

WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



GAME SYSTEMS
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U.S. POSTAGE
0.32

WORDS FROM THE WOOD

Now that the Christmas holiday is upon us, this crusading reporter (didn't know THAT was in the old job description, did you?) wanted to settle, once and for all, this whole Santa deal. So an expedition was prepared and we headed North, in search of Santa's workshop. We found the workshop and when we did, there was a huge surprise waiting for us. Who do you think was there, leading the elves in their toy building ventures? That's right, it was Elrond! Turns out that, when the elves sailed west, they didn't go to the Undying Lands. Instead, their journeys brought them north to a certain workshop. Having nothing else to do, the elves, being craftsmen, went to work. Elrond confided that the Boss could be cranky around this time of year and the weather had a lot to be desired, but at least there was no Sauron. Thank goodness for small favors. Just remember, you heard it here first!

Well, we have lots to talk about this month so we'll get right to it. The first piece of news is that Iron Crown Enterprises will be releasing their collectable card game, Middle-earth: The Wizards™, this month. We've seen some of the artwork and it is awesome. Although I have personally never played the game, I have it on good authority that the game is fun, too. GSI will be carrying the game once it is released, so feel free to contact us if you are interested in purchasing a starter deck and/or booster packs.

I'd like to address the topic of email players and the first turn of a new game. GSI cannot keep track of each player and whether that player receives any or all of his turns via email. There is a section on the first turnsheet to indicate whether you want email service or not. Simply fill this out and we will take care of the rest. If you want to receive your turns via email and you have a first turn due, please make a note on the first turnsheet that you want your turns sent out via email!!! Otherwise, GSI will not assume you wish to be placed on email service and it will not be done. If you are submitting your first turn via email, a note on the front page of your turnsheet will work as well. So, if you want email service, don't forget to tell us!!

We have recently received a number of suggestions for a "Suggestion Box" in *Whispers*. The idea is to provide a forum for players to make suggestions and exchange ideas about the game. So, how about it? How do you, the readers, feel about this? This will essentially be your column, as you will be providing the material for it. GSI will answer what suggestions we can, but the bulk of the material will be coming from you. If you are interested, drop me a line and, depending on the response, we will set this up!

Everyone knows that the holidays are right around the corner, and this brings up a number of subjects that we need to talk about. The first is that, during this time of the year, there are, inevitably, postal delays. We highly recommend allowing a few extra days when mailing, faxing, or emailing your turns to make sure they get to us in time. If it is a particularly important turn, we also suggest calling GSI to make sure the turn has reached us. If the turn has reached us, then you are set. If not, you can take steps to insure that the turn does get in. Please try and do this the day BEFORE the turn is due to be run. If you call us on the day the turn is run, you run the risk that the game will already be processed by the time we get the call.



ALONG THE PATHWAYS

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

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

This Month's Cover: "To Stare Death in the Eye" by John Kisse
 Volume XII Issue #9
 Published by GAME SYSTEMS INC
 December 1, 1995
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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 116

Dateline: Mordor, 1653. Turn 36.

Mordor impenetrable, all assaults repulsed. Eothraim in exile. Corsairs crippled and in bondage. Gondorian peasant rebellions. Free characters reeling from mysterious curses.

How long will the madness last?!
Your souls shall be ours.
Forever!

Durmorgûl

GAME 141

Betrayal is a double-edged sword, my friends. While hacking and slashing your allies from behind, beware it does not come back and cut your face in two!

Berserker

GAME 178

Leaving the Greenwood and onwards to Mordor. This is where we shall end it all. The remaining Dark Servants are entrenched so our losses will be high but it is worth it for victory. The land will not be denied.

Zarendarger (4)

GAME 184

Many have been the speeches in these pages from those who call themselves the "Free People" of Middle-earth, but would look to bind in chains the Children of the Sand and Plains. But hear me now, butchers!

Alone have the Children of the Sand and Plains stood. We bow not to

the Great Eye of Mordor, nor do we grovel on command of the "Free Peoples" who burn our homes, murder our people, and steal our lands. From the beginning you showed your true colors, attacking us, even as we spoke with the Northmen about an alliance.

To the Sinda, who drew first blood, fire shall be your only reward! And the Eothraim who invaded our peaceful realm, pain! Do not believe the dust from the south to be a storm only, but instead the Thunder of JUST VENGEANCE!

What was ours will be ours again! And those who did evil, in the name of Freedom, will bow before the Children of the Sands and Plains in chains, pleading for mercy and receiving the same as they gave. NONE! So shall it be!

Ovatha II

Written by my hand as Chancellor of the Realm.

Hul of Khand

GAME 186

Well fought Ûvatha, but you should have burned Buhr Widufiras while you had the chance. My army has been replaced and yours is now too weak to return. There are NO second chances in this arena.

Helcent

GAME 191

The battle of Goblin Gate could be the turning point in the western war. The Dragon Lord lost an army and his capital. The Cloud Lord misplaced the Ring of Wind.

GAME 192

Busted, battered, and broken Dunsul rode his mount to the battle line. But, alas, he too fell with a

broken sword at his feet. And his people wept as the sky turned black.

S. Gondor

GAME 194

Er-Mûrazôr surveyed Eriador from the top of the tallest spire of Carn Dûm and laughed chillingly. Cardolan had fallen long ago and the armies of Arthedain were scattered to the four winds, making their last stand before Bareketta. The Noldo had long been idle and would now pay the price for their idleness.

GAME 195

Lord Enion stands atop his tallest tower gazing westward.

"All of my enemies have fled? Just when things start to get interesting, they pack up and leave!! Well . . . so much territory and not enough time to claim it all. They didn't have much more time anyway."

Orillion Darkblade
Dunland Scribe

Lord Enion stands on the deck of his ship scanning the horizon.

"I feel a long, hard winter before us my friend."

Beside him stands Carlon of the Harad nation. "Aye, but I wouldn't want you to go soft sleeping it away in some cozy tavern. You've held off the west long enough . . . Perhaps it's time to take it for your own."

"That I shall! Helmsman, set sail for the Cowardlan coast!"

Orillion Darkblade

GAME 199

Bain the Pain died slowly in the rain.

Orillion Darkblade
Rhûn Assassins' Guildmaster

GAME 201

The Dwarves are on the march. Prepare to face their mighty wrath.

Dwalon

GAME 203

I've destroyed Angsûl, threatened Cargash, captured Mt. Gram, sent Dancu back home to mommy with his thumb in his mouth and his tail between his legs, and I now have an army at Morannon, so I'm going to commence kicking doggy butt. I've even sent the Eothraim some gold. How's the rest of ya doing?

Bain I

And Mûrazôr: Bonk bonk.

So the Dark Servants have rallied behind Mûrazôr and Khamûl. How touching. Pity that it comes too late. Don't be deceived, dear Nazgûl; I am coming for you, and nothing can save you from the shadows. . .

GAME 205

Uklurg kneels before his master. "Captured!!!! You fool! She was my best mage! If those Gondorian dogs were still at my gates I would throw you to them piece by piece!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"
"If she dies, you die! Now be gone and bring me my mage!!!"

GAME 209

Telumehtar rode out to meet the leader of the dark horde surrounding the city. Mighty blows were exchanged until finally Telumehtar fell in defeat. The charge was sounded and darkness poured over the walls. Flames and smoke could be seen for many miles as Osgiliath fell into ruin.

"Father!!! You're home early. Is the war won?"

"No my son, it is not. It is merely the quiet before the next storm. I fear the next will not go as well for us. The wind blows against us now."

"Shall you stay for a while?"

"No. I shall leave at sunrise."

Orillion Darkblade

GAME 212

The evil babblings have been heard. The legions of free armies have swayed not. Into the face of Sauron's domain, we charge.

The bloodletting begins.

Hellrazer.

GAME 214

Me shaint lay and be one of brunt to ye cause, nay, me hand let fall the ax of hell to me foe praytell! So me heart ask "Don't court me like a harlot!!!"

The Brouge

GAME 215

Deep within Mordor a troubled Adûnaphel is consoled by her advisor.

"What is troubling you, my queen?"

"You know about my affair with the master."

"Yes, do you not please the master any more?"

"No! I have conceived. I am with Nazgûl."

"Does the master know?"

"The master knows all! I am just worried about what his reaction will be."

GAME 216

Our Dark Lord has released his black riders upon the land. They ride before a thunderous dark storm that blacks all light except that which can be seen by the undead. It will soon cover all. Beware, Free People, your

time of reckoning is upon you. It will be swift and sharp, but I promise that it will not be clean. Begin your mourning, for when the riders come, time will have taken flight. Remember well. You will die!

Limper

Power behind the eye.

GAME 217

Cold winds blew through the hair of King Argeleb II. He stood on a rock outcropping of the Weather Hills, looking onto the frozen wastes of the En Udaniath. Many miles across that timeless waste lay the mighty kingdom of Angmar, and Carn Dûm--the Witch-king's Iron Fortress.

The aging King knelt on the stone and prayed.

Middle-earth™ PBM
circa 2950

GAME 20

As the wizard and his Noldo cronies delve into the Black Magic of Curses to spitefully slay a few leaders of Darkness, vast hordes of slaves overrun Edoras and claim it for the Blind Mage. Elsewhere, Akhûrahil prepares his own Spirit Mastery squad, and the last vestiges of the Riders are exterminated. Saruman, you are next . . .

Dendra Dwar waited for the report.

"Sir, economic forecasts are grim." What else is new the Dog Lord thought.

"Our advisors recommend acquiring some enemy settlements to increase our tax break my lord." Now that's a plan the Dog Lord thought.

"Our scouts have identified several targets, sir." Dendra Dwar smiles for the first time in recent memory.

GAME 26

With the fall of Sarn Goriwing, Greenwood is now truly free. Alas, clouds are rising from the south and heading this way. The siege will start anew.

Zarendarger (5)

GAME 28

I extend an open invitation to all Dark Servants, especially the Witch-king and Dog Lord, to join the party at my capital in Mirkwood. However, if you dare to come, you may not return.

Thranduil, Elf lord

Witch-king--you are whistling in the dark for soon your doom will befall you.

Thranduil

P.S. I'm not impressed with your campaign so far.

A savage kick to the ribs awakens Camthalion. He looks up to see the Warlord Bolg grinning down at him.

"Take him down to the officer's mess. Since he commanded the elves that are now in the pot, he can serve 'em up!"

Bolg turns to go, "Oh--yeah, my bowl is the one made from Waulfa's skull."

Doomweaver.

I hate cocky orcs, thought Ringlin as he sucked the last life from Bolg. The 300 lives of my brethren have been redeemed today. He also was in a hurry to attend the capital celebration over the death of Mûrazôr to a Silvan

assassin. He couldn't wait to tickle the feet of the caged Anglach as well and tweak his crooked nose. The stench from 3,000 dead Witch-king troops was beginning to gag him.

GAME 31

It seems we have weathered the "storm" and are now on the offensive. The Khand have fallen. To the Rhûn . . . choose quickly, the dance is over and the real contest begins.

Helcent

GAME 33

Hey Bard, where are ya?! If you'd just stay still for a few seconds, I have someone who'd like to meet ya. Well, I'm sure I'll catch up to ya soon enough. After all, you're playing in my back yard.

Ûrzahil

An icy wind blows from the North. Winter won't be easy.

Bard I

GAME 35

"Whoa!

"What was that? A speed bump?"

"No sire. It appears to have been a Rohan army of some sort. Couldn't really tell, the way they were trampled into the dirt."

"And look--a bonfire in the distance."

"No sire, that appears to be a Rhûn Easterling holding. I smell horseflesh. Wipe your drool. Here comes more fresh meat.

GAME 37

Welcome DirgeLord. It is nice to know at least one Dark Servant is not afraid to speak out. To the others, cowering behind your walls will not

save you. Come, fight and die like warriors, or perhaps I expect too much?

Helcent

GAME 39

Army commander Urdrath could not be challenged by Ethacali, Naldûrgarth or Shebbin Vûr. Urdrath then killed Vûlmeck and Magurgoth, who both tried to assassinate him.

SIGH

Ovatha IV

GAME 41

To all who choose not to follow the path of the free--may you be forewarned! We have formed an alliance. He who defies one member of the Alliance, defies us all. Let it be known: the wrath of the Alliance has no equal. He who has not yet chosen an allegiance--a wise thing it would be to acknowledge this overwhelming power and join the people of the Free. If you choose the dark path, you may one day feel the wrath alongside the Dark Servants. My friends, far better to have dealt a crushing blow than to have received it. Far better indeed! Charlemagne of the Free Alliance.

Strategy and Tactics: The Witch-king

by
Greg Reid

Clearly, I enjoy writing about less-than-hopeful Dark Servant positions. My first Strategy and Tactics article for "Whispers" was a diatribe on the Dragon Lord -- perhaps the most horribly outgunned position in the game -- and now I write about his more powerful but no less doomed northern neighbor, the First of the Nazgûl, mighty Witch-king of Angmar. (Stay tuned for the third installment in the "Doomed Dark Servant" trilogy of articles about that mightiest of the Nazgûl, the Quiet Avenger . . .)

Well, let's jump right into it. A quick analysis of strengths and weaknesses is in order here. Your armies are pretty solid -- poorly equipped and trained, granted, but with a large cavalry contingent, excellent leaders and good command artifacts, with extremely high morales. Your characters are also some of the best in the game (although mostly commanders), anchored by the second most powerful player character in the game, Mûrazôr, the Witch-king himself. You actually have a tax base, with good fortifications so you can raise your taxes without fear of pop center degradation. And let's not forget that enviable selection of artifacts, among them being an excellent mage artifact, several superior command artifacts, and the best emissary artifact in the game. Pretty cool, huh? Bet you're just slaving to get started wreaking havoc on those Free Peoples.

Not so fast. You're outnumbered. Badly. Without support and competent play (or disjointed play among the Free Peoples), you'll soon be just another speed bump in the Free conquest of Middle-earth. A less glaring weakness, although one that will hurt you almost as much as the game progresses, is that your population centers, by virtue of being so far north, are horrible producers,

which will give you very little to sell during your periods of economic leanness. (Which should be, as an aside, nearly the entire game).

So what to do? I've divided this article into two parts: military/economic and diplomatic. Both will have to be done well if you're to have a chance.

Military/Economic Situation:

Your massive armies go hand-in-hand with your economic hardships. Alas, you've got to maintain them. You can maintain about 10,000 troops with some discomfort -- about 12,000 by squirming on the edge of bankruptcy (with some assistance from Mordor). This, however, is only if you raise your taxes to 80% or higher. Do so as soon as possible. You may actually want them at about 100% for as long as you can keep them there. If this gives you a surplus, good. You'll need the money to upgrade your pop centers and tide you over when you start losing your initial holdings. Dump all food from your initial armies into your pop centers for selling purposes (except in your cavalry army, if you decide to consolidate your cavalry).

Your high tax rate will prevent you from placing camps anywhere except the Misty Mountains, where dragons will be wandering around raising the loyalties of any new camps you put down. This is fine. You need to be wandering those mountains with somebody in order to attempt the dragon recruitment you'll need to even things up on either front. Your emissaries can upgrade your population centers with the assistance of the Pectoral -- so do that. Better the pop centers you have created than too many new ones.

You may want to consider moving some forces to Eldanar (town/tower at 1907) on the first turn -- it's one turn's march from Cardolan's biggest starting army and thus your most vulnerable pop center.

Your armies, although large, are outnumbered. However, if you stay on the defensive, eventually you'll be rolled over by the superior forces and recruiting centers of the Free. As soon as your armies can leave behind seed armies (100 troops apiece), you'll want to launch an offensive. If you can afford the time to do so, splitting them into a cavalry force for interior strikes and an infantry force to engage the enemy's forces is probably a good idea -- you have a large amount of cavalry in Angmar (1200 HC, 600 LC) and it's a shame to waste it. Threaten away Zarak-dûm (dwarven town/fort at 2004) immediately. Further objectives are more nebulous. If you're in a single-player game, talk with Rhudaur or Dunland about which of the two Free positions are more active (Arthedain or Cardolan), and hit the more aggressive of the two with everything you've got. If you're unfortunate and both are in the game and talking to each other, send the cavalry into one of the two nations to harass it, and your infantry into the other to the engage enemy forces. I prefer sending the cavalry south to Cardolan -- all that plains terrain is excellent for your cavalry and there's plenty of unfortified and ill-fortified towns to burn down.

Speaking of burning, a scorched-earth strategy in Eriador is probably best until (unless) you recruit one (or both) of the neutrals to your side. An alternative would be to threaten with the cavalry while you engage their main forces with your infantry, but this is only possible if one of the Free positions in the area is either inactive or inept.

On the other side of the mountains, the forces at Mt. Gundabad are pitiful and can only hold up if the Free don't pay much attention to you. Nevertheless, you shouldn't leave Gundabad until you can leave behind a recruiting army. Then march on Buhr Fram. Whether you threaten it or capture it will depend on how good of a commander you have with the army. Then stay put and wait for information from the Dragon Lord about whether or not you should march to

capture Free pop centers or wait to engage Free armies that are coming your way.

A final point: recruit like mad. Max recruiting at all of your initial army locations EVERY TURN is imperative. This will mean you're recruiting 1500 HI a turn (1700 after you hopefully upgrade Carn Dûm and Mt. Gundabad to cities), but you'll need all those troops to launch second waves and defend your homeland against inevitable Free assaults.

Diplomatic Situation:

Your nation's long-term survival will depend on how much aid you receive from your fellow Dark Servants and whether or not you can sway either (or hopefully both) neutrals to your cause. Without assistance you're destined to fail.

Any assistance that the Mordor powers can provide is a boon to you, obviously. You need cash to support your massive armies, additional military support to fight the Free around you, and agent support from, hopefully, the Cloud Lord. You should be able to get all three. Most Dark Servants will, ideally, realize that every turn you're still fighting up here is another turn that they don't see armies from Arthedain and Cardolan moving to assist Gondor, and will be willing (if not happy) to keep you funded so that you can fight. Military support is harder to get, and is best achieved by trading a major town (Mt. Gram and Mt. Gundabad are both good) to one of the Dark Servant positions in Mordor (preferably the Fire King as he hires armies for free, but the Blind Sorcerer is also a good choice as he often has little to do down south). Then that Dark Servant can recruit armies to support you at that MT (and you also get a backup capitol in Mordor if things get rough). Agent support will probably be willingly provided by the Cloud Lord. Even one or two agents up north can do a lot to keep the Free Peoples on their toes, as Arthedain and Cardolan are both ill-equipped to stand against agent assaults. Key army commander assassinations can help you immensely.

The neutrals will probably make or break you. Far more important of the two is Rhudaur, as his armies are mighty and can make the most difference in the fight. Throw artifacts at him, if necessary, to get him to your side. No matter what you get him for, it's cheap. Dunland is also a boon to your cause if you want to make a fair fight of things in Eriador. With either or both neutrals on your side, you can probably organize a strike that will knock out one of your opponents, evening things up considerably. If you can't get them to actively join your side, see if you can convince them to make a blitz on Cardolan while they're still neutral. If they do it early enough, they can still maintain their neutrality while managing to gobble up quite a bit of additional territory -- and, as a nice aside, evening things up for all concerned in Eriador.

As a final note, try and keep the Dragon Lord going in Mirkwood. Assist him with your Gundabad army up north and do what you can to maintain his existence. The longer he stays in Mirkwood, the longer it will be before the Dwarves, Sinda, and Woodmen start paying attention to you. You actually have a slight chance against only Arthedain and Cardolan; any other significant Free presence in the area almost certainly will spell your doom.

(215) RASPER

by
Paul Romaine

The only sounds to break the balmy night's silence were the rustle of paper and the occasional mutter of exclamation. An aged man sat in his study, under a multitude of lamps and candles, carefully turning pages of an ancient tome. He knew his care was unnecessary, but he couldn't help treating the nearly indestructible pages of the Suimbalmynas as though they might fall to dust at any turning.

The next sound to intrude on the silence was that of a steel gauntlet pounding on the front door. As the man made his way down the stairs, the banging increased in speed and volume. "Yes . . . yes, I'm coming!", he shouted. At the moment he opened the door, the thought came to him that he should be more careful than to admit a stranger at this time of the night without a spell or even his magically wrought sword, Anarmacil, to defend himself.

As it turned out, his fear was without cause. (And now that his moment of doubt passed, he could definitely admit that yes, it was fear.) A young officer bearing the emblem of Southern Gondor stood on his front step. "Milord Saerol," spoke the officer, "I am Commander Galdathol. I have an important message for you from the Steward of Southern Gondor, the Warlord Dunsul."

Saerol did not recognize the face, as he had removed himself from court politics with the death of his student and Prince, Celdrahil. Saerol had been at odds with Dunsul, mainly because of Dunsul's inability to see anything beyond the letter of the law. Saerol's view matched Celdrahil's in that they both believed that the good of the Kingdom (and what is a Kingdom but the sum of its people) was sometimes more important than the law. When Dunsul took over as Steward, Saerol decided it was time to settle down in a quiet place and pursue his mystical arts. For Dunsul to come to him now for help, it must indeed be important. He invited the officer inside and opened the letter:

Warlock Saerol,

Recently, the nefarious beast known as Gaurhir was apprehended by security at the Capitol. Subsequently, he escaped and is being pursued. My men are driving him toward a location just southwest from you. I want you to gather men from the militia of Cirith Durandir and proceed to this location. You will detain Gaurhir until my men arrive and can bring him back to Dol Amroth for trial. My messenger will instruct you on where to find him.

Acting Steward of the Southern Realm,
Warlord Dunsul

Sitting on a low hill along the coast, Saerol pondered the letter again. If Gaurhir could not be held the first time, what makes Dunsul think he can hold him now?, he thought bitterly. Simply killing a known assassin was too easy. The law must be upheld. How many more men would die in Gaurhir's next escape? How many more when he was free and roaming the Kingdom? Too many. Better to end it here and now.

Saerol was deeply respected by each of these men he had brought. At one time or another, they had all brought wives, children, friends, and even livestock to be healed by him when no one else could help. They would support whatever story about today's events that Saerol deemed appropriate.

Just as he finished that thought, there was a disturbance down below. Weary from a few day's pursuit, Gaurhir had stumbled into their trap. Ten men stood surrounding Gaurhir with swords drawn. The werewolf seemed ready to spring into action until he saw Saerol approaching. The beast was intelligent. He knew who the leader was and saw a chance for escape.

As Saerol approached, he put on the most pretentious air of aristocracy he could muster and spoke in a haughty tone, "By the power of the Kingdom of Southern Gondor, I hereby place you under arrest. But you need have no fear for your life. The new law of the Kingdom is such that executions have been declared the way of the Enemy. You will live the remainder of your days comfortably in the royal dungeon."

Saerol knew that his pomposity and the idea of being caged for life would be too much for a creature of Gaurhir's nature. The deftly placed barbs would infuriate the beast into attacking and could be slain in self-defense. Instead of lunging at Saerol's throat as expected, Gaurhir had a different idea.

His head went back and his fanged mouth opened as if to vent a scream of agony. Instead of sound, an inky blackness poured from Gaurhir's mouth, then his eyes, ears, and every other opening in his body. Almost instantly, Saerol and his men were engulfed. Saerol's first reaction was to swing Anarmacil where he thought the beast should be. To his right, he heard a man let loose a cry of pain and then another muffled grunt. "Witless old fool!", he scolded himself. First, for not recognizing Gaurhir's sorcerous ability and second, for his hasty reaction. The Warlock compressed his hands, and when he opened them, streaks of blindingly bright light began to devour the darkness.

Two men lay on the ground. One had been hamstrung, the other clutched a stump of an arm where it ended about mid-forearm. There was no sight of Gaurhir.

First, Saerol tended the wound. Then he half-heartedly assigned scouts to track their escaped quarry. It was highly unlikely that such a cunning creature would fall into a second trap.

On the somber journey home, Saerol tried to find solace in the fact that he could return to his comfortable and unassuming lifestyle. But one nagging thought persisted. It was the one that said if he still had some influence on the Royal Court, problems like this could be avoided. By the time Saerol reached his home, he was ready to start packing for the return journey to Dol Amroth.

TENACITY IN ADVERSITY

Defeated Nations in MEPBM 1650

By "Ovatha"

During the past two years there have been several articles in Whispers about which nations do best in this campaign game. I have found them to be fascinating. Raw and weighted data clearly shows that some game positions are "more equal than others" a non-random number of items. As a variation of theme, I have looked at the losing game positions to see if any conclusion can be drawn from that examination.

When the hero roll is called, the three victorious nations of a completed game are published. Also published, usually, is the runner-up nation of the defeated alliance. Review of the published data for last year and one half reveals the following:

Top Nation of Defeated Alliance

Woodmen	2	Witch King	1	Corsairs	2
Northmen	0	Dragon Lord	3	Harad	4
Eothraim	1	Dog Lord	1	Dunlendings	8
Arthedain	8	Cloud Lord	6	Rhaur	2
Cardolan	1	Blind Sorcerer	1	Easterlings	1
N. Gondor	4	Ice King	1	-----	
S. Gondor	7	Fire King	0		103 total
Dwarves	7	Quiet Avenger	4		games
Sinda	6	Long Rider	10		
Noldo	20	Dark LTS	3		

Presuming that random events are equally distributed among this pool of 2575 nation/games, then a nation would be runner-up about four times. Presuming, further, a bell curve distribution then a nation would expect to be runner-up 2 to 6 times during this period. Seven or more runner-up showings would suggest a non-random cause.

The first noteworthy item is that the Free People lose more often. This has been discussed before and will not be pursued here. The 'best of the losers' are Arthedain, South Gondor, Dwarves, Noldo, Long Rider and Dunlendings.

Geographic Considerations: One is east, one is scattered and four are in the west. Geography may play some small role, but if it stood alone then Cardolan would do better than the above data indicates.

Orientation: Two are mostly character oriented states while the remaining four are mostly military. If one was to postulate an advantage to military states, then how to explain the poor showing of Cardolan, the Fire King and the Easterlings?

MY THEORY: It is suggested that the single most important factor in game playing in Middle-earth is player tenacity. The number and nature of 'drops' is decisive as to which alliance wins. After that, ability and experience and tenacity sorts out those on the winning alliance.

Tenacity (the occasional stubborn man aside) is largely a product of perceived strength. Yes, I know that players drop out because they have lost their jobs, are undergoing a divorce or have received a transfer to Macedonia. But these are random events which would affect all nations and not be a selected few.

In the course of the games many players will come to the bitter realization that they can not win. Most of these players, I believe, then drop out of the game. Never mind that there is still a lot of fun to be had by playing that position. Or, that by stalling the breaks just might fall their way in the long term. Or, the greater the difficulty the greater the glory. There is no point, they say, to throwing good money after bad. Join another game and maybe get a better position.

Some individuals fight on, however, and they would be included in the follow-up data above. Why do they fight on? Why are the nation/positions of Arthedain, South Gondor, Dwarves, Noldo, Long Rider and Dunlendings over represented? This is where perception/reality/tenacity all come together.

These positions ARE strong and they ARE perceived to be strong and their player/commander hangs on a little bit longer than the rest because reality and perception are meshing here. They are hoping until their hopes are dashed by dropping allies. They now either drop themselves or are swamped by the opposing alliance.

Tenacity in adversity is a product of perceived strength. The perceived weak give up early and the perceived strong fight on a little longer.

(CONTINUED FROM INSIDE FRONT COVER)

Since the holidays are here, we know that there will be a large number of address changes. In order to facilitate this process and insure that your turns reach you, we ask that you notify us of changes in any and all games that you are in. It is also helpful to indicate whether the change is a temporary change (and if it is temporary, for how long) or a permanent one. This will help us keep down the number of problems which might occur after the holiday.

Christmas and New Year's Day fall on a Monday this year and, as such, GSI will be closed on these days. For those of you who normally have games processed on these days, we will be running your turns on Saturday, December 23 and/or December 30. That's right, we will be processing the turns on December 23rd and/or December 30. One more time: turns which would normally be processed on Monday, December 25th will be processed instead on Saturday, December 23rd and/or December 30. Please make a note of this on your calendars and take extra steps to make sure your turn gets to us on time. We realize this shortens the time to get turns back to us, but this is the best way for us to run the turns and observe the holiday.

GSI would like to announce that our new Internet service goes online 12/4/95. Our new Internet address as of this date will be: gsi@ellink.net. If you wish to receive your email turns without the need to uudecode the file, contact GSI so we can set your account for this service. Please note that this will not go into effect until 12/4/95, so we will not be able to do this until that time.

GSI is also proud to announce that our first one week all email game has started--and it is a grudge game at that! That's right, we now have one under our belt, so to speak. We have another all email grudge game currently filling, so if any of you are interested in putting together a team for such a game, contact us to set your team up. Remember that the all email games are at a reduced rate of \$5.50 a turn, so you get all the action at a reduced price!

One last note before I sign off and wish you all a pleasant holiday--we are currently in need of neutral players for both scenarios. If you are interested in joining a new game, a neutral is probably your quickest route to getting into a game. If you are interested, send us your request and we will get you into the loop, so to speak.

O.K., that's it for this month. On behalf of the staff here at GSI, we wish you all a very merry and safe holiday. We'll see you in thirty!

Stuart

The Hall Of Heroes

Game #13 - The Dark Servants: #20, #17, & #16.

Sauron's minions have spread throughout Middle-earth, dominating the land for their dark master. Under the tutelage of their most powerful leaders, the Dark Lieutenants, the Quiet Avenger, and the Ice King, the Dark Forces now spend their time turning the fair lands foul, remaking Middle-earth in their master's image.

Final standings are as follows:

#20 - Dark Lieutenants: 2167

#17 - Quiet Avenger: 2125

#16 - Ice King: 1967

Top Free People: #5 - Cardolan: 1225

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Hoarmurath/Ice King: 260

Highest Net Commander Rank - Soulcatcher/Ice King: 185

Highest Net Agent Rank - Joseph Smyth/Dark Lieutenants: 145

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Rakel/Dark Lieutenants: 117

Highest Net Mage Rank - Hoarmurath/Ice King: 235

Most Mithril - Dark Lieutenants: 7101

Most Artifacts - Corsairs: 24

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 65

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

Game #116 - The Dark Servants: #15, #16, & #14.

Seven perseverant evil nations held steadfast. Led by Durmorgul of the Blind Sorcerer, the Ice King, Cloud Lord, Dragon Lord, Dark Lieutenants, Quiet Avenger and Fire King spewed evil plague across all Middle-earth with no Neutral help. Mordor has been, and remains, unassailable. Ash and cadaver sucking flies choke life from the remaining indolent Free. The slaughter of ninety plus free souls and acquisition of near two hundred population centers has defiled and cracked their resolve, derelict of duty proved fatal. When inevitability of torture and death loomed in the minds of the Free, they cowered, cast down their swords, and fled.

After news of the great victory came to Mordor, a grand banquet was held in the new gleaming city of Lag-Zajarzot. In a dragon bone chair sat Sauron himself, eyes glowing ruby red, body flickering in and out of existence. All around beheld his evil magnificence as he stood up.

"Akhórahil, your vileness and treachery proves you worthy to carry the whip, as my dark lord! The Free cowered in our wake. Melkor would be proud. We have enslaved the Free, our thirst for lepers and morbid acts surely will be slaked. Dispatch a convoy of nine. My premier mages Shoglic, Úrzahil, and Morarthdur to retrieve my ring and assassins Khamúl, Bella, Thergor, Stragen, Nazog and Gontran to escort them. Now ride swiftly, to Esgaroth my little demons, we have a date with destiny!

(story written by player #15)

Final standings are as follows:

#15 - Blind Sorcerer: 2075

#16 - Ice King: 1617

#14 - Cloud Lord: 1583

Top Free People: #8 - Dwarves: 1075

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Úrzahil/Dark Lieutenants: 200

Highest Net Commander Rank - Nimril/Noldo Elves: 138

Highest Net Agent Rank - Urthel/Woodmen: 115

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Morgana/Blind Sorcerer: 97

Highest Net Mage Rank - Shoglic/Cloud Lord: 163

Most Mithril - Ice King: 1114

Most Artifacts - Dragon Lord: 19

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 36

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

The Hall Of Heroes

Game #132 - The Free Peoples: #4, #23, & #8.

Breathing heavily, Argeleb II thrust his sword point-first into the earth and leaned on it. A battle raged all around him, slowly fading to the moans of the dying and the silence of the dead. Black smoke choked the sky for as far as the eye could see, as the town of Faraway burned. In an incredible force of will, Argeleb hefted his sword and raced toward the Dunlending banner. After a five-minute sprint, he stumbled breathless into the midst of Enion's entourage. All eyes on him, he managed a weak smile. "All . . . dead . . .," he huffed.

Enion eyed him suspiciously. Though it was indeed good news that the Fire King's last militias had been defeated, the conditions of the battle had been less than gratifying. Elyssium, the enemy's last commander, had seen to it that their celebrations would be somewhat less jubilant that night. Apparently she had seen that both the battle and the war had been lost. At the last minute, she had ordered her forces to set fire to the town. It was a cold irony that the Fire King's last commander had chosen immolation over capture. The loss of life had been immense, and yet Argeleb III stood here, apparently overjoyed. Enion's wise gaze washed over the young man's overly weathered face. Tears flooded from the young man's eyes, though from grief at the loss of his father, joy at the end of the bloodshed, or simply the smoke, Enion could not say. At least it was over, and he would have decades of prosperity to become the kind of man that his father had been.

Final standings are as follows:

#4 - Arthedain: 2200
#23 - Dunlendings: 2083
#8 - Dwarves: 1659

Top Dark Servant: #18 - Fire King: 725

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 249
Highest Net Commander Rank - Aragorn/Arthedain: 210
Highest Net Agent Rank - Halyrin/Noldo Elves: 163
Highest Net Emissary Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 126
Highest Net Mage Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 175
Most Mithril - Dunlendings: 4291
Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 31
Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 19

Congratulations to the Free Peoples!

Game #154 - The Dark Servants: #15, #21, & #17.

Under the iron leadership of the Blind Sorcerer, the newly-converted Corsairs, and the Quiet Avenger, Sauron's servants have spread the Shadow to encompass all of Middle-earth. Their foes are crushed and they look over a land covered in eternal night, one in which they are the new lords.

Final standings are as follows:

#15 - Blind Sorcerer: 2500
#21 - Corsairs: 1900
#17 - Quiet Avenger: 1783

Top Free People: #9 - Sinda Elves: 575

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Naldûrgarth/Blind Sorcerer: 247
Highest Net Commander Rank - Memnon/Dark Lieutenants: 100
Highest Net Agent Rank - Jarlaxle/Cloud Lord: 117
Highest Net Emissary Rank - Kalendra Mashori Yazhgar/Quiet Avenger: 100
Highest Net Mage Rank - Naldûrgarth/Blind Sorcerer: 207
Most Mithril - Blind Sorcerer: 1653
Most Artifacts - Cloud Lord: 21
Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 40

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

The Hall Of Heroes

Game #155 - The Dark Servants: #11, #12, & #13.

Standing on a rise just outside the once-town of Andoon, Gandalf the Grey surveyed the smoking rubble. Years after the collapse of the United Free Peoples, these last few goodly towns were the only bastions of purity left in this blighted land. Mûrazôr was seeing to the end of that. Alpinus had fallen two weeks ago, and it was rumored that Esgalduin was next. Sighing, Gandalf started toward the north. He had much to do . . .

Final standings are as follows:

#11 - Witch-king: 2250
#12 - Dragon Lord: 2117
#13 - Dog Lord: 1850

Top Free People: #2 - Northmen: 1050

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Mûrazôr/Witch-king: 271
Highest Net Commander Rank - Ashdurbuk Zalg/Witch-king: 135
Highest Net Agent Rank - Soul Catcher/Witch-king: 146
Highest Net Emissary Rank - Úrzahil/Dark Lieutenants: 111
Highest Net Mage Rank - Mûrazôr/Witch-king: 203
Most Mithril - Dragon Lord: 5454
Most Artifacts - Witch-king: 32
Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 23

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

Game #185 - The Dark Servants: #22, #11, & #25.

Sighing wearily, the once-proud Waulfa paused to lean on his axe, chains clinking among the dried leaves on the forest floor. His sorrowful gaze was once again drawn to the ancient tree he was in the process of hacking off at the base. The smart crack of the slavemaster's whip on his back spurred him again to action. Casting a knowing, almost apologetic gaze at Beoraborn, he bent himself again to the task at hand. Hefting his axe, he resumed hacking at the symbol of the freedom of the Woodmen. In the distance he saw the smoke of a thousand fires, and knew that the Shah of Harondor and All Else had truly won.

Final standings are as follows:

#22 - Haradwaith: 2150
#11 - Witch-king: 2100
#25 - Easterlings: 1717

Top Free People: #1 - Woodmen: 575

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Mûrazôr/Witch-king: 348
Highest Net Commander Rank - Bulrakur/Dog Lord: 128
Highest Net Agent Rank - Jî Indûr/Cloud Lord: 188
Highest Net Emissary Rank - Úrzahil/Dark Lieutenants: 106
Highest Net Mage Rank - Mûrazôr/Witch-king: 285
Most Mithril - Witch-king: 1465
Most Artifacts - Witch-king: 28
Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 19

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

(cont'd)

The Hall Of Heroes

ME-PBM circa 2950

Game #4 - The Dark Servants: #21, #25, & #5.

The majestic Corsair fleet stood at anchor offshore, the city of Minas Tirith a tiny speck on the horizon. At the stern of the flagship sat Sea-captain Sangarunya in a roughly-hewn wooden throne. The rhythmic slapping of the waves and the rapidly darkening sky foreshadowed the death to come.

Bragolmaitë, leaning silently against the mainmast, gestured with his cutlass. With a roguish grin on his face, Prospero prodded the assembled prisoners with his own cutlass. Enion was the first to walk the plank, followed closely by Imrahil, Theoden, Aragorn II, and the rest.

Five hundred miles away, Earnil II strode briskly into the dark hall and approached the shadowy figure seated on the dark throne. At the appropriate distance he stopped and knelt, averting his eyes from the figure seated before him as he did so. While looking away he smiles inwardly at the foolish hobbit who had dared to answer his challenge in Methir, and so had started his long journey to this place.

His thoughts were interrupted by a sibilant whisper from the dark figure. "You have something for me?," it asked.

"Yes, master," said Earnil, bringing forth a small object wrapped carefully in cloth. Slowly he unwrapped the tiny bundle, revealing its contents, a gleaming circular object of purest gold. "For you, my master; I understand you have been searching for this for quite some time," he said.

"Ah," said the whisper, "Precious!"

{story written by player #21}

Final standings are as follows:

#21 - Corsairs: 2300

#13 - Dog Lord: 1417

#14 - Cloud Lord: 1333

Top Free People: #25 - Khand Easterlings: 1975

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Ringlin/Silvan Elves: 303

Highest Net Commander Rank - Bulrakur/Dog Lord: 161

Highest Net Agent Rank - Ohtar/Silvan Elves: 147

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Karna/Ice King: 103

Highest Net Mage Rank - Ringlin/Silvan Elves: 258

Most Mithril - Khand Easterlings: 2158

Most Artifacts - Silvan Elves: 26

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 7

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

The Hall Of Heroes

Game #14 - The Dark Servants: #19, #16, & #17.

Down the long, dark corridor the two suddenly saw each other. Though a battle raged outside, the subterranean hallway remained damp, cool, and quiet, and it was with the same lack of obvious tension that the two men approached each other. From the south came Boromir, sword in his hand and gobbets of battlefield gore adorning his battered and dented armor. Faramir, sometimes known as Faramir the Traitor, strode from the north, apparently unarmed. Both had once been in the employ of the nation of Northern Gondor, but much had changed in the weeks since Sauron had engulfed all of Middle-earth.

"Boromir . . . I'd heard that you'd escaped . . .," Faramir began casually. "Somehow, I knew you'd come here--"

"How could you? They killed Ecthelion," Boromir accused furiously, swordpoint rising dangerously.

Faramir crossed his arms over his chest, apparently assured that this discussion would remain as such.

"It was merely a question of survival," Faramir sneered. "And Ecthelion was a fool."

In a sudden flurry of movement, Boromir's sword snapped to and plunged through Faramir's black heart. Spasming, Faramir's eyes widened in a mixture of horror, surprise, and pain as he wordlessly regarded the blade extending from his chest.

His mouth worked soundlessly, a gout of blood gushed out, and he slumped to the floor, eyes raised questioningly.

"It was more than that, brother. It was a matter of good and evil, and the fool was you."

Final standings are as follows:

#19 - Long Rider: 2083

#16 - Ice King: 1666

#17 - Quiet Avenger: 1600

Top Free People: #6 - Northern Gondor: 400

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Mûrazôr/Witch-king: 197

Highest Net Commander Rank - Butrakur/Dog Lord: 133

Highest Net Agent Rank - Illiathor/Cloud Lord: 129

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Keemac/Blind Sorcerer: 105

Highest Net Mage Rank - Mûrazôr/Witch-king: 162

Most Mithril - Fire King: 488

Most Artifacts - Cloud Lord: 23

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 24

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

A couple of clarifications/corrections. First, Game 20, which was listed in last month's Hall of Heroes, was Game 20 in circa 1650--not 2950. Also, the top Free People was listed as #4 - the Cloud Lord. This is incorrect. It should have read #4 - Arthedain. Our apologies to those we may have slighted--it was never our intention!