

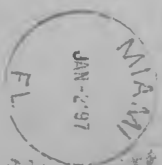
WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



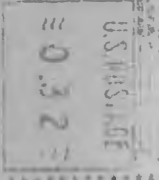
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WORDS FROM THE WOOD

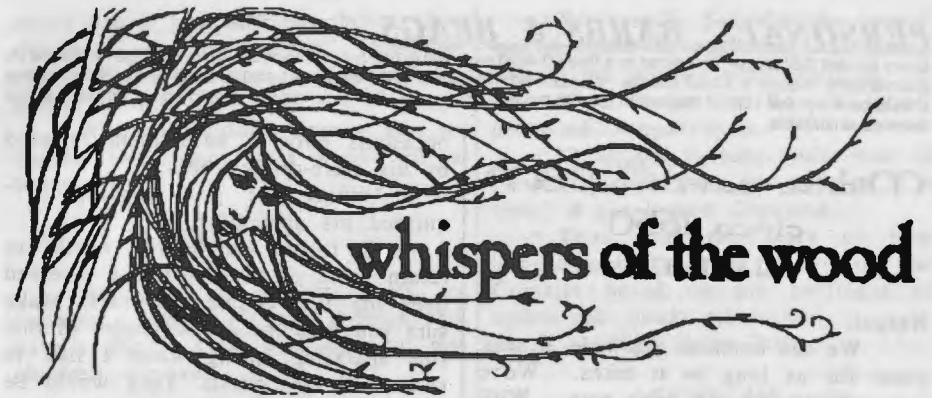
It's the time of year, once again, for those dreaded New Year Resolutions!! Now here's my list. I resolve not to mix vodka and paint thinner (no more Paint Removers for me!). I resolve to let my cat out of the blender. I resolve to run screaming from the gibbering horrors lurking in my closet and my unconscious (who, incidentally, remind me of Ross Perot. Hmmm--could Lovecraft have been a prophet?). I resolve to pound nails through cinder blocks with my head (it's a great tension breaker and lord knows I need lots of broken tension for my art). And lastly, I resolve to make no more resolutions (just as I do every year--but somehow, I don't remember that part until after I've made resolutions for the new year).

First, GSI wants to extend two thank yous to a couple of players who were kind enough to provide GSI with examples of cuisine from their part of the nation. The first is to Jim Rousselle, who provided us with a King cake from New Orleans, which is the traditional fare during Mardi Gras. The second is Marc Parker and the gang he games with, who were kind enough to send us some deep dish pizzas from the Chicago area. Both items were delicious and were enjoyed immensely! I thank you, GSI thanks you and, most importantly, our stomachs thank you!

Those of you who are currently using our email turn delivery service, we want to let you know that Adobe has come out with a new version of their Reader--this will be the Adobe Acrobat Reader version 3.0. We will implement using the new version during the first quarter of 1997. Eventually we will produce files that can ONLY be read using the 3.0 version, but this will not happen until the second or third quarter of 1997. There will be announcements made regarding when we will be doing this, so there is no need to fear. We just want to let you all know so that you can go about securing the new version of the Reader.

Speaking of email, GSI is currently working on setting up an automatic confirmation reply for players who submit their turns via email. Many of you have requested a service like this and we have listened! Please be aware, however, that this service will only be applicable to our GSI@ELINK.NET address. What this means is a confirmation of receipt will be sent to the email address of the sender. No more calling. No more sweating missed turns. Of course, we will let all of you know when this will be available (PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS SERVICE IS NOT YET AVAILABLE--WE CANNOT CURRENTLY PROVIDE RETURN RECEIPTS FOR EMAIL TURNS!!!!!!).

On yet another email topic, a couple of months ago GSI sent out a message to its email players asking about email service and setting up new game accounts with email delivery. It seems this poll was taken as confirmation that GSI would automatically set up a player for email service if he currently has email service. THIS IS NOT THE CASE!! The original message was sent to poll players on the feasibility of doing this. Enough players objected so we are NOT automatically setting up email players. IF YOU WISH TO SET UP A NEW ACCOUNT WITH EMAIL SERVICE, YOU MUST LET US KNOW ON THE FIRST TURNSHEET!! Even if you are sending in your first turn via email, you must indicate that you wish email service. You can do this by including a short note at the beginning of the turn telling us you wish email service.



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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This Month's Cover: "Young Smaug" by Theodor Schwarz
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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.). Submissions should be in by the 15th of the month prior to the publishing date. GSI reserves the right to edit or refuse material deemed unsuitable.

Middle-earth™ PBM circa 1650

GAME 178

Nazgul,

We can continue this hide & seek quest for as long as it takes. We're outnumbered but we don't care. With the market the way it is, you will have to root us out. Never say Die!

Free Peoples

GAME 181

The worlds most feared trio, enchanter Soth and the sorcerers Raven and Zimraphel. Their spoken word meant death. Sitting around a campfire in the mountain camp of Cthal Murgos.

In the shadows stood another type of death. Katchas Clay, Quick Silver, Ruby Red and Sham Rock. Dwarven agents with a bad attitude.

"For Bain" axes flew.

El & the Vadars

10,000 HI with 37 war machines marched to Citadel city of Larach Duhnnan of the Cardolans. The CL did not laugh as he burned it to the ground. A tear fell as 2 cities burned and his nation went belly up. Who would have guessed the Cardolans with that many pony riders.

Lanaigh

GAME 212

Dendra whistled merrily as he packed his bags. At long last he had been granted that vacation he had applied for on so many previous

occasions only to have them rejected by his slave-driving boss.

"Where are you heading to?"

quizzed his apprentice.

"I think I'll travel north to return some of the visits I've received over the last couple of years. Make sure you grab me a few bottles of that fine sparkling spring water I like to share with my guests. They would be so disappointed if I didn't bring some with me."

High Plains Drifter

GAME 215

Dear Freeps,

Is anyone still home? I am finding nothing but pop centers to capture. My dragons' are hungry for yellow blood. And only your soldiers are known to have yellow blood.

Sir Psycho

GAME 218

The Dark Servants have gone mad! Perhaps they just see the end is near. Ji Indur, you abandon your capitol with Haradwaith cavalry at its gate. And what is this sending an army towards me? You better be ready for a big surprise. Maybe you'll get one too if my gambit pays off. You'd only assassinate me anyway.

Tros Hesnef

New Emperor of Khand

GAME 229

Threlin: Kaldurmeir... you are hereby charged with the crimes against the Free People of this world. How do you plead?

Kaldurmeir:...

Threlin: Very well. I hereby sentence you to death, we are with compassion and shall make it swift. Unlike the

mercy you & your side has shown. Let this be a warning to all! Make an enemy of us and your empire will be turned to dust!

With that Kaldurmeir was sent to Sauron with one swift stroke of a Dwarven axe.

GAME 231

At last the market starts to improve. I think I'll take a break and have a drink. Only wish more of my children survived.

GAME 235

I hate dragons!

King Tarondor

GAME 239

Hello One-Eye,

Do you forget your past? Do you not remember when you had two eyes and I poked one out. Now you insult the master by claiming that you are similar to him. You must die!

Famine

P.S. Death is strong and he will not fall.

GAME 241

Notice to Rhudaur:

We know who you are,

We saw what you did,

You have made your choice,

Your doom is sealed!!

You cannot buy your safety with offers to sell secrets of the Free Peoples... Traitor! Spy!!

GAME 242

The High Council of Umbar was supposed to be in session.

"Where's Angamaite?" Faltur paced the room.

"He's over at Rosie's again."

Teldumeir was fuming.

"Oh, god. He'll be there for days!"

Eadur frowned but there was a twinkle in her eye.

"Let's make Sangahyando council leader. He's always here on time." Adumir put his two cents worth in.

"But I go to Rosie's, too!" protested Sangahyando.

"True, but I doubt you're ever in there for more than ten minutes at a time." Eadur looked disgusted.

Thus ends the story of how Sangahyando became leader of the Corsairs based on his swiftness of action and steady reliability.

High Plains Drifter

GAME 252

I see that three against one was not enough for you. You had to get the Rhudaur and Cardolan as well. There are ways to even the odds once more, but it will take time. And believe me, I have plenty of it. Long Live the Dark!

Murazor

"What's going on around here?" asked the Drifter. "This fog is so thick I can hardly see five feet in front of my face."

"It's the fog of war," Elrond stated matter-of-factly. "Didn't you expect it?"

"Some, maybe, but this is ridiculous."

High Plains Drifter

GAME 254

On your mark, get set, GO!!

Anndd, they're off- with the Freeps taking an early lead; Dark Servants trailing by a length. The neutrals are... well.. trying to find their way out of the gate!?!

Wolfie is watching!

Middle-earth™ PBM
circa 2950

GAME 50

The populace of Goblin-Gate cheered when Warlord Aragorn approached. Being beaten and punished by Khamul the Dragon Lord was not an easy life for these peasants. After food and clothing were distributed, the army headed out.

"The True King" Chronicles

Dark Servants, bring it on!

Stormbringer, Dwar, I'm not scared of you guys. Your moves remind me of checkers.

Aragorn-True King

GAME 63

Freeeps:

You hoard wealth while your neighbors starve and from golden thrones proclaim yourselves, "Righteous!" The tide is rising, infidels and change is in the air! The age of light flickers like a sputtering candle even as the darkness thickens, surges, and promises to burst forth in a wave of sweet black death! Your days are numbered...

Love,
Felonious Monk

Middle-earth™ PBM
circa 1000

GAME 4

Hurry, hurry, step right up! The big show is about to begin!!! There'll be thrills and chills and death-defying feats; There'll be victories and losses

and devastating defeats; We have heroes and villains and those in between; Those who will win remain to be seen. So let the game begin and let's make Fourth Age history!!

Kweo

It's a little past midnight
and there's a full moon in the sky
You hear a dog bark in the distance
You hear someone's baby cry
I sneak up on you in the alley
a chill runs down your spine
and someone's digging your grave
You wish the sun would shine
cause no one's gonna warn ya
and no one's gonna yell "Attack"
You don't feel the steel
till it's hanging out your back
Watch out for the Night Prowler
He works for Sir Psycho-
and it's time for you to go

GAME 5

Unforgiven

We are, if you will, a sort of Legacy. Do you remember the old woman in the neighboring village? The one who when she came into market to buy what supplies she could afford was greeted with whispers and sideways glances and gestures of warding against evil? The old woman who could no longer come to market to sell her hens' eggs when the senseless superstition of the villagers went beyond gesture and became fact? The old woman who had not the supplies to last the winter because no one would risk public disapproval dealing with a 'known witch'. Surely you remember. Every village has such an old woman. Or hermit. Or nursemaid or teacher suffering accusations of illdoing by bored brats, supported by their parents or magistrates, or zealots men of the cloth set on proving to their god and their superiors their ability to root out and destroy minions

of Sauron. Evidence? Well, who among us is truly innocent.

Unforgiven

Now Unforgiving

We are those people. Their spirits and their Legacy. Come back. Reborn and carrying a terrible debt.

We are revenants and wraiths. Some call us Erinyes, the 'Gracious Ones'.

That is both incorrect and an understatement.

Unforgiven

No good deed will go unpunished.

Thoughtful Trolls and Devious Dwarves
Just two of the many possible role-playing concepts for
your nation in the Fourth Age Circa 1000.

by
Mike Hunnensen

The primary decision you will have to make in the Fourth Age Circa 1000 is what concept to adopt for your budding nation. First you must choose a race, then an allegiance, and lastly Special Nation Abilities (SNA), of which there are over 30. You will be given only 20,000 gold to buy desired nation abilities, and to also purchase ships, artifacts and war machines. Hence, you won't be able to acquire all the things you are likely to want/need. Your final choices will have a significant impact on how the game progresses for you and careful consideration must be given to how to invest your allowed funds.

To this end, I have put together a few combinations of abilities and races that would appear to naturally work well in concert; have good role playing potential; or seem like they would be a great deal of fun to try. Note, the ideas presented in this article are meant as suggestions only. Certainly, you may have different interesting concepts or you may think of variations that would work well to those I have discussed.

There are 4 races to choose from, 3 allegiances and 34 Special Nation abilities. For our purposes we can consider this to be an infinite amount of choices. I will be discussing a dozen potential ideas which may or may not be centered around one of the optional races.

The Happy Hobbits OR Grinning Goblins

Race: Mannish OR Non Human

Allegiance: Any within context

Abilities: #1 (Double scout), #5 (stealth bonus), #11 (Agents at 40), #7 (Army food/morale bonus)

You can model your nation around being the regional leader of several hobbit sires or the Chieftain of a Goblin Clan. This concept has the potential to give you as much mirth as you can handle. Of course your actions will likely have the opposite effect on your opponents. They will be utterly frustrated trying to catch your pint sized characters as you continue to harass them to distraction. This collection of abilities is obviously suited to someone who likes an agent dominated Nation.

The Absolute Admiral

Race: Elves

Allegiance: Good (must)

Abilities: #18 (ships at 1/3 timber), #32 (Ships never lost), #34 (warships at 5 Str).

If you want to be the master of the sea, the above combination is a good one. Elves have an advantage over other nations here as they are the only ones who can acquire SNA #18. Any race could conceivably be a sea captain, but they would have to choose SNA #17 (ships at 1/2 timber), instead of SNA #18. The above SNAs will cost you little and so you can further customize by choosing a fourth SNA to your liking. If you are playing Elves, #14 (new troops at 25) is but one good consideration, so is #10 (new mages at 40). You also have a good sum to spend on your navy (What is an Admiral without a navy?) and war machines or artifacts as you deem best. Note, if you try this combination, it would be helpful to start off with a Port and to place your nation near forests for much needed timber.

The Dominating Dwarves

Race: Dwarves

Allegiance: Good (must)

Abilities: #3 (Scout at 50 min.), #15 (HI at 30 train), #21 (Armies at no Cost), #20 (Morale at 40).

This concept centers around military might which Dwarves are particularly suited to. Dwarves have a bonus to command skill in character design. SNA #3 and #15 are specific to Dwarves only and are by themselves a solid reason to choose Dwarves as your preferred race. The other 2 SNAs listed are to account for the fact that while powerful, Dwarven armies tend to be slow. Hence it would be more efficient to start them off where you want them to be instead of having to march them there. If you wanted to try this idea without Dwarves as the race, SNA #2 can be substituted for #3, and #13 can be substituted for #15. Whichever you choose, you will have plenty of gold left over to buy artifacts or war machines - your opponents will learn to fear those Dwarven catapult!

The Devious Dwarves

Race: Dwarves

Allegiance: Good (must)

Abilities: Choose one of #1, #5, #11; #31 (Kidnap/Assassin +20), #22 (Uncover)

NO ONE would see you coming! This untraditional role for Dwarves would certainly give you a surprise advantage, but I can not say how long that would last (perhaps long enough for your opponents to get the almighty boot from the game - courtesy of your carefully applied foot). At the very least, you'll have a great time with this kind of unnatural set-up!

The Tenacious Trader

Race: Mannish

Allegiance: Neutral

Abilities: #9 (Emissaries at 40), #8 (buy/sell +20%), #24 (Learn conjure mounts).

"I love the smell of Gold in my vaults!" is a phrase you'll often say with this nation concept. This idea is suited to mannish races as they have a bonus to Emissary characters to start. It is also suited to a neutral allegiance so you can avoid costly wars with your neighbors. Need a little cash infusion? Make and sell mounts. Have a grand time hoarding your wealth or buying what ever your heart desires.

The Jubilant Jack-of-all-Trades

Race: Any

Allegiance: Any

Abilities: #9 (Emis at 40), #10 (Mages at 40), #11 (agents at 40), #12 (New commanders at 40)

Flexibility is the operative word with this nation concept. You'll have a balanced nation and the best characters in the game. Its always nice to have characters who can be effective as soon as they are recruited for active duty. Commanders can immediately downgrade relations, Emissary can build camps, Agents can steal gold and guard against medium level assassins and Mages will be able to cast with some proficiency.

The Infamous Isolationist

Race: Any

Allegiance: Neutral

Abilities: Hidden PC, #22 (Uncover secrets at 40), #2 (scout/recon +20), #19 (fortifications at 1/2 timber)

This oxymoron titled concept will prove correct. As you insist on being left alone (for what ever purpose) and remain uncommunicative with your neighbors, your notoriety will grow while they discuss that "strange nation" that no one knows anything about. This nation concept is best suited to someone placed far from activity who wants to keep to himself while still learning about what goes on outside his walls.

The Thoughtful Trolls

Race: Non Human

Allegiance: Evil (must)

Abilities: #10 (Mages at 40), #23 (Learn Weakness), #25 (Conjure Food), #26 (Conjure hordes)

An interesting concept that centers around the research and application of spells. Your Troll magi will be able to sit in their caves drinking Minhiriath Wine and Smoking 'Old Toby' Pipeweed, while they discuss the various merits of prognostication, and the development of apprentices. Someone getting in your face? Give 'em a dose of the Eastern Flu. Need to eat? Conjure it out of thin air. Have to have an army? Summon 5,000 troops in a single day. Just some of the fun you can have with this concept.

The Portentous Pirates

Race: Mannish or Non Human

Allegiance: Neutral or Evil

Abilities: #17 (Ships at 1/2 timber), #33 (Warships at 4), #32 (ships never lost) #2 (Scout +20), #11 (agents at 40). Lots of ships to start the game.

Rule the High Seas! Strike Fear into every coastal nation! Sink every ship that has the audacity to travel on your oceans! Train and develop a top notch intelligence network, so you always know what the land dwellers are up to! If anyone annoys you, you can ask them if they know what the term "pillage" means. This has to rank among the top of my favorite role playing concepts.

The Obnoxious Orcs

Race: Non Human

Allegiance: Evil (must)

Abilities: #31, #4 (challenge rank bonus), #29 (learn Summon Storms).

A hodgepodge of abilities - all of which will come in handy. SNA #31 works well with non human races who gain a bonus to agent characters at game start. Orcs are tough creatures and SNA #4 reflects that. SNA #29 will serve you well in combat and is consistent with an Orcish mage's direction of study.

The Amiable Artificer

Race: Elves

Allegiance: Good (must)

Abilities: #30 (Learn Teleport), hidden capital.

This nation is designed for the primary purpose of locating and acquiring artifacts. Elves get a bonus with mages, so they are the best race to use here. With this concept, you will have a great time, cataloguing all the artifacts, hunting them down, solving riddles, fighting off fierce monsters and every once in a while coming across that special lost artifact that makes all your hard work very rewarding. Do all of this from the comfort of your safely hidden capital.

The Merciless Mumak-Riders

Race: Mannish, Non human

Allegiance: Any

Abilities: #24 (conjure mounts), #6 (No morale loss for force), #7 (Armies without food), #12 (Commanders at 40), #13 (new troops at 20 training), #4 (Challenge rank bonus), #2 (scout +20).

My good friend Kevin (an Ex Tank commander) would love this nation. Charge into your opponents, roll over them, stomp on them! Do what ever you want militarily, 'cause no one is going to stop your trained and deadly Mumak-Riders!. Imagine the look on your opponent's face, when he first feels the tremble in the earth, then hears the loud trumpeting of your fierce beasts and finally sees over 2000 determined Mumakil bearing down on his suddenly feeble fortress. So go ahead and "cry havoc", until you are in command of all that you see.

UKLURG'S BATTLE

By

Greg Shaffer

There is nothing I look forward to with greater displeasure. Another meeting with my two incompetent subordinates.

I have continually sent their outnumbered, unarmored, starving butts off to die in hopeless battles. I've never been able to supply them what they need, because our Lord is about as generous and approachable as a starving wolf. I never bother asking for help, because I already know the answer.

If my darkened soul were capable of guilt, I would not have been given charge of these maggots.

* * *

As I approached the room, a huge, dumb-looking, ugly, overweight half-troll was pounding his fist on the table. That would be Shogmog, my forward commander. He looks like he would fit in bouncing drunks out of the keg room--if we had any kegs on store. But he does know how to inspire the troops.

Shogmog leaned over the table and cursed loudly at someone as I entered. He was still sharing his opinions about his soldiers fighting with wooden weapons and rags for armor.

Shagrat, my reserve commander, was trying to explain how we could build cavalry by selling our steel weapons and armor, and using the profits to buy mounts and saddles instead. Shagrat belongs at an accountant's desk, balancing trade receipts. The bony little geek couldn't order his troops to run away from a charging Mumak. Even so, he's shrewd with his tactics and with his supplies.

I thought I would enter the room with my usual bag of pleasant surprises. "Sorry," I said, "the steel's already been sold, and my suggestion of training cavalry troops was denied." They turned away from their discussion and kept looking at me. "Your request for a food shipment cannot be fulfilled," I added.

Shagrat's bony knuckles turned white on the table. "Where is all the money going?" he asked. "Our spoils are taxed into nothingness, our steel is taken away, and the food is kept safely in the rear where it is not needed! What do we have to show for this?"

"I am sure our Lord Ren--" I said.

"He will leave us to die," Shogmog said, cutting me off. "He starves us because he knows we are doomed. He takes our steel because he doesn't want it to fall to the other side."

They looked at me for answers. I hate it when they do that.

I'm too old for this--I could be grandfather to most of these troops. I should be at home playing "goose the goblin" with the guys. Heck, I should be home playing "goose the noose" with the ladies. Employment with the Nazgûl doesn't allow much for family plans, though, and I've made many more widows than mothers in my line of work.

"I wish I could tell you," I said. "I don't know what is being done with all of it. Why don't you ask our Lord Ren the Nazgûl?" I'm sure as hell not going to, I thought.

Shogmog bared his teeth and pushed his huge, fat finger into my chest. "Why are *you* in command, then?" he asked. It was a good question.

Shagrat stared at me like ice. "Well, Captain Uklurg, since you haven't yet asked for our report, I'll give it to you now. Our scouts report the enemy army outnumber us nearly triple. They are mostly cavalry, outfitted with steel weapons and armor. They are supplied and reinforced by ship from their capital. We may as well not fight at all."

It was true. We are a small, poor nation at war with the huge, rich, allied Gondorian nations across the river to our west. Their Dunedain warriors are stronger, better equipped and supplied, and they always outnumber us. The Gondorians think their precious Dunedain hold a monopoly on heroism.

Of course, we have our own allies, but they are off gathering spoils in the north. Meanwhile, we are being destroyed defending their western flank.

I knew then what I must do, but I dreaded doing it. Only once before had I faced this. But to do otherwise would be to admit openly what a fraud and a coward I am.

* * *

I went to the hidden place and performed that loathsome ritual, as I'd been instructed, to summon the presence of my Lord Ren the Nazgûl. My commanders stood far to the side, watching in wicked fascination as I abased myself in fear. What satisfaction this must give them, I thought.

I felt something clutch my soul. The Nazgûl's reflection emerged before me. I don't think I wet myself.

"My Lord, I summon you only in great need . . ." I felt the grip on me tighten, deepen. I dispensed with the formalities. "A large force of cavalry is massing across the river. We are badly outnumbered and outclassed. Our position stands to fall."

My Lord spoke. My god, he spoke. You would think, from miles away, the terror would diminish. "*And of your commanders?*"

"They are displeased with you," I said. "They think you have taken their supplies and left them to die." The word *displeased* came out of me like the shaft of a spear from my gut, but I said it not willingly. It was as if the Nazgûl was controlling my lips.

Ren the Unclean held me in his gaze for a long time. I think I screamed. Hell, I know I screamed. One more time He spoke.

"Soon they will learn not to question me. I am coming."

We were doomed.

* * *

Once he stopped trembling, Shogmog lurched toward me and roared, "You didn't have to tell him--"

I cuffed him hard in the back of his oversized head. "You didn't have to talk to him, you worm! Have you forgotten what it's like, or should I arrange a special meeting for you?"

He shut up and resisted the urge to hurl me across the room. One thing even Shogmog could figure out--you do not cross Ren the Unclean.

Shagrat sat in the corner with his lips quivering, staring at nothing.

* * *

We never had to face our Lord in person, though we knew he was near. Over the pass came three thousand troops and a beast from Hell.

Two of the Nazgûl's apprentices marched with the army. Uthmag, the scheming half-breed, spoke for our Lord. "We diverted from our march to the north when we heard of your need. Your spoils were used to equip this army, and --" a dark, intelligent grin passed over his face "-- to appease the dragon Throkmau. He will help us destroy our enemies."

The Gondorian cavalry could already be heard faintly, thundering across the valley.

Rozilan, the human female, was the other apprentice. With battle nearly at hand, she presented my commanders and myself each a very fine sword, naming them as she did. Ren the Unclean had gathered them himself, for us to use in

battles against the west. Mine was called Bone Cleaver. I guess if a sword has its own name, there must be something to it.

With the beast Throkmau roaring overhead, Shogmog was able to rouse our troops into a screaming fury. Thank gods I was there at the battle, not holding audience with Ren the Unclean. What followed could only have been our Lord summoning the dark power of his master. Then even the Nazgûl must face fear.

A terrible storm drove into the enemy troops, overtaking and overwhelming the minor sorceries launched by the Nazgûl's apprentices. Flashes of light betrayed Throkmau swooping out of the darkened sky, belching flames toward the ground.

Our troops ran towards a solid wall of charging cavalry, unintimidated. The sky became such a darkened frenzy that I could not see, from the rearguard, the first clashes of troops. I squinted and scrambled forward. After a moment I began running.

Soon, however, enemy soldiers were brought to the rear. Someone said they were found lying on the ground, curled into little balls.

* * *

When the sky lightened into a gray mist, I could see Shagrat walking across the field, stooping as he went. He was already taking inventory of our spoils, setting aside those items not charred too deeply by Throkmau's fire. I could hear Shogmog shouting out further ahead, trying to round up scattered troops in the fog.

I waded across the soaked battlefield to join Shagrat, stepping carefully around piles of bodies. I paused once to put a squealing horse out of its misery.

Shagrat bent down to look through the possessions of a Dunedain captain. Just then, one of the bodies on the ground behind him rose into a crouch. It limped towards him, holding its gut with one hand and a knife in the other.

I sprinted through the last few feet of mud, leaping over a couple of bodies and drawing my sword at the same time. The new blade felt awkward in my hands. I overtook the would-be assassin and swung full at his unprotected midsection. His spine snapped clean through.

I bent my knees and wheezed for air, cursing and kicking the corpse for making me work. Then I noticed the bleeding gash in my right arm.

Shagrat was wide-eyed. "Thanks, boss" he squeaked. I don't think he ever expected to see this crusty, selfish old orc fight or risk his life for anyone, much less put on an inspired athletic display to do it.

Shogmog walked right up until he towered over me, then gave me a smart salute. He had seen the whole thing. It was the first time I'd ever seen him smile.

STRATEGY AND TACTICS: THE WOODMEN

So, I know what you're thinking - ANOTHER ARTICLE ABOUT THE STUPID WOODMEN? Can't they publish anything more interesting? Answer: no; so go and read someone's poetry or the insults in barbs and brags. Please by no means let me detain your interest further - we Woodmen have private matters to discuss.

This is just my two bits worth; I had the "educational" experience of playing my very first ME-PBM game as the Woodmen - and there is a certain lingering suspicion that I was suckered. For anyone who thinks otherwise, this is the VERY LEAST desired position. (Being clueless, I made no position requests except to be a Free People.) And voila! (By the way, GSI, you might want to adopt a "default newbie position request list" consisting of four to eight positions of intermediate level challenge to be given to the ignorant beginner, perhaps ones which in your experience are neither excessively difficult nor tactically critical during the initial turns of the game)

Anyone who plays the Woodmen position intelligently knows the two cardinal rules of the position, one for the initial turns, and one for the middle-to-endgame. These are:

1) Be aggressive.

and for the middle-to-endgame:

2) Be subtle.

Let's deal with them in order. Against an experienced collection of opponents, especially say a Dragon Lord and Witch-king with good communication, the first ten turns of the game can be a living nightmare for the Woodmen. There are a few things that you can do, however, which will turn things to your advantage. First, strike immediately! Those armies are impressive and unfortunately expensive, and you don't start with a balanced economy. In this game I sent my most powerful armies immediately against Goblin's gate, and caught the Dragon Lord completely unprepared. By striking down that army there and eliminating two of his starting characters, I seriously weakened his position in northern Greenwood and cost him a lot of money and time; this also had the effect of removing a direct threat to my under-fortified capital city.

So be aggressive. It also has the effect of impressing your allies with the possibility that you have the potential to be a major asset to them. Arthedain is far more likely to loan you his silver rod if he thinks you'll use it against Dol Guldur than as a toothpick.

Also by striking quickly, (losing a few expensive troops and saving some money) you take the pressure off your allies, and they may be disposed to assist you in return. My eliminating a powerful army two hexes away from Imladris freed Elrond from pressure in that direction; he reciprocated. Barely had the Witch-king army under Lord Cyka descended into the vale of Maethelburg when Elrond spread his mantle of invisibility over my capital city, leaving Cyka to howl in rage.

Wheedle! South Gondor, if it's being run by a competent character, will recognize that if you stay afloat then there's an agent power to someday match the Cloud Lord who owes him a favor. The Noldo probably won't give you artifacts, but they might point out one or two to you that are too far for them to

seek out conveniently. Make all the promises you care to - an assassination here or there, or the commitment of a Woodman agent to the Noldo or Arthedain curse squads - those are within your power and difficult for your allies to do without you.

Be opportunistic! When the Witch-king (who was an utter incompetent) collapsed, my ONE decent mage immediately located the Pectoral and fetched it out from under the noses of my more experienced and powerful allies. Possession is nine-tenths, they say.

Now there's the matter of the character imbalance to worry about. You have NO decent agents, mages, or emissaries, nor hope of obtaining them soon unless an ally goes under and you can recruit some. So work with what you've got! During the early portion of the game create pure commanders. They're cheap and useful, and let me explain.

One aspect of the game that is overlooked by many is that commanders are high challenge rank characters and that THEY TRAIN FASTER THAN ANY OTHER SKILL RANK. When that's combined with the probable challenge or stealth bonus, you either have super-challenge characters (outmatched only by the artifact-rich powers) or DECENT challenge characters who are nearly invisible. If you're the Woodmen and you don't have seven Warlords by turn ten you're playing the position wrong.

(OK, I exaggerate, but not by much.) But there was one Lord Marshal in the game when it ended, and his name was Beoraborn.

Don't go for mages. There's no hope. You need ONE decent mage and she should stay in some forest villa casting locate spells for you. Find Galadriel, find Gandalf, locate Sting or Orcuin for you, but don't try to compete with the mage powers until later in the game. There's no way you're EVER going to have Tinculin or the Ring of Wind, so forget it - for now. You can also use all the pure emissaries you can spare the cash for, so balance that with your high-challenge commanders. When you can afford it, train commander/agents. That way the special ability bonus is useful either way

If some brilliant tactics and deft cooperation help you through the initial crunch, then some real subtlety is in order. Military actions outside of the Greenwood are inadvisable. But there's a greater inequality to be remedied; which is that all the best artifacts have already been taken. With your ONE decent mage tracking various persons and artifacts for you, you can form a "challenge squad" of high-level commanders accompanied by one of your matchless agent scouts to do a Scout for Characters order. While the Noldo are still putting together their curse squad nine generals may descend upon Morannon and destroy every available character - indeed, Dendra Dwar may be laughing so hard at having Bornbeneor appear in his capital that he may not bother to refuse personal challenges at all

There's another aspect of challenging that often goes overlooked also. Order of challenge is determined by native, not modified rank. So General Odagus gets to challenge before Warlord Gothmog, no matter how many trinkets Gothmog may have picked up from Bain I in a recent assassination. And if Din Ohtar is also present with his lovely Ring of Wind, then Din Ohtar will die by challenge and Gothmog will receive a polite refusal. Remember that the best assassin is no match for a great commander in a challenge, and with your powers of scouting someone with the Cloak of the Abyss may consider himself safely positioned to off Beoraborn or Elrond only to die in a duel long before the agent actions portion of the turn.

One final consideration for high native rank characters is that the success of agent actions against a character is determined by his native, not modified

rank. (Officially, GSI refuses to confirm or deny this, but that doesn't change the fact that it's true.) So your high commanders will be difficult to assassinate, kidnap, or steal from. Even Ji Indur may be surprised when he assigns two of his best agents to off the aforementioned General Odagus and Lord Bain (with all his artifacts), and General Odagus, the Woodman patsy, casually annihilates the upstart agent where Bain dies. Lord Marshals are harder to assassinate than anything except perhaps a dragon or Tom Bombadil

Be aware that your enemies want you dead and your allies want you as a tame lackey. So repay your debts during the middle game and be mercenary in the endgame. Both ally and enemy must come to respect you once there's been a chance to even things up. When an ally leaned on me in the endgame of my first game, I had four Warlords, two Generals, eleven emissaries (nine above 50 rank, one above 90), and the highest challenge rank character in the game ready to launch an offensive a single turn later. Pity that the last remaining Dark Servant folded shortly thereafter, before the scores could become more even.

And while you may not place, then again you may, and in future years you can tell little Beorning children - "We may not rule over Dol Guldur or Morannon, but if ever an elf asks, remind him who brought the dragon!"

Call me - Aurnyn

The Best Defense

by
Cliff O'Connor

Certainly one of the most hotly contested areas of Middle-earth is the pass leading from Barad Ungol through Minas Ithil to Osgiliath. It is here that an often little used order can be used to great effect. The 840 Stand and Defend Command order is ideal for use in this situation. Having played one of the Gondors and the Fire King, I can honestly say that skillful use of this order can easily stop a well planned offensive from either side.

The Fire King has a national advantage of being able to hire armies at no cost (order 770). If the Free Peoples were to attempt to march into Mordor, they would be stopped by the fortifications at Barad Ungol. Since taking this population center is difficult even without defending armies present, the Free People will often attack any armies present. They will attempt to move on into Mordor, where even a reduced force will fare better against the unfortified heartland. In this situation, the skillful use of these two orders will prevent all but the largest of armies from going through the pass into Mordor. The sequence of events would run like this: Free People attackers move into the pass through Minas Ithil, and are stopped by the fortifications and any Dark Servant armies at Barad Ungol. The next turn either the Dark Servants or the Free People attack their opponent's forces. In most cases the better equipped and better trained Free People forces will win, but be too damaged to successfully attack the Major Town (City)\Castle. To maintain their offensive, the Free commanders often attempt to move into Mordor (order 850 or 860).

To prevent these armies from wreaking havoc on the Dark Servant economies, the Fire King needs one command character with both orders available. First, this commander issues the 770 Hire Army command at Barad

Ungol. The most effective troop type would be either Heavy Infantry or Archers, both of which can be hired without using resources on weapons or armor. Then this commander of 400-500 troops issues the 840 Stand and Defend order, specifying which direction he wishes to prevent the enemy armies from moving (East). In most cases these 400-500 troops will be enough to prevent the enemy armies from moving on into Mordor while allowing reinforcements to arrive unimpeded. But a few turns of this, and the attacking forces will be reduced to little or nothing without being able to advance out of the pass.

The reverse also holds true for the Free Peoples, except for the advantage of hiring armies at no cost. Whomever controls Minas Ithil or Osgiliath, if it is not the Fire King, needs to be sure to have 5000 gold available to finance the new army in order for this tactic to work. Other than that, the sequence of events would be similar to those already given.

(CONTINUED FROM FRONT COVER)

The last email subject to discuss is that *Whispers of the Wood* now has its own email address. That address is: WhispersEd@aol.com. Any personals, articles, stories or other correspondence intended for my eyes can now be sent to this address. This allows me to respond quicker to business concerning *Whispers* as well as allowing last minute submissions to get in without being lost in the general email shuffle. I hope to hear from you there!

The last item of business is new game needs. The Fourth Age is proceeding along nicely, but we currently have a glut of Free People nations pending. If you are looking at getting into a Fourth Age game, we suggest submitting a Dark Servant or Neutral nation, as this will allow you to get into a game quicker. Those of you who have already submitted a Free People nation can submit an alternate nation design if you wish to get in a game quicker. Just make sure that it is labeled as an ALTERNATE nation design so we do not think it is a NEW nation design.

We are currently looking to fill a three week game--our first Fourth Age three week game is close to filling, so those of you who are interested should get your requests in soon. We are also close to filling a one week all email game and are waiting for players for this game. If the fast paced, break neck, go for gonzo pace of one week games appeals to you, contact GSI so we can get you started.

That's it for this month. I'll talk to you again next month!

Stuart

The Hall Of Heroes

ME-PBM Circa 1650

Game #205 - The Dark Servants: #19, #17 & #21

The vile plague that infected Middle-earth so long ago has finally consumed it. Nazgûl and their legions swarm like eager maggots over the corpse of the land, leaving disaster in their wake. Úvatha's vast mounted armies make the entire eastern realm dangerous for anyone who does not serve him, and the Quiet Avenger and the Corsairs likewise wield awesome power. Sauron has won . . .

Final standings are as follows:

#19 Long Rider - 2250: Mark Mills

#17 Quiet Avenger - 1800: Saul H. Ravitch

#21 Corsairs - 1767: Gregory Brauer

Top Free People: #1 Woodmen - 667

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Celedhring/Dog Lord: 299

Highest Net Commander Rank - Gothmog/Dark Lieutenants: 200

Highest Net Agent Rank - Gaurhír/Ice King: 170

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Carrog/Dark Lieutenants: 99

Highest Net Mage Rank - Celedhring/Dog Lord: 240

Most Mithril - Ice King: 1544

Most Artifacts - Long Rider: 21

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 17

Final Turn - 38

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

Game #214 - The Dark Servants: #18, #20 & #11

Wisdom is its own reward, reflected Angamaitë. While the other neutral nations had wavered indecisively, the nation of the Corsairs joined the cause of the Dark Servants. Fortunate that they had, for the Fire King, the Dark Lieutenants, and the Witch-king had led them to a crushing victory over the Free. The other Neutral nations had all perished beneath the incredible might of the Dark Servants, and Angamaitë was left with sovereign control over the seas to the south. No, thought Angamaitë, wisdom is not its own reward. Power is.

Final standings are as follows:

#18 Fire King - 2250: Dina M. Comeau

#20 Dark Lieutenants - 2233: Matthew S. Siebert

#11 Witch-king - 2050: Robert W. McKemie

Top Free People: #5 Cardolan - 400

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Celedhring/Dragon Lord: 329

Highest Net Commander Rank - Gothmog/Dark Lieutenants: 155

Highest Net Agent Rank - Dîn Ohtar/Long Rider: 173

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Angûlion/Witch-king: 122

Highest Net Mage Rank - Celedhring/Dragon Lord: 273

Most Mithril - Dark Lieutenants: 870

Most Artifacts - Dragon Lord: 20

Most Kills - Cloud Lord Long Rider: 13

Final Turn - 33

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

The Hall Of Heroes

ME-PBM Circa 2950

Game #8 - The Dark Servants: #17, #11 & #21

Thousands of black-armored troops mustered on the edge of Mirkwood. Inspecting her force from a nearby rise, Adûnaphel considered the trials and tribulations of the last few years. It seems that the Quiet Avenger is no longer quite so quiet, she thought. And with that, she gave marching orders to destroy the last Noldo encampment in Middle-earth, and with it the last hope of the Free.

Final standings are as follows:

#17 Quiet Avenger - 2117: Sheeyun Park

#11 Witch-king - 2084: Darren L. Frechette

#21 Corsairs - 2067: August Tischer IV

Top Free People: #10 Noldo Elves - 1150

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Gaurithoth/Witch-king: 280

Highest Net Commander Rank - Morgurthia/Witch-king: 184

Highest Net Agent Rank - Alukhôr/Corsairs: 127

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Annatar/Witch-king: 109

Highest Net Mage Rank - Gaurithoth/Witch-king: 235

Most Mithril - Long Rider: 848

Most Artifacts - Witch-king: 42

Most Kills - Long Rider: 14

Final Turn - 38

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

Game #33 - The Free Peoples: #1, #5 & #2

Led forth by the Woodmen, the Silvan Elves, and the Northmen, the Free Peoples of Middle-earth have surged forth with holy fury to sweep the black scourge of Sauron from their homelands. No trace remains of the threat that once was except the traitorous Rhûn Easterlings and the skulking Quiet Avenger, both of which nations are now defunct. Good has triumphed over evil, and the terrible threat that Sauron has posed for so long is gone. At least, for now . . .

Final standings are as follows:

#1 Woodmen - 2400: Matthew S. Larson

#5 Silvan Elves - 2317: Michele L. Palmer

#2 Northmen - 1833: John A. Kenny

Top Dark Servant: #22 Rhûn Easterlings - 1733

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Celedhring/Dark Lieutenants: 329

Highest Net Commander Rank - Faldor/Woodmen: 136

Highest Net Agent Rank - Lîndal/Silvan Elves: 143

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Braega/Woodmen: 119

Highest Net Mage Rank - Celedhring/Dark Lieutenants: 261

Most Mithril - Northmen: 5217

Most Artifacts - Woodmen: 24

Most Kills - Woodmen: 43

Final Turn - 41

Congratulations to the Free Peoples!