upgrade all of the economic advantages in 2950 (most notably hire armies for free) since GSI decided to use a one sided economic model to determine costs (i.e. less money in 2950, but same hire army cost of 5000, regardless of market in either scenario)

The Most Devastating Attack Known to Man, Dwarves, Orcs, Elves...

by
Darren Beyer

Agents can steal your gold and assassinate your characters, but they can be defended against. Armies can route your forces and take your towns, but they can be defended against. Emissaries can influence away your population and recruit your characters, but they can be defended against. Your allies can drop out of the game...oh oh.

Name a tactic and I can name a defense to counter, but when your allies drop out, not only do you lose valuable allegiance characters and armies; you also lose recon in the form of turn maps and character orders. In fully half of the games I've played, quite a few nations have dropped out of the game unexpectedly (i.e. were not forced out, they just quit). Obviously this poses a problem for the side they belong to, but it also diminishes the enjoyment for all the players who will not get the satisfaction of being a part of a balanced game. In one game, where I play a good nation, all but one of my allies have dropped (and we haven't reached turn 20!). Refusing to drop, I called the neutrals and few Dark Servants I had been in contact with and told them I would try to hang on, but to prepare for the inevitable. Imagine my surprise when a Dark Servant offered gold to help me stay active and a neutral offered to turn good "just to make things interesting". I don't enjoy playing on either side of a one sided game and this surprising and reassuring response led me to believe there are others like me.

Is there a defense to the quitter? There is no solid defense, but there are some steps to take which can lessen the impact:

Keep in Contact With All Your Allies.

By maintaining open communication with your allies, whether by phone or note card, you stand a good chance of finding out if someone wants to drop. If early enough in the game (before turn 12) you can immediately find a replacement and the nation, thus your side, won't miss a beat. This was the case in one of my games where an ally was considerate enough to give a phone call to tell us he was going to drop and our team was able to find someone to take his place the very next turn. More importantly, if you can find out why your ally wants to quit it may be possible to reverse his/her decision.

Ask Your Ally to Transfer Goods/ Population Centers to Your Team.

If you manage to catch an ally before the nation drops, ask to have goods and population centers transferred to you. This will boost your own economies while helping to keep the goods out of your enemy's hands.

Try to Make it Appear That a Nation is Still Active.

When a nation becomes inactive it draws enemies like [*explicative*] draws flies. If you can make the nation appear to remain active, it may be possible to stem the enemy tide long enough for your nation to capitalize on your ex-ally's demise. Note cards, calls (lies) to neutrals, and masking some army movements are just a few of the ways to accomplish this.

Recruit. Recruit. Recruit.

When a nation drops out it affords the other members of the alliance a unique opportunity, the ability to acquire new characters at a relatively low cost. When a nation drops, its characters are up for grabs and should be jumped on by eager alliance members. The obvious choices for recruitment are the big guys (imagine, Woodmen, surprising a bad guy with a recruited Elrond!), but with a good emissary even the lesser characters are worth going after and can be obtained for less than the cost of naming new ones. This process can be facilitated if the dropping nation can be contacted; simply ask for the locations of the characters or even, if contact is possible before the drop, ask that all the characters be moved to convenient hexes. Even if recruitment isn't viable (i.e. the character roster is full) personal challenge of an inactive nation's characters is a great way to improve in skill ranks, though this isn't recommended until after turn 12 when it is certain a nation can't be filled by a backup player.

There is no way to defend against the "attack" of a dropping nation and only a few ways to recover from it. Even one nation dropping can have a severe impact on a game, but more important than the tangible effects is the loss of enjoyment twenty four other people will experience. To win by good play and conquest is one thing, but to win because others quit is an empty victory. When a player drops a nation the game loses something. Defend against the attack by keeping in the game and challenging your fellow players to do the same.

(CONTINUED FROM THE FRONT COVER)

Just a reminder that we here at GSI are taking on another team in a 6x2 grudge game in the 2950 scenario. For those of you who are interested, the game number is 45. Keep a look out in the personals for any words of interest!

O.K., game needs. Looking at our new games filling, what we need are Neutrals, Neutrals, Neutrals! That's right, we need Neutrals for both scenarios in all types of games. If you want to get into a game quickly, playing a neutral is the way to go. We also have a 3 week 2950 game pending which is looking for a Dark Servant team to face them. Anyone who is looking for a fierce head to head contest should contact us. These guys have been waiting since September, so they are ready to go! We are also looking for players for our one-week all-email games, again in both scenarios. This option allows you twice the action at a reduced fee of \$5.50 a turn. So get those requests in.

That's about it for this month, so I'll talk to you in thirty!

Stuart

The Hall Of Heroes

Game #95 - The Dark Servants: #17, #22 & #16

Elrond sat, shackled to the floor of Adûnaphel's audience hall. The Nazgûl walked around the elf, brushing her fingers along his cheek. Elrond shuddered involuntarily, his resolve not to show weakness crumbling at the Quiet Avenger's touch.

"Well, well, my pretty," Adûnaphel whispered. "Together at last. I wait with great anticipation for our eternity together. Your days will be split between Ossim Rallah and Hoarmûrath. But your nights are mine. ALL mine!"

A chilling laugh rang through the hall, and Elrond knew true despair . . .

Final Standings are as follows:

#17 Quiet Avenger - 1750

#22 Haradwaith - 1667

#16 Ice King - 1600

Top Free People: Noldo Elves - 1600

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Maben/Witch-king: 254

Highest Net Commander Rank - Ossim Rallah/Haradwaith: 135

Highest Net Agent Rank - Siren/Witch-king: 138

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Atropos/Witch-king: 130

Highest Net Mage Rank - Maben/Witch-king: 251

Most Mithril - Ice King: 2394

Most Artifacts - Witch-king: 20

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 93

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

Game #141 - The Dark Servants: #14, #13 & #20

A cold, foul wind blows throughout Middle-earth, carrying the blighted laughter of the Cloud Lord, the Dog Lord and the Dark Lieutenants. The remaining Free huddle in caves, in ditches, in graves, anywhere they think might offer some respite from their tortured fates.

Unfortunately, there is no respite. Their armies have been crushed, their leaders slaughtered, their cities razed. The only future facing them is one of servitude, slavery and eternal torment. Sauron holds the world in his palm, and he does not look lightly on those who opposed his will. The Free are crushed. Now comes the payback.

Final standings are as follows:

#14 Cloud Lord - 2300

#13 Dog Lord - 2200

#20 Dark Lieutenants - 1984

(cont'd)

The Hall Of Heroes

Top Free People: #4 Arthedain - 725

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Akhórahil/Cloud Lord: 334

Highest Net Commander Rank - Kaldúrmeir/Dog Lord: 180

Highest Net Agent Rank - Soul Catcher/Cloud Lord: 175

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Angúlion/Witch-king: 103

Highest Net Mage Rank - Akhórahil/Cloud Lord: 272

Most Mithril - Dog Lord: 1522

Most Artifacts - Cloud Lord: 62

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 108

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

Game #183 - The Dark Servants: #19, #12 & #22

Vagaig stood at Tarondor's grave, silently reminiscing. The two of them started this conflict together, along with 6 others. Of those original eight, only he remained.

"Old friend, if only you were here now, we'd find a way out. We struggle on, but it gets harder every day. I'm not sure how much longer we can hold out."

Suddenly, a net dropped over his head and cold, harsh laughter echoed in his ears. Vagaig spun and saw Úvatha, Khamûl and Haruth Ramam. All three were smiling, but there was a malicious coldness in their eyes. A coldness he knew meant his doom.

"How touching. Talking to dead brothers," said Úvatha. "Do not fret, little one. We will soon make you forget poor Tarondor. We have so many nice little activities set aside for you . . . Activities that will take years to complete."

Again, the cold laughter filled his ears. And Vagaig screamed

Final Standings are as follows:

#19 Long Rider - 2125

#12 Dragon Lord - 2083

#22 Haradwaith - 1833

Top Free People: #4 Arthedain - 725

{cont'd}

The Hall Of Heroes

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Maben/Dragon Lord: 213

Highest Net Commander Rank - Arfanhil/Rhudaur: 134

Highest Net Agent Rank - Tormog/Dragon Lord: 149

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Fraga/Witch-king: 129

Highest Net Mage Rank - Maben/Dragon Lord: 160

Most Mithril - Easterlings: 2304

Most Artifacts - Dragon Lord: 28

Most Kills - Cloud Lord Quiet Avenger: 14

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

Game #204 - The Dark Servants: #19, #17 & #14

From their bases in and around Mordor, Úvatha, Adúnaphel and Jí Indûr send a pestilent shadow coursing over Middle-earth. The green life of the earth has turned a mottled grey. The once proud Free cities, former bastions of the Light, have been reduced to rubble and kindling. Music which once soared in the woods and hills has now changed to the tormented cries of the wretched Free.

The shadow creeps through every corner of Middle-earth, and the three's Dark Master feeds on the fear and misery caused by their hand. Sauron handsomely rewards those who serve him well, and Úvatha, Adúnaphel and Jí Indûr stand highest in his esteem.

Final Standings are as follows:

#19 Long Rider - 1717

#17 Quiet Avenger - 1475

#14 Cloud Lord - 1225

Top Active Free People: #4 Arthedain - 625

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 247

Highest Net Commander Rank - Gothmog/Dark Lieutenants: 144

Highest Net Agent Rank - Lomëlindë/Long Rider: 125

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Angúlion/Witch-king: 88

Highest Net Mage Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 184

Most Mithril - Dark Lieutenants: 343

Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 15

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 24

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!