

# WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



JOHN WOODY

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SYSTEMS  
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## WORDS FROM THE WOOD

It's February and that means Valentine's Day. And Valentine's Day means -Love. Exciting and new. Come aboard. We're expecting you. And Loooooove. Life's sweetest reward . . . . Do you get the feeling like you're in a song lyric? O.K., I'll stop now.

For those of you who have sent email to our GSI@ELINK.NET address, you may have noticed that we now have a return receipt which is generated when your email is received. That's right, GSI now has an auto-confirm set up to send return receipts. Please note, however, that this is ONLY APPLICABLE TO OUR GSI@ELINK.NET ADDRESS!!!! It DOES NOT apply to our AOL or Compuserve accounts. If you send email to either of these two addresses, you will NOT receive an automatic return receipt--although both of these servers do provide that service for a fee. Those of you who subscribe to AOL and/or Compuserve are welcome to send mail to our Elink address, thereby receiving a return receipt, but this will not happen automatically for our AOL or Compuserve accounts. Once again, email sent to our GSI@ELINK.NET address WILL receive a return receipt.

If you haven't read the Letters to the Editor yet, you might want to do so. A Unique concept is brought up and GSI is curious as to the interest in such a game. What do you think? Would any of you be interested in such a game? If so, please let us know and we will be happy to set it up. The only way we'll know if you are interested is if you inform us, so do not keep silent if this sounds like your cup of tea.

GSI would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our Fourth Age circa 1000 new game guidelines. The circumstances for this game are a little different, so we want to make sure everyone understands the guidelines under which we operate. Feel free to contact our office if you have any specific questions.

### All Games:

--Players/teams will be assigned to games so that the balance of allegiances will be either:

7 Free Peoples, 7 Dark Servants, 9 Neutrals, 2 Kingdoms; or

8 Free Peoples, 8 Dark Servants, 7 Neutrals, 2 Kingdoms.

### Team Games:

--Team size can be from 2-4 players (no 5-player teams in FA 1000).

--Team size can only be 2 players, if a Kingdom is included in the team.

--No team may have both Kingdoms as their team.

--All teams must select the same allegiance (during nation design).

### Grudge games:

--Team size can be 8/9 (3 teams) or 12/13 (2 teams) players.

Thus, games can be filled with either:

Two 8-player teams (with a Kingdom each) and a 9-player team; or

Two 8-player teams and a 7-player team, with the two Kingdoms assigned

by GSI; or

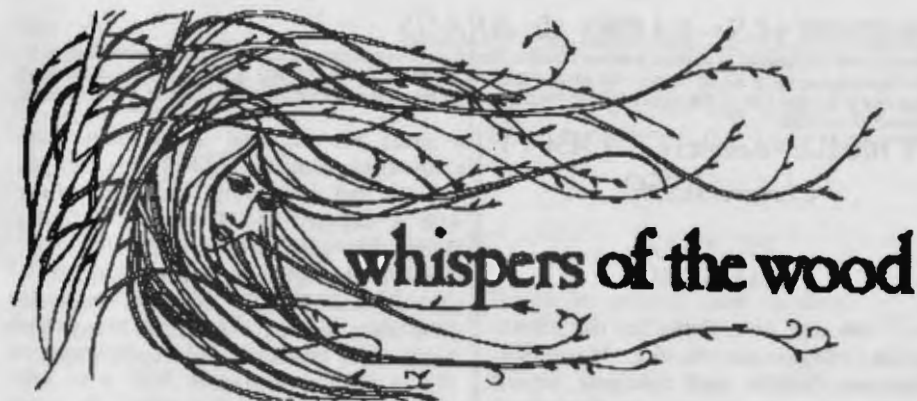
A 12-player team and a 13-player team, each with a Kingdom.

Variations of the above (variant games) can be arranged with consent of all teams.

--Homeland placement can be arranged (as normal) by GSI, or the teams can arrange a lottery/draft to assign locations, if all teams agree.

Well, that's about it for this month. I'll see you in thirty!

*Stuart*



## ALONG THE PATHWAYS

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This Month's Cover: "In the Jungle, the Gruesome Jungle" by John Woody

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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 181

We are free thanks to the efforts of the Dwarves, Noldo, Woodman, Southern Gondor and the now strong willed me of the plains- the Cardolans! We placed the last knife in the backs of the Cloud Lord agents and burnt his cities to the ground. Well played by all.

### GAME 199

Tick-Tock... time is running out. At least 19 nations out & only the Noldo standing in for the Free.

Orillion Darkblade

### GAME 215

Hello Mr. Dun. I found your capital (1521). Hello Mr. Arthedain. You're next.

Sir Psycho

P.S. Is anyone else out there? I'm doing my part in Whispers.

### GAME 218

Hear me Corsairs:

One, two, One-Eye's gonna get you  
Three, four, better close up your ports  
Five, six, your gonna need alot mor  
than crucifix

Seven, eight, your death awaits...

One-Eye

\*\*\*\*\*

It is a sad day for the people of Khand. Tros Hesnef, the newest emperor of Khand, is dead! Vile agents of the Dark came to Luglurak. Tros found Gwathlo,

a most vicious and silent sort, and challenged him to fight. Tros fought bravely and honorably. Gwathlo struck with a dagger, and Tros fell, writhing from the pain of the poison now coarsing through his veins. Now, it is unclear who will be the next emperor, or if there will be one at all. Many fear the division of our people once more.

Simpton

Easterling scribe

### GAME 223

The winter storms begin to weaken, but the cold still chills my bones. My people have begun to forget what sunshine & happiness are, so long have we been under the shadow of the 'Darkblade'. Combat is all we have now.

As our blood demands, we shall fight until the end. I no longer wash away the blood and grime of battle, doing so is a waste of energy. Surely I look like death itself.

Now I must sleep before the morning assault.

Orillion Darkblade

### GAME 228

It seems that most of my Lord's servants have fled these lands. I will prove to 'Him' that I am truly a loyal servant. Let the mortals come, I am not afraid!!

Orillion Darkblade

### GAME 231

Just when the market starts to improve, it falls back into the toilet. Fret not. I am hiring a new economist. His name is Carter, if anyone can bring about out of control inflation--Carter

Can!

The Prophet

P.S. Don't mess with the Clergy!

P.P.S. Or my economy!

### GAME 232

Congratulations Free Peoples!

The Servants of Sauron have folded like a house of cards. You have fought well. We will meet again in future time with more trusted accomplices. All the odd characters who have died have gone down to the wave of Long Rider agents. Just ask the Northmen, Dwarves, Southern Gondor and the Sinda! I have offered twenty-seven characters. I cannot do both that and hold seven armies. Good job! Good Bye! A future age will smile upon us!!

Jim

The Farout Rider

### GAME 235

"\*Burp\* Excuse me," Turukulon, the dragon said.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Full after eating only three Freep armies." Dwar said.

"The Harad's were tasty, but those Gondorians gave me gas." Turukulon retorted.

"Indeed King Tarondar has been hiring rejects. North Gondor must be in desperate straights." Dwar flatly stated.

Kraven the Hunter

\*\*\*\*\*

Elladan,

Soon ye shall be brotherless,  
Then ye shall be fatherless,  
Then after I kill thou,  
You will be headless.

One-Eye

\*\*\*\*\*

So it appears there is a rift among the Dark Servants. Two of their

Nazgûl fight a war for themselves. Artifacts and the remains of dead nations will not win you the day! I thank the heavens that myself and the other nations of the Light saw that sooner.

King Tarondor

### GAME 238

To the misguided Dark Servants:

You will find it is you who are mistaken . . . about a great many things. Declare Free while you still have time.

Thetick

### GAME 239

One-eye- I am Death. I have not fallen. I will not fall. I shall Prevail!

Kraven the Hunter

P.S. The Four Horsemen cannot fall. We are eternal.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Freeps continue to lose battle after battle and town after town. They will be destroyed before the onset of summer. So let it be written, so let it be done.

Famine

P.S. One-Eye: You still haven't knocked out Death.

\*\*\*\*\*

King Argeleb II,

Arthedain are thou alive and fearless or are thou scared and cowardly? For you do not help when you should. Send a file card with your emissary.

Servants of Bain I

One-Eye

### GAME 241

Lord Ulrac sat despondently in his chamber at Carn Dum. Things had not gone well during fall's campaign season. It had started well, with Witch

King troops sacking undefended Arthedain towns and terrorizing Noldo and Cardolan forces into a static defense, but then it had turned ugly. The illiterate Hillman under Arfanhil had broken their truce and had attacked into southern Angmar. They had taken the food stores of Angsul and Shedun before Witch King commanders could react. Arfanhil pinned down Dancu's southern army early on, and the Rhudaurian Hillman had climbed all over the place like ants at a picnic.

Then had come word of the defeat of Dancu. With his army gone, and Mt. Gram about to fall, Murazor had no other choice but to recall troops back to the capitol to punish these insignificant peons. But it had not been that easy. After a forced march across the northern wastes to avoid detection, they had arrived outside the borders of Rhudaur to discover that Mt. Gram had fallen. Murazor had instantly moved to retaliate by sacking Nothva Raglaw, but Arfanhil and a army of new recruits stood in the way. Murazor had been victorious but losses were high and Nothva Raglaw had not been sacked. However, Arfanhil had been challenged to combat and had been killed by Murazor.

Not wasting time, Rogrog had moved the army south to take the undefended town of Fennis Drunin as a base against Rhudaur. Unfortunately, Rogrog and the last of the old troll guard had been slain outside the town gates like common bandits. News also arrived that the town of Morkai had also fallen to the Hillman. Now winter was here and Lord Ulrac had pulled the remaining troops into Carn Dum. At least we will have the winter to rebuild he thought. But even then the enemy had shown no respite. Cardolan had taken the last town in southern Angmar and Noldo assassins had plagued the garrison of the castle. Ulrac had taken precautions, but several characters had already died. Ulrac swore an oath of vengeance,

"When spring comes back we will teach those Hillman about war!"

Gazing out the tower window, Lord Ulrac felt his urine filling up his polished leather boots. Over the mountain peaks surrounding Carn Dum came the tribes of the Hillman. On skis and sleds they brought their baggage train and its was stocked to last a long time. Troops without number, more than the garrison Ulrac had, could be seen making efforts to put Carn Dum under seige. Ulrac called for his commanders to assemble the army to meet this attack and tried to sound confident. Quietly he told his personal guard to get ready for a quick escape east.

Brogga sat astride his horse and gazed at the scene below. The defenders of Carn Dum had been caught by surprise. Brogga looked at his generals and said, "We do not stop until all their heads are hung outside Cameth Brin's battlements and the ravens have picked the eyes clean!"

\*\*\*\*\*

Slaves of the most foul,

Have you forgotten the fate of Khamûl? He wept and begged for mercy on his knees while we hunted him through Mirkwood. Beware! The shadows of Mirkwood have bright eyes and sharp ears!

Oldest of the Old

\*\*\*\*\*

The cloaked figure viewed the city street with satisfaction. The security in and around Pelargir showed early signs of disintegration as panic began to seize the hearts of the populace. Some had already fled and more would follow. Chaos would set in as the city began to dwindle in size.

Nazog had taken advantage of this laxity to enter the city undetected the previous night and relieve the house from which he watched of its remaining inhabitants. He would be far

away by the time the mutilated bodies were found. He had skillfully extracted the information he desired. His quarry was a more or less permanent fixture of the inn down the street.

The disheveled officer drinking alone in the dark corner of the common room was an all-too-familiar figure to the inn keeper and serving wenches. But, his money was good and, in his sullen drunkenness, he kept to himself and caused little trouble--except when the stablehands had to be summoned to carry him up to his room when he had drunk too much. Vinyaran was trying unsuccessfully to erase the memory of his disgrace. Not only had he lost his army in the failed defense of Minas Ithil, he had also let the fabulous Palantir of Osgiliath fall into the hands of the Fire King.

Nazog had come on a "mission of mercy" to put Vinyaran out of his misery. After dark, he drew his hood over his head and stole down the street to the inn. No one saw him, as the frightened populace barricaded themselves behind locked doors at night. Once in the darkened bedchamber, Nazog drew his knife as he approached the still form on the bed.

Nazog's hand stopped in midair as he suddenly realized his quarry had escaped his revenge. Vinyaran's unseeing eyes stared in cold terror at the ceiling. On the bloodstained cover lay a token of the Ice King. Nazog was too late! A cold smile played across his lips as he withdrew a token of the Fire King from his pouch and laid it alongside the other. Let the townsfolk make what they will of that. The panic would spread and ease Pelargir's fall to the approaching armies. Regardless of whose hand had struck the fatal blow, Ren the Unclean would be pleased that Skargnakh's death had been avenged.

## GAME 242

Carlton watched tight-lipped and warg-eyed as Haruth Raman paced the room. At length Haruth stopped, turned toward Carlton and spoke. "I know we must soon choose which side to support, but..."

Just then Shobla burst into the room. "Lords, we have received rumors of Dark Servant activity around our mountain camps."

"The choice is made," Haruth grimly said.

\*\*\*\*\*

Firedancer,

I got your love letter. I noticed that you volunteered all the other Freeps to fight before you. Since elves are not known to be humble- it must be cowardice.

Kraven the Hunter  
P.S. You like to dance with fire? I got a new toy to help you dance. Meet my toy- NAPALM!

\*\*\*\*\*

Deck the hall's with Drifter's body  
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la  
Tis the season to get folliced  
Fa, la, la, la, la, la...  
Cut his head off, rip his eyes out  
Fa, la, la, la, la, la...

Remember this Drifter along with your girlfriend, Harad. Mess with the best end up dead like all the rest.

One-Eye

\*\*\*\*\*

Hey Drifter:

One-Eye's rantings hurt my head (only because of my hangover). I hope he has a navy. So we can crush him between our great navies and use him as shark bait.

Kraven the Hunter

### GAME 247

The sightless eyes of Angamaite stared down from the pole upon which his head was affixed, reviewing what was left of his once great army at Has Adri. Nearby, Carlon's wounds were being dressed by a young aide as a messenger approached and saluted. "What news from the south?" Carlon asked.

"Sire, the huge Corsair army attacking Sukh Akhor has been utterly destroyed by our forces under Commander Ossim Rallah. Lord Faltur of the Corsairs challenged Shabla, and Shabla prevailed. The populace of the towns and villages overrun by the Corsairs are rebelling. Already, the inhabitants of Has Yayb have thrown off the yoke of oppression, and cast their Corsair task masters into the sea."

Carlon smiled. The Corsairs had begun to atone for the death of Haruth Raman.

Kweo

\*\*\*\*\*

Where have the pony riders gone? Perhaps they went the way of the munchkins. At least the pointy-ears still want to play.

Orillion Darkblade

### GAME 249

To the DS:

Good try. You can kill my people, take my pop centers and crush my armies, but in the end I'll be standing over your grave . . . if we even decide to bury you. The Free will prevail. The Northmen will live on. Don't you know "Team Tong" rules!?

Stormbringer

P.S. Easterlings--Bad move. Now be a short lived lackey instead of a leader.

### GAME 252

To whoever owns Dol Guldur,  
You're welcome.

Khamûl, we have to keep each other updated or we're only helping the Freeps.

Adûnaphel

### GAME 254

Nibble, nibble like a mouse; who's that nibbling at my house? Watch your step, Fillipe.. Wolfie... is watching... and waiting!! Hmm, chocolate mouse, er, mousse; sounds yummy!

### GAME 256

Chaos runs rampant ... yet the fun has just begun!!

Orillion Darkblade

\*\*\*\*\*

To all peoples:

Rhudaur chooses to join the Dark Lord. Already, forces of Cardolan have been destroyed just west of our southern settlement of Fennas Drunin. More forces of Cardolan approach, and the treacherous Noldo came to attack us as well. But we DEFY the FREE- for "Freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose..."

Rhudaur

Middle-earth™ PBM  
circa 2950

### GAME 48

To the pathetic Free players in Game 48 (you know who you are):

Your actions are that of a frightened group of cowards. You prey on my nation to secure your winning positions. Because I joined as a standby I'm not worthy to do well. You

knew my nation's standing and never communicated. You are by far the worst "team" I've encountered. I now see why the Neutrals all dropped on you. If this was 4th Age I would squash you like the little boys you are. As a matter of fact, if you wish to test yourselves against a real team have GSI contact me. As for my nation of Southern Gondor--we're gone, baby, so all you DS . . . my lands are yours.

Stormbringer

Your Master

### GAME 50

To the pathetic Free--

We will bring it on . . . right down on top of you. A true King needs not declare himself . . . Aragorn the Weak. But all the pathetic Free need to be reminded who their master is.

Call me Master

Call me Stormbringer

### GAME 57

The Elves are hiding in the woods. The Dwarves are hiding in the mountains. The Hobbits are digging holes in the ground. The humans won't come to their front doors. Of course, the Riders hide in horse's dung. So I understand why the Freeps have nothing to say. But the Dark Servants should not be humble- Speak up- You have the right to brag in victory.

Guess Who

### GAME 59

The forboding that hung over Mirkwood failed to triumph over the heart of the timeless Elven King. The foul demon Duran, Lackey of Khamul, was its source, and he fell to Thranduil's blade in the waning days of last year.

### GAME 60

It has been observed that it is necessary to fight to win in this age. The Servants of Sauron couldn't fight their way out of an Elf-Maid's girdle, (or into one for that matter). Though I suspect they've tired.

Icarus

### GAME 61

Pathetic Freep Weaklings: Hear now the words of Sauron!

Gondor is to cease their foolish attempts of invasion, or suffer eternal despair.

To the Noldo- perhaps your insults would go over better if they were not written in crayon.

Southern Gondor- die now or die later; your choice.

Sinda- I see you!

Urzahil

\*\*\*\*\*

Dark clouds that spewed sheets of ice and snow loomed over Minas Tirith as Hoarmurath reached the icy gates, he scowled in his dry raspy voice that echoed throughout the city. "Ecthelion! Come meet death face to face, I'll show you the way to the blessed isles where the Elves cower behind Sauron's might!" Then waited for a reply.

### GAME 63

Freeps play an imptant role in post-war Middle-earth. For one thing, they make great cattle, to be corralled and slaughtered at leisure.

Just don't be wasteful; be sure to use every part of the Freep!

Felonius Monk

P.S. Hobbitt-hide ear muffs, anyone?

Middle-earth™ PBM  
circa Fourth Age  
1000

GAME 4

My strategy- I do a psycho attack  
my set- I'm a maniac  
You have never seen no one like me  
Prevail- regardless what the cost  
might be  
Power- flows inside me  
Never- fail as long as I try  
Refuse- to be part of your lie  
YOU CANT BRING ME DOWN  
Who you callin' crazy?  
You wouldn't know crazy if Charles  
Manson was eating fruit loops on your  
front porch.

Sir Psycho

*Managing Retire-able Characters*

By  
Brian Hansen

Many positions in ME-PBM circa 1650 begin with what I term "retire-able characters." A retire-able character is one that can be replaced by a more potent character, merely by hiring a new character. A clear example is Rhudaur's character Marendil with Command 30. As Rhudaur hires new commanders at Strength 40, Marendil can immediately be retired and replaced with a stronger (Command 40) character.

A more subtle example is Ejenna of the Haradwath. Ejenna is a multi-class character that cannot be replaced by a stronger multi-class character of equal skill categories. But based on my evaluation of multi-class characters, Ejenna is retire-able! What makes Ejenna retire-able is that Emissary-Mage is one of the most useless multi-class characters. Mage is usually a full-time occupation, between Prentice Magery, casting spells, and Spell Research there is not much time to build of Emissary skills. Ejenna begins the game as a poor Emissary and a poor Mage. Yes, Ejenna can be made into a useful character - any character can be useful. The point is why go through the Herculean efforts to make a character with the uncomplimentary skills of Emissary and Mage ability, get a leg up on the situation and replace Ejenna with a more potent 30 point Mage, decent 30 point Emissary, etc; almost anything but a 10-20 Emissary-Mage.

There are three things one can do with a retire-able character:

1. Use the character to perform those necessary actions which do not build skills. Market sells, retrieve artifacts, transfer artifacts, recruit, and Name

GAME 5

Long ago, a small group of Elves, tiring of the incessant wars of the North, disappeared into the southern deserts, where they found a stark beauty in the shifting sands and barren rocks. Forgotten by the Men of Harad and beyond, they adapted to their new home, learning to survive, even flourish, where others perish. They became . . . the Grey Riders.

\*\*\*\*\*

My soldiers shall fight to the death. And when they die, if they can die, I shall call upon their damned souls to rise and speak horrible curses at the enemy.

Unforgiven

Character come to mind. The character's skills do not increase but remember this character is performing these actions to allow a character you are going to keep to do the activities which do improve skills.

2. Use the character to perform high risk actions. Investigate ruins, talk to dragons, try an untested action in an encounter, personal challenges, lead armies in high risk situations -- just don't get captured if you have no agent skill (you want to get rid of the character, not support it in jail). I have some even more creative things in mind but I'll let you do a little thinking on your own.

3. Retire the character. The (better) replacement character may even come with an additional bonus to Challenge Rank, Stealth, or the like. The optimum time for retirement will vary: A) If you want to save a little money, do it sooner. B) After the character is injured seems a natural time. C) The most expedient time is when you have run up against your character limit. You will have had the use of your character for a number of turns. So, just as you hit your character limit, the character's final useful act is to retire itself to open a new character slot. (I hope retirement in your kingdom means a gold watch; not something more sinister).

Luckily, most countries have 0-2 retire-able characters. To retire many characters would be laborious. I have taken considerations such as my personal evaluation of multi-class character type into account in developing this list. By my count, these are the characters which are retire-able:

Arthedain	Alquawen	A 10-10-10 Agent-Emissary-Mage is hard to build up.
Cardolan	Imlach	A 40 Strength Commander can replace.
	Lanaigh	A 40 Strength Commander can replace.
Eothraim	Aluiric	A 40 Strength Commander can replace.
	Athaulf	A 40 Strength Commander can replace.
	Gisulf	A 40 Strength Commander can replace.
Woodmen	Chilperic	Consider just naming a 30 Emissary for 10,000 gold.
Cloud Lord	Ar-Gular	A 10-20 Emissary-Mage is not worth it.
	Gontran	A 40 Strength Agent can replace.
	Kadida	A 40 Strength Agent can replace.
Blind Sorcerer	Mardrash	A 40 Strength Mage can replace. Do use Mardrash to get artifacts.
Rhudaur	Marendil	A 40 Strength Commander can replace.
	Seammu	A 40 Strength Commander can replace.
Haradwaith	Ejenna	A 10-20 Emissary-Mage is not worth it.
	Shamara Katub	A 10-20 Emissary-Mage is not worth it.
	Yezmin	If this were any other country I would keep Yezmin to use as a Commander-Agent.

A fine distinction: You might argue a character such as the Fire King's Rozilan is expendable. Rozilan is a lousy emissary; an Emissary-Mage which is hard to build into something potent...and with two better mages at hand, does the Fire King need a third mage? The key point to note here is that Rozilan cannot be replaced by a more potent character. Rozilan is a 30-point Mage and could at best be replaced by a 30-point Mage. This does not fit into my definition of a "retire-able" character. Yes, she may be expendable and you may use Rozilan as you might use a retire-able character. But my discussion here focuses on "retire-able." You are invited to take the principles concerning "retire-able" characters and apply them to "expendable" characters, but that is a separate exercise.

I acknowledge that a case can be made for not retiring a retire-able character. It costs gold, the character can be trained up into something useful in a reasonable number of turns, etc. But consider it from this perspective: this is the only way you can increase the useful skills ranks of your characters by spending gold. To some countries gold is not a big issue. To all countries, character skill is a big issue and might be worth the gold anyway! Game playing is an art form, this is just one more color with which to weave your handiwork into the tapestry of Middle-earth.

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I am interested in playing in an "Anonymous" game--one where you do not have to communicate with others--allies, neutrals or enemies--and all the players agree not to exchange contact information. The concept is that the most time consuming aspect of ME-PBM is the diplomacy. I, and other experienced players, realize that diplomacy with the neutrals, coordination with allies, etc. make a huge difference in how well one does in the game. Though I like all that, I am too busy sometimes to make all the emails, phone calls, etc.

GSI can in no way enforce the no contact rule, and you need to make that clear in your advertising. However, you also would need to make clear that this game is for those who specifically do not want to get emails, phone calls, letters and want to be in a game where others also do not want that so they won't be disadvantaged.

I've played in such PBM games before and they are exciting because the strategy you use is very different. Coordination with allies takes a lot of guess work and prediction of what you would do if you were them. Peer pressure from the other people in the game is almost always enough to stop someone from breaking the rules. After all, they have to initiate sending people a message and they are sending it to others who specifically requested that they not get that kind of information. GSI can help by saying that you will not forward messages.

What do you think? Please let us know.

*O.K., we'll put it to the readers--how many of you would be interested in such a game? If demand warrants it, GSI will be happy to run such a game. Before we commit to this, however, we'd like to see who might be interested. If this sounds like the kind of game you would like to play in, drop us a line and let us know. If the response is sufficient, we will gladly set up such a game. So let us know!*

Stuart

## Nation Design Ideas: A conflicting POV.

by

Darrell Shimel

(edited by GSI, with some comments by Erving Bolinski)

Recently I got around to checking on this new [Middle-earth PBM 4th Age] 1000 scenario I've heard so much about. I went "Surfing" to the web to GSI's web site. I downloaded the Nation Design sheets, abridged rules, and both strategy articles. I started with the Nation Design Ideas, and found it totally useless. I simply didn't understand the rules well enough to understand the concepts of Erving's article.

I went to the Nation Design sheets next. These were very well designed. I applaud GSI for the format. I read and re-read these sheets. I analyzed these forms every way I could think of. I then read and re-read the rules. I wish the entire rules were on the web, but you take what you can get [*ed. note: all of the rules except for the order's section is included in the copy at the WWW site*]. I studied the maps, identifying sites for population center placement. Next came the article on this. Some really great ideas here.

After studying everything I could find, I made lists of questions and sent them to friends already in some of these games. Questions begot more questions. Finally it was time to get down to business. I designed a North Kingdom, South Kingdom, and many nations of each alliance. I even designed nations for teams.

Finally I got back to the Article on Nation Design. While Erving admits that he was taking inspiration from earlier scenarios, I see this as a major error. [*ed. note: clearly, as stated by both Erving and the rulebook - pages 8-9*]. I see, what I consider, major flaws in almost all of his designs.

Nation 1: Evil non-human, SNAs: learn Conjure Hordes, Summon Storms, Teleport. 2 artifacts. 10 war machines. Fortify pop centers and add a camp. 60A; 50C; 50M; 50E; 30A, 30M; 30C; 30C; 30E

The whole point of being non-human is to get the starting 60 agents at 50 cost. Where are the agent SNAs? Why start with war machines? They are too easy to lose in the small armies present at the start of the game.

To only select "Spell" SNAs seems ridiculous to me. Teleport? You're obviously building a military nation, so why have a character nation spell Conjure Hordes? You're not going to get so far from home that you need this spell. The troops are poorer than poor, and still cost as much as normal Men-at-arms (which are the worst troop in the game). Summon Storms? How much does tactics really affect battle?

The 30A, 30M was to have Teleport, Divine allegiance forces, and Divine characters with forces. I'm not sure what the mission of the character would be. If he'll be traveling with the army, why no combat spells? Where is he going that he needs Teleport? Basically, I see that this nation has wasted all of its SNAs. SNAs are the most powerful factor in this game, and should not be used unwisely.

[*Erving: Are agents really the whole point of being non-human/Evil? Any nation/race that focuses only on being oriented toward their best skill becomes rather predictable, no? War machines make an excellent addition, especially to small armies - in fact, they can help keep that small army from being destroyed, are good for threats, etc.*]

Nation 2: Good Dwarven, SNAs: Scout recon at 50, new HI have training 30, New armies have moral 40, Hire at no cost. 2 artifacts. Improve camp to village, fort on capital, tower on town. 60C; 60C; 50E; 40A; 30C, 30M; 30E; 30A; 30C

Who is going to rely on a 50 ScoChar? Not me! If you are going to be a military nation, you're going to have many commanders. The ability to have agents and emissaries recon is nice, but not all that great. New HI start at training 30 is poor because training counts for so little in the combat algorithm. New armies start with morale 40 should only be selected if hire armies free is also selected. Since he has both of these, I'll cut him some slack. I still think better SNAs can be selected. With 2 60 commanders and 2 artifacts chances are very good of retrieving lost artifacts, if they had a decent mage to locate them.

Nation 3: Good Elven, SNAs: Stealth, mages 40, new recruits start 25 training, 1/3 TI ships, 2 artifacts. 3 towers, camp, port, harbor 60M; 40C, 20E; 40A; 20C, 20M; 20A, 60M; 40E; 40E; 30C

Again, training is poor. 1/3 TI ships, but not warship strength 5? I'd rather have fewer ships (since they have the same gold costs) than saving the TI. Stealth on a nation with a navy and mages? What for?  
*[Erving: Not every nation should be designed toward augmenting a single strength. There are excellent reasons to compliment your nation with characteristics that will minimize your weaknesses, while at the same time making your nation strong.]*

Nation 4: Neutral Men, SNAs: Name 40 comm, 1/2 TI ships, 5 strength ships, Travel open seas. 2 artifacts, bunch of ships. Tower, Port, Harbor, Harbor. Mixed characters

I actually like this design. Think of putting camps on non-plains along the coast, so that enemy ships can't land. If you get around to upgrading, you can add the harbor to make it a recruiting center.

Nation 5: Neutral Men, SNAs: Name 40 comm. Hire free, conjure mounts, 2 Artifacts, 10 war machines, 2 towers, 2 camps. 60C, 30E; 40C; 40C; 40A; 40A; 40E; 40M; 40M

What the heck is the 60 going to be doing that a 50 couldn't do, for 500 less. Well maybe hunt artifacts. Why does he have emissary skill? Is he going to be a capital commander, an army commander, or an artifact hunter? Any way I see it, the emissary skill is a waste. Use 400 to get the 40E up to 60. Camps will be easier to place, and the higher loyalty will make them easier to improve. To be a military power, you'll need income.

Nation 6: Evil Men, SNAs: Name 40 agents, +20 kidnap/assassinate, tower, village, camp. 50A; 40C; 50A; 40A; 60E; 30C, 20A; 30M; 30E

Why the heck choose a human for an agent nation? You don't need the income a military nation does, so the 60E is not as important as 2 60 Agents. If you're going evil anyway, select non-human.

I thought a long time about the Name 40 agents vs. better chance of Stealth. As Woodmen in 2950, I didn't get stealth on my first 6 agents. A commander got stealth and an emissary got a challenge bonus. Big deal. Selecting 40 agents allows the character to move to a friendly pop center and steal gold from its first turn. This increases time to usability by several turns. Of course, my first agent with stealth got 34, making him a net 64 agent on turn 1.

Nation 7: Good Men, SNAs: Name 40 Emissary., Uncover secrets at 40, weakness. 3 artifacts. 2 towers, 2 camps. 20C, 60E; 40C; 20A, 60E; 30M; 30A; 60E; 40E; 30C

If you're an emissary nation, why do you need a SNA that allows all characters uncover secrets at 40? Uncover secrets is one of those last ditch orders. You select it when you just can't think of anything better to have the emissary do with their second order.

*[Erving: Uncover Secrets could just be the big surprise bonus in 4th Age 1000! After all, how else will you find out what the other nation's SNAs are? And this kind of knowledge could be extremely critical.]*

Weakness should only be learned on the way to sickness or curse. As a stand alone spell, it is poor. The best mage for this nation is a 30. Assuming prenticing every turn, it should be a 60 by turn 12. This would allow him to cast the spell for 20 points of damage each turn. That means that he could single-handedly kill any character in the game in only 15 turns, assuming you can get them to sit still that long. Of course my point is that any artifact that allows access to curse also allows access to weakness. Save the SNA for something better.

BTW: What is an emissary nation going to do with 3 artifacts? The best commander is a 40, the best mage and agent are only 30.

*[Erving: What would any nation do with 3 artifacts - grin!]*

Nation 8: Good Elven, SNAs: Better chance of stealth, Name 40 Mage, New recruits start at 25 training. 3 artifacts, fort and 2 camps. 30C, 60M; 40A; 60M; 60M; 40M; 30A; 40E; 30E

Three 60 mages and 3 artifacts. Definitely a good artifact hunting nation. Why stealth? I already talked about the uselessness of training. Now this is a nation that weakness almost makes sense for, Nah, go get a curse artifact.

Nation 9: Evil Men, SNAs: buy sell +20%, name 40 emissary, conjure food, fortifications costs tower, imp. Town to MT. 60E; 50C; 40A; 60E; 60E; 30A; 40E; 30M

Not bad. I can't find any obvious things I disagree with. Perhaps a better mage would be nice.

Nation 10: Good Dwarven, SNAs: All characters scout/recon at 50, challenge rank bonus, 1/2 TI fortifications, Hidden capital, 2 towers, camp 60C; 50E; 50A; 50M; 40C; 40E; 30A; 30M

No way I would hide my capital. The kingdoms get an area map on each nations capital, so they'll know where it is and could easily reveal it. Any nation that had a map covering your area would surely notice a MT was not visible. It wouldn't take long to figure out where it is. If I ever take a hidden pop center it will be a new camp I added. This way no one could notice a missing pop center. Use your 50E and its starting 50 loyalty to improve it to a TN or MT. This option is probably better for a non-military nation since any recruiting done at a hidden population center is like a flare letting everyone know it is there.

*[ed. note: This is not, in fact, completely correct. The Kingdoms do get an area map (at the game beginning only) that is only 'roughly' centered on the capital (may be off by a hex in any direction). Thus, the Kingdoms may not know exactly where the capital is, nor whose it is! And a hidden capital, accompanied by a second MT truly does look like a normal nation. Besides, even if a nation could determine that a hidden capital exists, there are a lot of hexes to search in the possible location radius. Furthermore, the 434 spell will not be common at*

game start (it is a Hard spell). This further ensures the safety of hidden capitals and PCs.]

My philosophy: You're not alone in the world, so don't assume you will be. Even if you join a non-team game, there will be 7, 8, 9, or even 11 other nations of your allegiance. I would build a nation that was very good at one thing rather than try to build a nation good at several things. Here are my steps for designing a nation.

- 1) Choose an alliance.
- 2) Decide what type of character I want to specialize in.
- 3) Select the race (if alliance matches) that gets a discount on 60 characters of that class.
- 4) Choose SNAs that enhance this strength: (most important). Make sure they will be used frequently and effectively. Once you choose these, they can't be taken away. Once the game starts, you can't get any you passed on. Hidden pop. centers can be revealed. Artifacts can be lost and found (verbs, not adjectives or a noun). Ships and war machines can be built or destroyed. The ability to scout at double rank, buy and sell at 20% adjustment, or get a +20 to assassinate/kidnap orders can't be lost or gained. Don't choose SNAs just because they are only selectable by your race. Troops start at 25 training rank is poor, so don't select it. Especially if you're selecting Elven because you want to specialize in Mage or Naval power.
- 5) Select sites for population centers.
- 6) Make pop center modifications to match gold needs and location demands.
- 7) Characters: (second most important). I'd take two 60s of whatever class you get a discount on. Make the most of this opportunity. If I decided on play an agent nation, I'd get stealth on at least one of my 60 agents. For a non-agent, non-non-human, nation, I'd take two 40 agents rather than a 50 or 60. There will be very few agents that can defeat a 40 guard at the start of the game. Since mages train so slowly, don't cut corners here. Do your best to scrape up the cash to get a 50. Unless Dwarven, only get a 60 commander to use as an artifact hunter. You had better have a good mage to do the locates. Better to have several good characters than one great one.

This is just my opinion, but I welcome feedback.

[ed. note: Yes, an excellent idea! The above article offers some good 'food for thought'. What do the rest of you 4th Age experts think? Do you agree, or disagree, or do you have an article that you wish to submit?

## A Story of Retribution in The Fourth Age

by  
Eric Gallant

The war with the Pelorians lasted 3 months. In that short period of time the Pelorians lost 4000 heavy infantry and 300 heavy cavalry. In their cowardly plan to ambush the nation of the Saratani the Pelorians lost their own Kingdom. The Pelorians lost not because their armies failed but because their King did. He had forgot his greatest strength as a King, diplomacy. Where his troops went to capture Saratani holdings they were met by superior forces well armed and mounted. It was diplomacy that had provided those horses and steel. When the warnings went out of the backhanded dealings of the Pelorians, a great cry went up amongst the other nations. Treachery would not be tolerated in the new world. So they sent steel, mounts, leather for harnesses, food for the hungry and gold for the Saratani people. Covert forces were sent to protect Saratani holdings and Nobles. Sabotage and theft were visited upon the Pelorians' towns like the plague.

Three months, that's all it took to force a King from his throne. The Pelorians' King died a pauper. His people are now subjects of the Saratani, and they were happy to be rid of his Lordship.

Now the High King of the Saratani looks East. East to where the Kingdoms lie. East to where victories are to be won. East to where death may await.

Already the High King has ordered his patrols to ride further East. The West secure, the King looks over his new maps. New holdings he has discovered. These maps are updated every fortnight by his people and invaluable they will become. Should he concentrate even further East or maybe South? But he has to stretch his resources and his reports from the West dwindle and he is blind there now.

Rumors abound in his Kingdom. One rumor appears to be true. Yes, it is confirmed by his most trusted double-agent. The Twin Kingdoms now enjoy the luxury of commanding more nobles and heroes. His own staff pushed to the limit, the Saratani King wonders how the Twin Kingdoms can manage so many. With more Army Commanders, Diplomats, Covert Agents and Mages, the Twin Kingdoms will be a formidable foe for any nation, perhaps even for two or three nations.

The King of the Saratani looked out over his land and saw that it was strong. The nation he built from an idea. People believed in him and so they followed him, even fought for him. He chose his advisers well, his allies even better. He knew all of these things would be put to the challenge for there were many young nations like his vying for rule, and there were the Twin Kingdoms to deal with. Many things to ponder in the dawn of this new age.

## The Hall Of Heroes

ME-PBM circa 2950

Game #17 - The Free Peoples: #24, #8, & #21.

With holy fury, the Free Peoples have united to drive the bringers of famine, death, and plague from their lands. Of the five neutral nations, the White Wizard, the Corsairs, and the Dunlendings chose the path of light while their steadfastly neutral brethren perished in the wallows of indecision. The wars are finally over and peace has been secured . . . or has it?

Final standings are as follows:

#24 White Wizard - 2100: James E. Drysdale  
#8 Dwarves - 2033: Sheldon Campbell  
#21 Corsairs - 1750: Payton Turpin

Top Dark Servant: #16 Ice King - 725

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Dáin II/Dwarves: 253  
Highest Net Commander Rank - Dáin II/Dwarves: 190  
Highest Net Agent Rank - Lisselle/Noldo Elves: 139  
Highest Net Emissary Rank - Calmuad/Dunlendings Gríma Wormtongue/White Wizard Felana/Riders of Rohan Bjornling/Woodmen Boulder-mouth/Dwarves Elentari/Dunlendings Quentelpe/Noldo Elves Hammernose/Dwarves Rulart/White Wizard Emisery/Blind Sorcerer: 100  
Highest Net Mage Rank - Tharúdan/Sinda Elves: 131  
Most Mithril - Dwarves: 2518  
Most Artifacts - Dwarves: 22  
Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 52  
Final Turn - 57

Congratulations to the Free Peoples!

Game #30 - The Free Peoples: #22 & #10.

War has ravaged Middle-earth, filling her skies with black smoke and the screams of the dying. The utter force of the conflict has sent all but three nations spiraling into oblivion. Of these, the Rhûn Easterlings and the Noldo have managed to secure victory over the last of Sauron's minions. An uneasy silence has settled over Middle-earth, as if all the world were holding its breath in anticipation of what were to come next . . .

Final standings are as follows:

#22 Rhûn Easterlings - 2400: Corey Dightman-Kovak  
#10 Noldo Elves - 2400: Clifford S. O'Connor

Top Dark Servant: #15 Blind Sorcerer - 1108

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 372  
Highest Net Commander Rank - Ascarnil/Noldo Elves: 163  
Highest Net Agent Rank - Glaurung/Rhûn Easterlings: 154  
Highest Net Emissary Rank - Wynett/Rhûn Easterlings: 100  
Highest Net Mage Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 306  
Most Mithril - Noldo Elves: 3035  
Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 35  
Most Kills - Rhûn Easterlings: 33  
Final Turn - 46

Congratulations to the Free Peoples!

## The Hall Of Heroes

Game #41 - The Dark Servants: #24, #21, & #12.

Sauron's laughter rolls through Middle-earth and his unblinking Eye looks over a landscape torn and brutalized by his most faithful Servants--the converted nations of the White Wizard and the Corsairs, as well as the mighty Dragon Lord. Those most faithful to his cause have earned the right to oversee his new reign of terror.

Final standings are as follows:

#24 White Wizard - 2100: Aaron Bourg  
#21 Corsairs - 2017: Drew T. Carson  
#12 Dragon Lord - 1867: Eric J. Gallant

Top Free People: #8 Dwarves - 525

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Saruman the White/White Wizard: 272  
Highest Net Commander Rank - Bone Snapper/Witch-king: 116  
Highest Net Agent Rank - Jí Indûr/Dragon Lord: 112  
Highest Net Emissary Rank - Jacinth/Dragon Lord: 120  
Highest Net Mage Rank - Saruman the White/White Wizard: 230  
Most Mithril - White Wizard: 3300  
Most Artifacts - Witch-king: 16  
Most Kills - Dragon Lord: 14  
Final Turn - 32

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

Game #48 - The Free Peoples: #10, #4, & #9.

The voices of the Free lift to the sky in glorious harmony, singing the praises of those who were responsible for the eradication of the foul taint of Sauron. The knowledge that their efforts brought peace and a life free of Shadow lift their spirits even as the efforts of rebuilding a war-torn land rests on their shoulders.

Final standings are as follows:

#10 Noldo Elves - 2150: Christopher M. Day  
#4 Dúndan Rangers - 1850: Ricky Johnson  
#9 Sinda Elves - 1849: Mark G. Jaede

Top Dark Servant: #15 Blind Sorcerer - 500

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Helkama/Sinda Elves: 269  
Highest Net Commander Rank - Gothmog/Dark Lieutenants: 158  
Highest Net Agent Rank - Elrohir/Dúndan Rangers: 121  
Highest Net Emissary Rank - Erester/Noldo Elves: 93  
Highest Net Mage Rank - Helkama/Sinda Elves: 224  
Most Mithril - Dwarves: 2384  
Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 22  
Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 20  
Final Turn - 25

Congratulations to the Free Peoples!