

WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



GAME SYSTEMS
INC.

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WORDS FROM THE WOOD

The new T.V. Guide is here! The new T.V. Guide is here!!! That's right, it's time for a new T.V. season, and that means one thing--spending hours upon hours sitting in front of a box which emits flickering images to dull our minds and deaden our senses. We get to hear even that much more about six slacker friends who sit around being chummy and living in apartments that no one in the REAL world can afford. We get to hear more advertisers scream at us in an attempt to bludgeon us into buying their weak, pathetic products. Ah, fall. It just don't get no better than this.

O.K., those of you interested in joining an all-email game, the deal just got better. Because of the quick turn-around, these games will be offered at the discounted per turn price of only \$5.50 a turn. That's right, that means lower turn fees for players in some of our one-week games!! Please note, however, that this reduction ONLY applies to players in ONE-WEEK ALL-EMAIL GAMES!! This does not apply to players who are currently playing in our two-week games and happen to use the email turn service. So if you were holding off signing up for an all-email --what's stopping you now? We've got several games filling right now, including a 1650 1-week all-email Grudge game, so sign up now!

GSI is also offering a second "paid up front at game start" option to compliment our \$250 "paid up game" option. This new option allows players to pay \$150 for the setup/registration and first 25 turns. This works out to about \$5.50 a turn for the first 25 turns. That's a dollar off the regular turn price of \$6.50. After the first 25 turns, however, normal turn charges would be applicable as this option is not renewable for that game. Again, these special rates DO NOT cover fax fees or other extra charges that might be assessed to your account. Those of you who are interested are welcome to contact GSI to start a game with either new "game start option".

We have been experiencing on-going problems with some "home-made turnsheets" that are not following our requested turnsheet format. This is especially true of some email turns which are sent to us. These non-standard formats become a bigger problem when the required information is not formatted correctly and it ends up scattered all over the page. This makes it extremely difficult for our data entry staff to correctly punch in the orders. In order to minimize such mishaps, if a home-made turnsheet arrives (by mail, fax, or email) which does not follow our requested format, and is difficult to read, we will be forced to charge \$5 so that the turn can be transcribed to a format which is readable. If you are on email and are having some problems meeting our turnsheet format guidelines, you can try sending a turn to yourself and see what you get. This will give you an idea of what happens when we receive the turn. Also keep in mind that the turnsheet must be in an ASCII format and we suggest using spaces instead of tabs. Contact our office if you having any questions regarding our home-made turnsheet format guidelines. These charges will commence on 10/1/95.

That's the long and short of it this month. We'll talk to you all in another thirty days. Until then, keep your swords sharp and your wits sharper.

Stuart



ALONG THE PATHWAYS

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This Month's Cover: "Old Man Willow" by Jim Pigtain

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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.

Middle-earth™ PBM

circa 1650

GAME 115

With a snarl and a wave of his Staff, Malezar the Vampire finished his most potent spell--and the City of Elostirion, current Noldo capitol, lay revealed. With a bow to his Mistress, he turned to feast upon his reward, a quavering Elven maiden.

"General Vashakûr," Adûnaphel whispered, "by tonight I expect Elostirion to be MINE."

"As you wish, my Mistress," the General replied, knowing his steel-equipped mûmakriders would have no trouble against the defenseless elves . . .

GAME 125

Contest of Champions

The Blood bath continues at Buhr Ailgra and the surrounding area. Body count get closer but we still killed more than we lost. Where next shall the stakes rise again. Imdorad perhaps . . .

GAME 141

Lord Murazor,
Seeing the fall of Arthedain is all you are capable of. My present situation is only due to 10,000+ troops and hyperactive agents of your allies. I think the use of the title Doombringer is insulting to your allies and laughable to the rest of Middle-earth.

Argeleb

GAME 165

At long last the final glimmer of light fades and the world is plunged into the dark grip of Sauron! Long we have labored for this day when we the Corsairs should sit at the right hand of the true lord of Middle-earth.

Teldûmeir

GAME 177

So, Arthedain wants an agent war with the Ice King. No problem. I have 9 that are 60+, 2 more over 80, and several more in training.

Hoarmûrath
The Ice King

GAME 178

Angmar is secure and the Witch-king is no more. Onwards to Mirkwood. Time has come to make it into Greenwood.

GAME 181

Hallas:

I personally decimated 8700 troops belonging to the late South Gondor. I do not fear you; I pity you. You talk of conquering Mordor. Pah, you are a weak minded fool! I command you to bring forth your armies to do battle with me! My dragons shall clean their claws upon their flesh.

Quiet Avenger

Hallas,

Since you brought the whole clan, I guess I'll have to kill the whole clan.

Carlton

Shah of all Harondor

P.S. Thanks for Morannon.

GAME 184

Eoder, Iron Fist of the North, rose slowly from the table. Maps of Northwestern Middle-earth lay strewn across the table and the candles set on the table burned to within an inch of their holders. Eoder lifted his goblet and drained the remaining dregs of wine. He shook his head.

"Where were the promised armies of Cardolan, Arthedain, and the Noldor? I will do what I must," he thought to himself. "We must march to war without them."

It's good to be king,
yes it's quite a role,
It gives me the right
to kill orc, goblin and troll.
I'll sharpen my knife
and head straight for the strife,
To burn down a town
ahhh, that is the life.
To those Free western nations
who have yet to fight,
Get your men in this war
and you'll see that I'm right.
High Plains Drifter

Hey Éothraim,
Neigh Snort. Swish. Swish Chomp.
The preceding message was brought to you in Horse code for the genetically impaired.

Jí Indûr

P.S. Weasel, eh? Pretty tough talk from the one that just crawled away from 3135

GAME 186

The black storm clouds hung in the sky over the Sea of Nurn, obscuring all but the faintest light. From the dark window in the castle overlooking the shadowed sea, the Storm King smiled cold and distant.

"The storm is coming," he said in a whisper, "and it will destroy all in its path."

GAME 187

Alas, the Armies of Mordor march upon my Lords. I do not despair. I shall fight unto the End. Come bring your armies. I shall fight you until I or Sauron is destroyed.

Hallas

High King of Cardolan

GAME 195

Another month of war has passed. The dwarves came and now the scraps of 2900 troops and Azaghal fertilize my fields! I will soon send the Sinda home in pine boxes. Alas, once again it's time to try to solve the riddle of the dragon. They seem to travel this way often.

Meanwhile . . . the snake prepares to strike!!!

Orillion Darkblade
Dunland Scribe

GAME 197

In the shadow of the forest keep of Dol Guldur, Ringlin stepped out before the great gate. The Elven Wizard shouted out his challenge, his voice carrying up to the battlements with magical ease full of confidence. While waiting for a response, Ringlin let his folded arms rest across his bracers, feeling the magical powers within. When Lhachglin, the evil sorcerer, accepted Ringlin's challenge by calling down from the battlements, Ringlin could not help but smile. He knew he was stronger.

Some minutes later, the massive gates creaked and shuddered and opened enough to allow Lhachglin to emerge from the keep dressed in a simple black cloak. In front of the massive walls of Dol Guldur, the two magicians met and the mystic battle

began. Bright orange flames shot forth from Ringlin's outstretched arms seeking to reach through the shield of blue lightning that protected Lhachglin. The walls of the keep seemed to dance madly as the two mages hurled energies back and forth.

Suddenly, a black-hued tendril emerged from Lhachglin's finger. Ringlin's eyes widened in surprise as the thin tendril of ancient power swept aside his defenses. Before he could scream, his skull was shattered by the blast, showering the ground in smoking gore.

A thin smile spread across Lhachglin's face as he stared at the twisted corpse that belonged to the former elven wizard. "So arrogant," he muttered to himself. As he turned to return to the keep, he let his hand rest lightly in the folds of his black cloak on the ancient black harp known as "Tinculin" that he had so recently found.

GAME 199

Sitting against an ancient tree, Din Ohtar watches a tower burn while he ponders his next mission.

He smiles as the local Woodmen try to control the fire. Only one more task in Mirkwood. One more trophy and then the real hunt begins.

Reaching into his bag he pulls out the skull of his kinsman Drurgandra.

"Vengeance first my friend."

He slowly stands, draws his dwarven sword, tosses the skull and cleaves it in two.

"From this day, until my last breath, shall I take the life of my enemies!"

Orillion Darkblade
#19

GAME 200

Arise, My Children
And set loose the Lances of the East.
We ride to Death and Doom

Beneath the Banner of the Lidless Eye;
Hail Sauron, Lord of Men!
Ovatha the Last
Khan of Khand and Rhûn

GAME 205

Soaked in blood, Uklurg scans the battlefield. Thousands of bodies cover the land for as far as the eye can see. Two small armies approach from the south. Days late for the first assault on Osgiliath. They too will be crushed by the huge Gondorian armada.

Thousands of troops are still on the way, but for now he commands only the dead. Tossing his sword hilt aside, he begins his journey home.

"Sauron will not be pleased," he growls. "And I must explain the loss of my mage!"

Orillion Darkblade
Lord of Flames

All in Lorien were in a state of trepidation, for Caras Galadhon had fallen, and Cerin Amroth itself had been revealed. A scout rode into the city and cried, "Elves of Lorien rejoice, for a Dwarven host approaches!" A maiden stepped forth and asked, "How great is this host?" The scout smiled, "They are like the stars in the sky."

GAME 212

"Sire, the dogs are hungry."

"So send a wagon over to the dog food factory and get them something to eat," growled Dendra Dwar as he looked up from his snack of stuffed hobbit.

"The factory has been closed . . . out of horses."

"Well, Eothraim has horses. Let's go ask them if we can have theirs!"

The Howling

The game has begun
Darkness descends
Middle-earth shall be ours.
The Warlord

GAME 214

Gamers,

I do hope that there are formidable opponents and strong allies in this bunch. I do grow weary as a neutral watching impudence. Let the fun begin.

Middle-earth™ PBM
circa 2950

GAME 4

Some will not understand the reasons behind my actions and will lose trust thereby. But where are their own actions when the tables offer them the same chances as I? They too favor betrayal of trust or in this case truce . . . Having made my choice I will abide theirs.

GAME 7

More than twenty turns have passed, and I'm getting bored . . . So, I'm going to get medieval all over one of you bad guys. Look out, it could be you.

Knightmare

GAME 20

Tis a strange new world.
No correspondence.
No notes.
Whispers?

So dull . . . time to start a fire.

And where the Vaders travel
destruction is sure to follow.

Ovatha IV

GAME 24

Battle at the crossroads . . .

While higher-morale armies with more troops under better commanders of Dwarves and Riders stood watching, Captain Hardred of Northern Gondor led his small army of knights against Regent Uvatha's small army of camel riders and footmen. Though taking severe losses thanks to an allied inactivity, Hardrad proved victorious and even (briefly) captured Uvatha! Hurrah . . .

GAME 25

The elves won't leave my forest alone! This means war.

Baaltrac

GAME 26

Welcome all who would be free, to Greenwood. Dul Guldur has fallen and the forest is a Silvan playground once again. Don't mind that Ice King army tromping around. It's lost and doesn't know how to get out . . . but we do (grin).

Zarendarger (5)

Mortals of the West, hear me.

Behold, the mighty Gondors burn as I speak. The eye of Sauron is upon them. Prepare places of refuge for them as they flee my burning wrath!

Ren the Conqueror

And the war raged upon the plains and foothills of Gondor. Never had man seen so many trolls and orcs flood from the mountainsides to siege their last fortifications. Darkness began to descend upon Minas Tirith. From the burnt remains of their villages fled the survivors to spread the word that the Lord of Flames had returned with his intact. Gondor will soon cease to exist!

GAME 28

Silvan Elves,

Thanks for the villages. Nice try recruiting armies, but as you can plainly see, it was a waste of precious gold.

Er-Mûrazôr
Witch-king of Angmar
Lord of the Nazgûl

GAME 30

Soon our enemies will be as dust scattered before us like the wind. The northwest again sounds the call to battle as neutrals heed the plea of the last Dark Ones and march to Sauron's sagging cause. I salute their spirit even as I march to destroy them.

Elrond

GAME 33

I am Stormbringer. I am a Dark Servant. I shall see the destruction of all the Free, especially those who take the name of their future lord and master in vain. The deception is revealed. Their payment will be their souls. Fear me and kneel before your lord. I AM STORMBRINGER!

Olbamarl is mine. Who's next? Perhaps that friendly Urzahil fellow. . .
Bard

GAME 35

Northern Gondor:

Unfortunately for you, you have attracted the attention of Ren the Unclean. The battle for Middle-earth begins with your destruction. My armies, and those of my allies, shall wipe the entire nation of North Gondor from the land as an example to all who oppose our will and that of Sauron.

The Fire King

Hello, Hello

Are ya bored yet? Well this column's for you. Why don't you start using it or sending cards or something. Or are ya all just sittin' back building up. Dark Servants communicate. Freeps better look out. Neutrals - Hello! Let's make this interesting at least. Well keep on your toes . . . Dendra Dwar's loose.

Bard I,

Next time, try to bring a larger army, and Din Ohtar sends his regards.

Easterlings,

Are you out there?

-Uvatha
The Long Rider
Ninth ring of the Nazgûl

GAME 37

Dear Dragon Lord,

We, the Free Peoples, have but one thing to say to you. Surrender now before we have to burn your population centers to the ground and hang all your leaders by the throat. We offer you this one chance to leave these lands and go back to Mordor.

Tyeon Corrella

To those who hide in darkness:

Justice may be blind, but she can see in the dark. There is nowhere that you can hide where she cannot find you. Then the scales of justice shall be balanced with her judgment taking the form of a sword. So repent your evil ways or you will surely die!!!

Baruk Khazad

"Oh no, not the mammoth men!"
"My lord, wake up! You were dreaming!"

"I am sorry, Alukhór. For a moment I was someone else . . .

somewhere else. Something to do with Middle-earth . . . wood? Oh well. It's nothing."

The First Month of the War

written by
a resident of Minas Anor

Caranthir was frustrated by his failure to outmaneuver Bolvag's small force. Despite his superior arms, the situation represented a dangerous delay, here where good souls had best not tarry. Caranthir knew the risks of what he attempted here. Trying to show none of his personal doubts, he addressed his troops before his battle. "There is a time for caution in warfare. This is not one of those times. Just ahead lies Carvarad, the unprotected town we have come to destroy- our victories here in the field will mean nothing if we cannot rid these mountains of this orc-breeding haven!" He smiled cautiously to his following, then nodded to himself. "We will stride boldly ahead, doing battle with all that we see! If we allow them to respond to our unexpected appearance, these mountains will only become more dangerous. Mount up!" He could see the fear, but also the determination, in his men's eyes.

". . .and one last thing- if that Tormog or any other of Sauron's throat-slitting cowards come anywhere near this camp, I'll slay them myself!" Caranthir wasn't sure if he said this to encourage his troops or himself. . .

Preparing to assault the mountain-fortified town of Berad Perras, Vagaig surveyed the lands below. To the south he could see a huge force marching towards the hostage outpost at Minas Ithil, and another force arriving at Osgiliath in the plains below. Ah, so the sealord from the south had arrived safely as hoped! If only he could be there to participate personally in the revenge against Mordor. But his scouts had given warning of an enemy force of unknown size concealed in the forests to the west. Probably Hukor and his rabble out of Durthang. Hukor was responsible for the slaying of his kinsmen at Tir Nindor. Curse him to death and darkness!

Vagaig also knew that a new force of trolls was already gathering again at Durthang, just to the north of his current position, steadily growing into a force to be reckoned with. Vagaig accepted his uncertain fate with a stern grimace, and considered whether to claim the outpost before him for the glory of Gondor, or to burn it to the ground. . .

Alandur knew the time was near to march forth with the troops he had been preparing at Calmirie and do battle. No longer would he slowly rally the people of this once secure dwelling- the time had come to take a stand! With a last call for the troops, and a last encouraging speech to the people, he marched forth hoping to meet up with Vinyaran's army on the road. Together they might be able to engage the mass of orcs and trolls issuing from Dol Guldur with a

superior force. But first, he would have a last night with his favorite "camp follower". . .

Vinyaran destroyed the message from King Tarondor with a sigh. He knew why he had been ordered to stay behind, giving the Prince the bulk of his army. Telumehtar, the next in line for the throne, must show his willingness and competence for leading his people in battle. Vinyaran would bide his time and, as ordered, rebuild the strength of his armies. Given enough time, perhaps he would have his own chances for glory once again.

Telumehtar marched forth seeking battle for the second time in as many fortnights not knowing if he was Prince or King. He had tried to rally a last dash towards the remnants of his father's guard when they were overrun at Minas Ithil. He was sure he had seen his King beaten down and stricken several times before they were separated, only to scramble back out of the fray. One of the toughest, most persistent figures he had ever known, his father. A little overcautious perhaps, but tough as iron.

King Tarondor rode back into his capital city, making special note to his stewards along the way to spread hateful propaganda against Ren the Unclean and his followers, who had so recently done harm to his nation, his people, and his very person. If only he had time to instill in his troops the righteous loathing he now felt, perhaps he could've saved Minas Ithil. . . ah, never enough time to accomplish everything in the opening stages of war.

But foremost on the King's mind was the decision he was most reluctant to make. Was it commander's instinct which told him to gallop off to Telumehtar's aid in the coming battle, or was it just fatherly concern? His strong but overly proud son had held his own in the tragic battle of Minas Ithil. But he never faced a Nazgul before! Would he know of the dangers he faced if Khamul was present among the enemy's ranks? Perhaps this would be a good chance to demonstrate for him the power of the family heirlooms. . .

With special thanks to mine enemies in ME-PBM #206.

A Little Communication on Communication

by
William Boy

There is one thing I know better than anyone else in the game. There is one thing that I am a virtual expert. I know how I feel. I know how I feel when I communicate. I know when the communication is positive, productive, entertaining, and most of all, I know when it is negative. You also know how you feel about your communication better than anyone else. Our feelings are the one thing in which we are all experts.

In terms of game communication, I have been in games of various communication intensity, from little communication, to a well run team of highly communicative players. There is no comparison, a team that communicates poorly, plays poorly. So to win, you must communicate, both with your allies

and with prospective neutrals. And in order to communicate, you must know how to communicate.

There are many different forms of communication. The obvious form of communication at the start of the game is the 3x5 card. I type up messages in approximate 3x5 size on my word processor instead of using cards. You would be surprised how much information can be put on such a communiqué. I have seen one total genius of a player type up such a note and then use small print to get even more information on it. Another side benefit of using paper instead of 3x5 cards is reduced weight. Be careful about postage if you are sending several cards. Despite all of these suggestions that 3x5s are a good form of communication, they are not. Cards can only impart information, and that information can often be outdated by the time it is received. Feedback is limited and usually received too late.

Usually in the initial 3x5 card sent off at the start of the game, the experienced player will give the other information which is even more effective than the 3x5 cards. This information, of course, will be addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers, and electronic mailing addresses.

Telephone calls are very effective forms of communication, but do have serious drawbacks. One very real drawback is the cost. Please remember that some players very often have a hard time getting together the cost of their turns. A few long distance calls would hurt financially. If you have a preference for using the telephone solely, be courteous and try to determine who can afford to call you. For those who cannot, make other arrangements. Call them, or use another form of communication.

Cost is not the only drawback of using the telephone. People have different schedules. Some people work nights. For them a daytime telephone call is like calling in the middle of the night. People are often not at home, and your telephone may turn into a quick message on an answering machine. Let me tell you, more information can be put on a 3x5 card than on a person's answering machine.

In addition to cost and scheduling, by using the telephone you must overcome the listening factor. Most people are poor listeners. At best, retention is even less, and, in case you were not listening--most people are poor listeners. Therefore much of what is said in a telephone conversation is lost. Just ask yourself--how much can you remember about your last telephone call? How about your last conversation with a teammate you have not spoken to in a few weeks? Also, some conversations have a tendency to drift outside of game parameters. This is fine, I enjoy getting to know the other players, I find I have very much in common with them, but you may miss vital points and therefore be ineffective because you are chatting about things other than the game. So when you make your call, be prepared. Have an agenda of information you need to impart. Take notes so you will remember what is discussed. Your teammate may be counting on you to do something. You may not remember to do it if it is not important to you, but they will remember if you failed to do it. Encourage your teammate to also take notes and be prepared for conversations. And watch the time so you don't have to pawn the family jewels to pay the telephone bill.

A real good idea is to follow up your conversation with a letter or 3x5 on the major points. This will reinforce what was discussed. Not only on the other player's part when they receive your note, but also on your part when you write down the information.

Despite all these drawbacks, telephone calls remain a very effective form of communication. You can exchange information quickly and therefore react quickly. You can exchange a tremendous amount of information in a short

period of time. And you can do something with a telephone call that cannot be done easily with other forms of communication--you can make important discoveries and discuss them before they become disasters, or use them for game winning moves.

Letters are very interesting and enhance the fun of the game. With letters you can add a gaming flair. Getting a telephone call from Joe is good and effective, but getting a letter from Gothmog is most exciting. I have received letters from some players who can put such a fine tone on their correspondence as to make you think Nazguls are real. No one has ever put a "chill on my spine" with a telephone call, but I received more than a few letters in my time that really have added to the game. As evidence of the value of a letter to the entertainment of a game I only have to ask my non-gaming friends. They are really not interested when I talk about the game, but many of them routinely ask to read my latest letters from a foe.

Besides entertainment, in certain circumstances letters are more effective than telephone calls. Have you ever tried to send a copy of a map over a telephone? So what if you are told where an enemy army is, what if you are not familiar with the surrounding population centers? What if the other person didn't tell you about a few important facts about the map that they felt were unimportant? And then there are new players. Instructions to new players are much more effective in a letter. I often refer to letters on important facts that were sent to me by my game mentors. Often they prove invaluable. Unlike telephone calls where a person will often fail to retain much of the information, a letter can be referred to over and over again.

Fax machines and the internet combine the swiftness of the telephone and the benefits of a letter. One drawback of using a fax machine to communicate with other players is that they too must have a fax machine. Very few people have fax machines. E-mail on the other hand is quite common, but not everyone has it.

I have explained many of the forms of communication used in the game, but what I really want to address is how they should be used. The first and most important element is that they in fact be used. Winning a game because the other side does not communicate is somewhat disappointing. The game is entertaining because it is a challenge in conflict. People love challenge, and conflict is emotionally intense. To simply walk over the other side to an easy victory often leaves some players bored. On the other hand, it is very frustrating to lose because your allies will not coordinate. I have seen neutrals join the underdogs in a game because "it will make the game more interesting." Now if both sides are communicating well, and therefore playing well, the game should be much more fun.

The new player must be taken into consideration. As we all know, you can learn the rules without help, but you are hard pressed to use them effectively. Communication with the new player is a must because they need help. Of course, they don't know they need help. And they don't know they need to communicate, or they may be too shy to communicate. You want your rookie ally to help the team, and we all want players to have a good time and keep playing the game. So do your best to communicate with the new players. New players, do your best to communicate with your teammates; after all, it is your nation that is at stake.

After agreeing that communication between players is a good and desirable thing, the second point is that it should be effective. To be effective your communication must be positive.

For example, have you ever received a 3x5 card from your ally at the start of a game with only an internet number, and you do not have access to the internet? I know many players who do not use the internet. They all feel the same about such cards and are very outspoken about their feelings. They do not like them. They feel they are being told "if you do not have access to the internet, you are not worth speaking to." I realize that is not the intention of the other player, but here is my point-- communication is a subtle thing and you can easily impart a message that you do not intend to impart. You may not think you are sending a negative message, but you very well may be doing just that. The very same message is given to a lesser extent by players who only send telephone numbers, or addresses. Many people do not have E-mail, but everyone probably has an address or a telephone number. But do not assume that. Many players in the military, for instance, may not have a telephone readily available. Perhaps the only way to communicate with them is by 3x5 or a letter. Knowing that, would you be more inclined to accommodate them? Therefore, give a variety of communication methods if you can. Explain what method you prefer and your reasons for that preference. If you want to give your telephone number but cannot afford to make lengthy long distance calls, say so. The other player should understand to call you. Try to be considerate to the other player's wishes. If they really prefer a certain method, you will have to decide to meet that person's preference, or use 3x5 cards. But never halt communication. Remember, things change. The person who cannot afford telephone calls may suddenly be in a financial position to do so. Or the reverse may also apply. A person may get on the internet when they did not have it a few turns ago. A person may decide they like to write letters. You never know. Just keep in contact with them.

Another consideration on being positive is to be careful on your role-playing. People are becoming very concerned in our society about violence and behavior. Certain role playing games have poor reputations. These reputations are unfounded, and have actually been seen to be beneficial in many studies published in psychological journals. However, most people do not read psychological journals, or play these types of games. They prefer to believe hearsay. They react to reputation rather than fact. So do not add fuel to any fires. Definitely role play in your communication, but do it in a style which cannot be judged improper. You really do not have to worry so much about other players, but you never know who might be reading your communication and what influence that person has over the player.

Another mistake is the self proclaimed leader type. Try not to make demands of other players, make requests. Do not tell them what to do, ask if they could do it. Explain why they should do it. Explain how to do it. How persuasive you are depends on your ability to communicate, and practice makes perfect. It is good to have a coordinator in the game, and if you want to be the leader, be persuasive, not demanding. If you want someone to do something for you ask if they can do it, and then ask if they would do it. Don't tell them to do it. There is a word for this--DIPLOMACY. Leaders are made by getting others to follow, not by being tyrannical.

Definitely avoid insulting people. You will find that one unintended insult can really hurt someone's feelings. If you hurt someone's feelings they will remember it. You may not have thought it was significant, but they may have. And they probably will not confront you about it. It will just simmer on their minds and when you need them, they may be really unlikely to go out of their way for you. This is bad enough for an ally, think how it will affect your relations with a neutral. Of course what I mean by insults is not a barb or jab as

in Whispers in the Wood, I am referring to a personal attack on that person. If a person cannot afford to make telephone calls, do not criticize them for it. If a person has an aversion to writing letters, accept it. If they do not have E-mail, so what? If they are new, help them. If they are confused about their strategy, persuade them to come around, but don't make them feel stupid. But above all, they run their nation, they make the final call.

As I already mentioned, the most important point is to communicate, but what about the player that is reluctant to communicate? If you have not heard from someone, and you can see they are active, you just have to keep trying. They will receive your 3x5s. Make your communication interesting to them. Bait them into communicating with you by peaking their interest. Make them look forward to getting that 3x5 and ALWAYS express how much you want to communicate with them. Eventually they will communicate with you, or, you may see positive results in their movements. Always remember the new player may be shy, keep trying and you will eventually break the ice.

Another point is that some people feel uncomfortable giving out addresses and telephone numbers. Or, they may not want to communicate for some reason. As I have already mentioned, they still get your 3x5 cards.

Let me offer some suggestions on a communication strategy for you and your team:

- *Send off 3x5s to everyone you want to communicate with as soon as possible. Preferably with your first turn. Indicate what means are available to you to communicate (telephone numbers, addresses etc.), which methods you prefer, and why you prefer that method.

- *Respond to those 3x5s and set up a dialogue. Try to accommodate another person's communication style if possible, but communicate in some way if that is not possible.

- *Prepare for telephone conversations, encourage the other player to do likewise, and give them time to do just that. Have a set time to call, or call them, give them a few minutes to prepare, and call back.

- *Follow up conversations with notes or letters so that plans will not be forgotten. Do not agree to do things which you may not be able to do.

- *Have a coordinator or two, usually someone who can easily adapt to everyone's communication style. If expenses for phone calls are a problem, pool the money into the coordinator who makes all the calls. It will be the responsibility of the coordinator to use the money effectively or fund the expenses of the overrun. Please, if you do pool money for a coordinator, be responsible about payment. Better, if you do this, everyone pay the coordinator an agreed upon amount for expenses in advance (say \$10 a month). A better way might be to agree to have the coordinator call collect.

- *Have the coordinator act as a spokesman for negotiating with neutrals. Of course, everyone should advise the neutral of this authority. It would really impress me to see an alliance having that much coordination if I was a neutral.

- *If you have a player on your team who will not communicate (and the position is active), keep trying. They will eventually communicate, either when you persuade them, or the enemy does.

So why not get to it? Improve your gaming success by improving your communication. Communicate with your allies, the neutrals, even your enemies. And when you do, tell them all about *Whispers of the Wood* and that ... " Willy Boy was here ! "

"The Gift"

by
Gary Drebit

"But why doesn't he understand?" King Hoarmûrath asked drunkenly.

"I don't know, my King," Lord Greco replied. "Perhaps our message was unclear."

The King threw his goblet at Greco, missing him by inches. "However, my King, your message sounded clear to me!" Greco stammered.

"I simply asked for coordination. To vote on which one of us would be the hub of our 'Circle of Dark' and I'm treated by a whimsical threat by the Dog Lord?" the King asked pouring himself another drink.

"Perhaps it was the fact that you were considering threatening the Cloud Lord's army at Minas Arthor two weeks ago, Sire," Greco offered, half ducking.

The King straightened to his full 6'9" height and loomed over his 'Advisor'. "Greco, you know that Minas Arthor is important to our Nation. If the communication between the Fire King and our people at Osgiliath had been better 3 weeks earlier, we would not have moved our army to Minas Anor and that opportunity to get in behind the Northern Gondor's lines would not have been there." The King moved back to his chair but instead of slumping into it, as Greco had anticipated, he spun around and pointed a bony finger at him. "Coordination! The choosing of a leader! The division of strategic points! That alone will save our circle!" the King stated with conviction. "But how dare the King of Dogs threaten me with this letter. 'This is not a threat;'" Hoarmûrath read, "it is a simple statement of fact: those who attack or kill a member of another Nation will be destroyed by the rest of us..." Hoarmûrath crinkled it in his hands and threw it into the hearth. "The vote for the hub of our circle has not been taken!" he whispered with disdain.

"Our communications with the Cloud Lord and Quiet Avenger have been positive," Greco offered. "They understand our position and we have offered to help the Cloud Lord in any coordinated event for allowing our glorious capture of Minas Arthor. Perhaps if the Dog Lord was in our position he would understand? His armies are in battle and many towns fall to his banner; where the confusion of battle is not a problem for him." Greco moved to the map table to sit across from his King. "Surely, he must understand that well coordinated small armies will capture more territory and create more confusion than marching with a large army?"

The King looked up from his map. "It is a shame that this strategy will be lost because we are unwilling to share in our territories. I'm afraid, Greco old friend, that we must also travel with a large army to ensure that when a 'coordinated' capture takes place that we hold the town. This way, it is our decision.

"But first we must send a message to the Dog Lord." The King looked up with haunting eyes. "He has embarrassed us in public and I'm too old to be pushed!"

"But Sire..." Greco urged, but the King's dark eyes cut him short.

"The Dog has put me in a position of either cowing to his letter or responding," the King said. "If we cow to his letter, no one will respect our Nation or our people. The death of our circle will be his undoing, not mine! Find my

personal messenger and have him see me. Now go." Hoarmûrath dismissed Greco with the wave of his hand.

"But, my King..." Greco started.

"NO BUTS" Hoarmûrath shouted, slamming his fist on the map table. "I'd rather burn with Sauron than continue waking every morning to this pain. Perhaps, in another time, there will be another war to fight and Sauron will call me again. Now leave before I lose my temper with you!" The King turned his back to his Advisor.

Lord Greco remembered that evil look in his King's eyes. He had seen it before. He left without hesitation.

It took several days for the messenger of the Ice King to reach the realm of the Dog Lord. He rode hard and determined. He avoided old battle sites and ruined population centers. Many times he saw refugees of human, elf, and troll. All looking for a new beginning. His message was memorized and he knew that this could also be a new beginning for his Nation as well. The 'gift' was light to carry and he touched it often to insure that he had not lost it. The fate of all the world rested on his, and the Dog Lord's, shoulders. Also, the lingering death the Ice King described for him was another incentive.

The guard to the throne room gulped as he knocked on the steel door. "I told you I do not want to be disturbed when my pets are eating!" The King shouted.

"My Lord, there is a messenger from the Ice King here," the guard announced.

"Tell him to wait!" the King shouted again.

"He bears a gift from the Ice King, My Lord. The messenger would not release it."

"Then remove all of his weapons and present him before me. Insure there is a full compliment at his side," the King shouted. "Have someone come in here and clean up after my pets. They are thirsty for drink after their meal."

No one had ever seen the 20 or so dogs, chained into the throne room, eat. But many had tried to guess what the meal was during the clean up. The torn flesh, bone and muscle could be beast, elf, human, or troll. Everyone hoped it was not the last choice.

The messenger stood with two guards at his side. He was stripped of every weapon and anything that could be used as a weapon. The guards were very good, for the consequences were all too chilling. "Your 'Gift,' messenger, let me see it." The King demanded. The messenger opened his bag as the "pets" of the Dog Lord howled and strained at their chains. The messenger hesitated a moment before he dumped the decapitated dog's head on the floor of the throne room. The crack of bone, when it hit the floor, was not heard over the howling of the dogs. Some fluid from the brain was starting to leak from the ears and open mouth. The messenger did not see any of this as both guards seized him and started to beat him savagely. The thirty seconds or so for the Dog Lord to regain order among his animals was enough time to break three of the messenger's ribs. Also, some blood was starting to drip from his left ear.

The Dog Lord strolled over to the messenger and grabbed him by his hair. "Pray you have more to say, Messenger, or I kill you where you stand".

The messenger grabbed at the jewel encrusted knife at the Dog Lord belt and drew it from its scabbard. With his free hand, the King grabbed the wrist of the messenger before any of his guards could react, breaking it at the base of the

hand; but the knife did not drop from his grasp. "He sent you to kill me?" the King laughed. "You are pitiful for a Nation of agents."

"No Sire" he replied through swollen lips. "Our lives..." he began to choke. "Our lives are like this dagger, my Liege. We have a choice but only two. I could ride back carrying the hilt of this dagger or you can send me back with the point buried in me. But before you choose, this is my King's message.

"I feel that you have embarrassed me and my Nation to the rest of the Circle of Dark. This is of your choosing. If you wish us as an enemy, I will cause you, and anyone that joins you, as much harm as possible."

"My King knows we will not rule the lands, we may not even survive at all. But we feel certain that a life with Sauron will be far better for you, than the hell he will put you through!" the messenger said. "He also commanded me to add: 'This is not a threat; it is a statement of fact'."

"My King is expecting me back. How shall I carry this dagger?" the messenger asked with more fear in his tone than he wanted.

Hoarmûrath, the Ice King, had locked himself within the throne room and had taken to drinking. His messenger was a week overdue and scouts in the area had not seen him. His time was consumed with drink, and scanning over the latest news from his agents. If he and the Dog Lord do not come to an understanding the battle lines will shift, and Sauron will not be pleased.

Greco had taken to the Dungeons lately. The King's Advisor had found solace in making Valacar scream for mercy. The Northern Gondor emissary had been taken from Minas Anor 9 weeks ago. The extraction of information from him had been easy and not as painful as Lord Greco would have liked, but he was sure there would be others. He was of no use to the Ice King anymore and Greco had kept him alive to boost his spirit. The pain that the burning poker inflicted was much more interesting than facing his King's wrath.

Neither the King nor his Advisor noticed when the lone rider appeared at the gate of the Ice King's capital. The rider had been sorely beaten and rode slumped within his saddle. The horse was no longer being controlled by the rider and had come home on its own. As the animal entered the courtyard, the rider fell. Interference with the King's messenger was punishable by the whip; no one moved to help the troll. As the Messenger lied on the cold flagstones, he moved his arm to his side to touch the gift. It was light and easy to carry. He had touched it often to ensure he had not lost it. The jeweled encrusted dagger was worth about 100 gold pieces and it would have fed him for a year. If he would have lost it, he would not have lived a year.

The Nazguls had every evil characteristic Sauron could have hoped for. They were fearless, cold hearted and ruthless. They also had a characteristic that sometimes drove them to extremes. PRIDE! But in this war, at this time, PRIDE would not be a factor. At least... not today.

The Hall Of Heroes

CORRECTION--Last issue in Game 161 we listed Desperado of the Easterlings with the highest net emissary rank. This is incorrect. The correct character was Wathlorg of the Cloud Lord with a rank of 116. Our apologies for this oversight.

Game #122 - Dark Servants: #13, #23, & #14

Gazing up at the yellowed moon, Dendra Dwar slavered and forgot all his worries. The wolves prowled the moors tonight, and he pitied any who found themselves with someplace to go. Sometimes the peasants found one of their unfortunate number the next morning, little but bones and sinew left to bury. Like the wolves, Dendra Dwar almost always finished what he began. Right now, all but the pointy-eared Noldor were pushing up daisies, and Dendra Dwar's main hall was decorated with war trophies from his numerous successful battles across Middle-earth. Sauron's hand now held the whole of Middle-earth in his clawed grasp, and chaos reigned supreme. Only the strong survived, and only the strongest of the strong prospered. Dendra Dwar had been granted a large portion of Middle-earth as a barony, to do with what he pleased. Life was good. After all, who could be happier than the Dog Lord with all the Freep bones to gnaw on that he could desire?

Final standings are as follows:

#13 - Dog Lord: 2300

#23 - Dumlendings: 2133

#14 - Cloud Lord: 1984

Top Free People: #10 - Noldo Elves: 1717

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Baewyn/Cloud Lord: 207

Highest Net Commander Rank - Baewyn/Cloud Lord: 182

Highest Net Agent Rank - Gontran/Cloud Lord: 165

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Ultor Blakgold/Dog Lord: 123

Highest Net Mage Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 135

Most Mithril - Dog Lord: 3463

Most Artifacts - Dog Lord: 30

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 24

Game #151 - Free Peoples: #7, #10, & #1

In the middle of a woodland clearing a gathering of men and elves stood before a wooden platform with three identical lecterns, their attention focused on the business at hand. Camlin of Southern Gondor stood at the central lectern, still caked in the bloodied dust and grime of the battlefield. To his left and right, respectively, stood Cfrdan of the Noldo and Beoraborn of the Woodmen. On a wooden dais off to the left languished the remnants of the Easterlings' leaders. Adúnaphel, Gorovod, Hos Harf, Ovatha II, Kav Makow, and the rest stood shackled to one another, their once proud heads bowed in shame.

"You stand accused of crimes against the Free Peoples of Middle-earth."

Camlin intoned, his angry gaze settling upon the damned. "How do you plead?"

This was, of course, just a formality. Cfrdan knew that this hastily gathered military tribunal would find them as guilty as they were. They would be dead before dawn.

The Easterlings, seeming to sense this, remained sullenly devoid of a response.

"Very well," Cfrdan replied, after allowing them the benefit of a few seconds to answer.

"Your silence bespeaks your guilt in this matter. This court finds you guilty as charged. With the dawn, you shall meet your master . . . by fire . . ."

(cont'd. next page . . .)

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Final standings are as follows:

#7 - Southern Gondor: 2150

#10 - Noldo Elves: 2017

#1 - Woodmen: 1950

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Tharddan/Sinda Elves: 253

Highest Net Commander Rank - Elrohir/Noldo Elves: 177

Highest Net Agent Rank - Bingobo/Woodmen: 153

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Eadwin/Woodmen: 99

Highest Net Mage Rank - Chilperic/Woodmen: 216

Most Mithril - Noldo Elves: 1205

Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 28

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 2

Congratulations to the Free Peoples!

Game #165 - Dark Servants: #20, #21, & #17

In the shadowy recesses of a dank tavern, four silent figures sat arrayed around a wooden table in the corner. The light from the fireplace barely illuminated the room, and left the grim individuals in near-complete darkness. Untouched tankards of ale sat on the table before them, to give the illusion of people there for legitimate and mundane reasons. They were, in fact, the only organized resistance to the dark cancer that had spread across Middle-earth.

"So now what," spoke Seladrynn, breaking the silence. He was Thranduil's only living son, and yet a child by all appearances.

"We wait," the figure across from him replied. The man wore a deep brown robe with a hooded cowl that he never lowered. If he had, he would have surely been killed in short order by one of Gothmog's many "peacekeepers." It was truly a mark of the horror that had befallen Middle-earth that the once-king Argeleb II hid like a thief in his own lands. They lived in the sewers like rats, making what they could and stealing what they couldn't.

The commoners of Middle-earth supported them, at least in spirit, but the oppression was strong. Being caught bearing arms was an offense punishable by death, and enforced regularly. Needless to say, their resistance was an underground one. They all hoped for a day when Sauron's minions would be banished from Middle-earth, but such a day seemed so very far off . . .

Final standings are as follows:

#20 - Dark Lieutenants: 2167

#21 - Corsairs: 2000

#17 - Quiet Avenger: 1900

Top Free People: #4 - Arthedain: 600

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Ji Indûr /Cloud Lord: 194

Highest Net Commander Rank - Teldûmeir/Corsairs: 156

Highest Net Agent Rank - Teller/Corsairs: 169

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Sarunam/Quiet Avenger: 95

Highest Net Mage Rank - Ji Indûr/Cloud Lord: 128

Most Mithril - Dwarves: 1513

Most Artifacts - Corsairs: 20

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 30

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!