

WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



**GAME
SYSTEMS
INC.**

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WORDS FROM THE WOOD

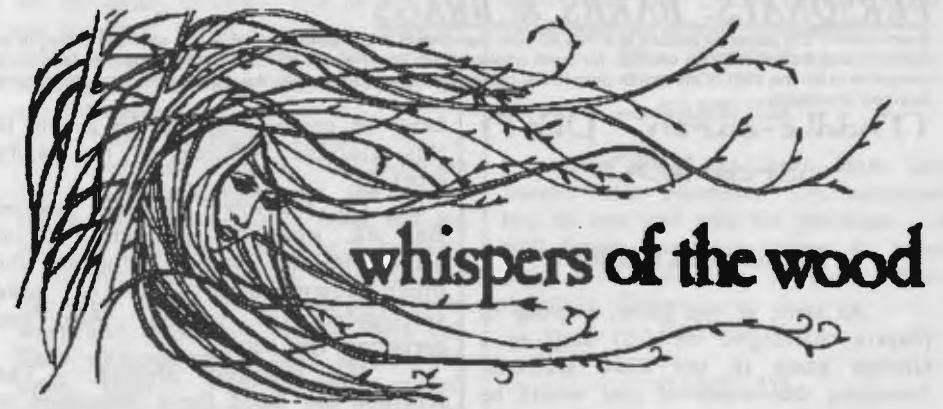
You know, among the great mysteries of the world, the biggest enigma facing man is--woman. You ever notice that, when you're single, women avoid you like the plague. If you were the last man on earth, they would have nothing to do with you. As soon as you get a girlfriend, however, you suddenly become the hunted and it's open season. I have a theory about this (could you doubt otherwise?). See, I believe that all women have this invisible stamp. When you start going out with a woman, she stamps your forehead with this stamp. Essentially, this lets all of the other women know that you are involved. Thus, they all hit on you heavily. Like Noah in his ark, the deluge hits you for forty days and forty nights. Of course, if you do take one of these "offers," the woman will stamp your forehead with another stamp. This is so your girlfriend will find out about the affair. As a result, you lose your girlfriend, the woman you cheated with leaves you because you no longer have a girlfriend, and you are right back where you started. Ahh, life is grand.

Well, the Fourth Age scenario is coming along nicely. The first playtest game has begun and the second game will be starting soon. We have received a lot of good suggestions, and the game hasn't even started yet! We have already made some adjustments based on these suggestions. We at GSI are very excited about the new game and look forward to bringing you more reports and, eventually, another excellent game!

The Contest of Champions has ended! That's right, the 1650 Contest of Champions is now at an end. It ended, appropriately enough, with the disposal of the One Ring. There is a write up on the game in this issue, written by one of the players (the game winner, in fact). Those of you who are interested should take a look. Which brings us to the 2950 Contest of Champions. We are still taking resumes and applications for the game. If you are interested in a highly competitive game, you should send in those applications. Anyone who was involved in the 1650 Contest of Champions will be granted a free set-up in the new Contest of Champions, so why not join up? Contact GSI if you are interested in getting involved.

Hey, there's this hot new CCG out there that everyone's talking about. What is that card game, you ask? Why, it's Middle-earth: The Wizards. That's right, ME:TW is one of the hottest games going right now, and GSI has the cards for you. We have a very limited supply of the Limited cards, so if you want some of these hot cards, inquire with us. The Unlimited cards are also now available and GSI has them for you. We can also get you a copy of the Middle-earth: The Wizards Companion. This is a reference and resource book for use with ME:TW. Included are the rules, play examples and clarifications, a complete list of all the limited edition cards featuring cross references for cards that can be directly or indirectly associated for combination plays and, best of all, a selection of scenarios developed for playing out specific storylines in the Middle-earth setting! If this sounds like the hot item just for you, get in touch with us and we'll be happy to get a copy out to you.

May is here, and that means one thing--summer conventions! That's right, it's convention time and GSI will be attending both Origins and GenCon this year. We will be holding seminars at both conventions, where we will be discussing both of the ME-PBM scenarios we have as well as the new Fourth Age scenario.



ALONG THE PATHWAYS

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This Month's Cover: "Balrog Unleashed" by Bryan Chapman

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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

GSI GRUDGE GAME

As some of you know, a group of players challenged the GSI staff to a Grudge game in the 2950 scenario. Assuming that many of you would be interested in the progress of such a mammoth undertaking, we have been able to engage the services of a front-line news team to carry word of the battle back to you. Let's listen in.

This is Gloria Price for PBM News reporting to you live from the front lines of what some are calling an all-out war between the rampaging forces of the tyrant Elrond and the Peoples Liberation Forces of the Dark Lord. We have tracked down several of the Dark Lord's commanders outside of the major town of Shrel-Kain. Towering above us as we speak is the military tower of Shrel-Kain from which we can hear the cries of captured prisoners as they are tortured by Northmen interrogators to learn more about the liberating armies. Ah, here is Captain Grishnakh of His Lord's expeditionary forces.

"Captain, may we have a few words from you on the course of this war? For the anxious people back home?"

"Certainly, Miss Price. I have a few minutes to spare while we await word from the council of Shrel-Kain. But, please, don't fall prey to the false and misleading accusations of Elrond's minions. This is no war. This is rebellion by the people against years of unwanted Elven and Dwarven tyranny which has corrupted the land and betrayed its people. It is only thanks to our Gracious Lord that we

have the courage to lead the people in this glorious righting of the land's woes."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize. But, uh, what did you mean about waiting for the council? You and the other commanders seem to have surrounded the town. Are you preparing for battle?"

"We probably should. The rebellion has faced fierce opposition in this area around the sea of Rhûn from the lackeys of the Elven tyrant, the Northmen, and from the hated Dwarves themselves. Even now we have heard that the Northmen and Dwarves have attacked another undefended and peaceful settlement, killing and murdering all of the men, women, and children who lived and toiled there. It is said that the bodies were burned and the Dwarves raked through the ashes to find bits of gold and silver from the remains. Oh, it was ghastly! But that's what we have come to expect from Elrond and his toads. And although we have surrounded this town, we have asked the town council to peaceably see our position and respect the love and desire that our Lord has for their people and to cast out their oppressors and lawfully join with us in our struggle. We await their response."

"Wow. I just hope that the people at home realize what a struggle is being waged here for their benefit from you courageous commanders of the Dark Lord. Oh, wait, here comes a messenger now. Perhaps it's the answer you've been waiting for. But what if they don't agree? What will happen then?"

"Well, Miss Price, then we will attack the oppressors themselves in their cursed tower, but we will let the people remain totally unharmed. We are not here to harm the very people

we are trying to save. But let me read the message, please."

(Captain Grishnakh reads message. He turns to one of his subordinates.)

"Have the bugles sound."

"Captain, what is it? Why are the bugles sounding and the troops lining up in columns? What did the message say? Will there be a battle?"

"No, no, my dear. The council has seen the error of their oppressors' ways and they have thrown them out. They welcome us as their saviors with open arms. The bugles merely announce the jubilation with which we greet their decision. And now, Miss Price, you must be escorted to another location for your personal safety. Even though the people have seen their true friends, there are always a few malcontents to worry about. But you will be safe to deliver the truth about today's actions."

This is Gloria Price. The gallant actions of the Dark Lord Commanders continue to rain praise upon the Dark Lord himself for the unselfish and chivalrous actions taken for the benefit of this land's peoples. The armies have high morale and look forward to punishing the ravenous hordes of the Northmen and the despicable Dwarves. I myself have decided to move into even more dangerous territory now that this area seems secure. As always, PBM News will bring you the unvarnished TRUTH about what's happening in our land. Till next time, support the People's Rebellion!

Gloria Price
Somewhere about the Sea of Rhûn

GAME 103

The long war comes to a close. The wreckage of the Dark Servants lie scattered across Middle-earth as the Free scour the land for the remaining bastions of Darkness. Master, your foes hold your ring and the final act

approaches. But I shall never submit! There shall be terror, fire, darkness . . .

Rhys, the Fire King

GAME 125

The ring has been cast and Sauron rules supreme. Out numbered two to one and still we prevailed. A well fought campaign lasting 61 turns. Glad it's over, now to chase down renegade Freeps.

Zarendarger

GAME 178

Sneaker and your teammates, would you guys speak up and make this campaign of ours more interesting in the pages of Whispers. I'm doing my part though there's not much to talk about.

Zarendarger

GAME 181

Dark Servants,
Go toward the light!
No more darkness, no more night.
Save your honor for another game,
we have won in all but name.

The desert is your only home.

Bain
El & the Vaders

GAME 182

I've waited over 15 turns for you yutzes who claim to be Dark Servants to kill me. Since you apparently are colossally incapable of doing so, I fear I must take the offensive and do so to you.

Sincerely,
Marshal Thranduil
Lord of Mirkwood

GAME 190

My compliments for a game well played! Your resistance was fantastic and with support you could have plunged Mirkwood into total darkness.

With your fall Mirkwood is hidden from Sauron's view and Mordor itself comes under attack. You were a bloody thorn in our side, and they should mourn your passing...

Rhys
Rhudaaur

The loss of some towns is not going to slow me down. In fact, I intend to move faster. I know the real enemy and I am coming!

I will no longer be sidetracked. If I fall, my kinsmen shall carry on. We shall do to you what was done to us and when we are through, we will use your sharpened bones to pick our teeth!!

Never have we seen a group of people without honor such as you! Lies flow as easy as water. We shall avenge the deaths of our comrades.

Lord Delagurth
Broggha Slayer

GAME 197

One day in the reconstituted North-Kingdom...

"Sire! A message from the capital, Fornost Erain. We have visitors!"

"What! Oh no, Jí Indûr and Khamûl are there. Quick, bake them a cake. Cook! Where did you put the arsenic?"

Unhappy Rulers of Arthedain

GAME 203

Blood and fire fall at Morannon. The Woodmen and Dwarves' war one with another. Deep in the deserts of Mordor, Akhôrâhil dreams of the One, not knowing that double agents watch his every move. Gothmog and Úvatha play cat-and-mouse with what remains of the Free, and over all, the Grey King laughs and laughs and laughs and laughs....

GAME 205

Aredhel turned back and made his way down the dangerous road between dark windy valleys. His tattered robe flapped painfully into his face as the dark winds raged. His Lord Master had spoken, and his wrath was great. Sniffing the salty air, Aredhel spoke. "The time has come. Let the second phase begin." Shadows moved swiftly away.

GAME 209

"Our enemies approach, my lord."

"Yes, I can see the smoke of the battle from here. Begin the evacuation, son. We must at least allow our people the chance of survival. Our fate will be decided within these walls."

"As you wish, father. I will inform you when the enemy is near."

Orillion Darkblade

Firdance: My Lord, you were right. The winter is over and our nation has gained much.

Hoarmûrath: I told you my child that sitting idle by the fires would only leave us fat and lazy. Now we are strong.

Firdance: What will we do now my Lord?

Hoarmûrath: We shall see.

GAME 212

A swift death to some trolls at Carn Dum left the Wuss King with three large armies to contend with. One more turn of residence for Er Murazor in Angmar and plans for three nations shall be focused elsewhere. My what a long march.

Hallas

Dendra and his young apprentice gazed intently. The object of their concern was a huge map of Middle Earth and the small, black, elongated cylinder shaped object wiggling upon it. For months it had either rested in the western pass of Mordor or had slimed its way slightly east.

"What do you think it's doing?"

"Well, Sire, one can never be completely sure but it appears the Wurm is turning."

Meanwhile in the Royal Court of Hallas: "What do you think, Doc?"

"Your majesty is suffering from braggest-the mostest-inflammationist."

"Huh?"

"You've beaten your poor little bony chest so hard you've broken three ribs and numerous venules. My best medical advice is an apple a day-to be placed in your mouth and left there."

High Plains Drifter

Rejoice fellow Free! The major town fort of Mt. Gram & city castle of Carn Dum have fallen to Free soldiers. The Witch King of Angmar has been expunged! No longer will his leperness defile our lands in Eriador. The light grows brighter my brethren.

Hallas

GAME 228

Faltur: My Lord Angamaite. Our massive army grows bored by the year. Sir we must attack something or else our swords will rot away.

Angamaite: You're right! But what to attack! I need time. Tell the troops to kill the men-at-arms. They're worthless in battle anyway.

Faltur: <Gulp> Yes sir!

Angamaite: Neutrals never dominate events. They always sink. Blood alone moves the wheel of history.

Mahrcared and Uirdiks stood at the far end of camp, surveying the corrals.

The wounded?" asked Mahrcared.

"Being cared for" Uirdiks replied.

"The dead?"

"The ceremony is at sunset."

"Good, they fought well and brought honor to their clans. Now for the big problem, what do we do with all these... dogs". Mahrcared asked.

"Gisulf thought they might make good hunting dogs." replied Uirdiks.

"But they are giving our horses fleas!"

"They got them from their masters."

"These mutts are barely trained."

"So were their masters." Both leaders chuckled.

"O.K.," Mahrcared decided, "we will give it a try. We can always use them for target practice if it doesn't work." Uirdiks smiled a very cold smile.

"Just like the Dog Lord troops that rode them." It was a good day to be alive.

GAME 231

Ahhh... the Spring air, birds in the meadows, the rotting husks of Úvatha's precious heavy cavalry force...

I love the Spring! The cool waters of Rhûn lapping against the shore, no sign of Úvatha's fleet...

Almost too good to be true, Isn't the Bird Sorcerer due to show up-before he bankrupts himself? Just wondering.

Rhys

GAME 232

So far the Easterlings have only received threats from the Dark Servants. You guys must be fans of Dale Carneige.

GAME 235

The long watch on Mordor begins again. We sit on the doorstep to resist the evil that pours from its gates.

Do not despair, for we will fight them to our last dying breath. Deal with your enemies soon, or if you have none, send your forces soon! Together we will bring this evil time to an end.

King Tarandor

Middle-earth™ PBM
circa 2950

GAME 20

Good news sir, our economy is back on track and Marshal Tonn Varthkur is threatening everything in sight. Goblin Gate should succumb this week.

"I always knew his ugliness would come in handy."

Dendra Dwar Thought

GAME 26

Not even the Khand Easterlings can save the Dark Servant campaign in Rhûn. Cause a delay in our advance maybe, but nothing more. Party at Durthang, time to trash the place.

Zarendarger

GAME 33

To all Freeps- It would seem the end game approaches, agents and emissaries roam freely throughout Mordor. Nothing is safe. My lord Sauron will have his vengeance. Well

played to all-except to certain Dark Servants who were outlasted by a first time player exiled by all Nazgul but a few. Sauron will have no pity.

Storm Bringer
Dark Lieutenants

GAME 35

Elves and Dwarves oh my! Elves and Dwarves will die! If the last couple turns were your best shot...well not bad. The next few turns will be messy...real messy. Let's play!

The New Dog Lord

GAME 41

Greeting to all Dark Servants (now including the Corsairs) Summer's on the way so its time to turn up the heat. Mordor's gonna burn- I'm coming for ya.

Storm Bringer

GAME 42

Ren was constantly amazed at the folly of others. The East was Dark, Mirkwood conquered, Gondors crippled, West held in check, but the Corsairs attack his allies in the South. Was this bravery or stupidity? This very day would see the death of Sangarunya and the taking of two towns by the Dark. The pirates would realize their error.

GAME 50

Wow! How many dead Free People already 1,2,3,... well don't stop counting now were gonna keep your fingers busy. Don't send any unwanted characters to one of our holdings... we'll take care of the rest! Eternal rest that is!

Storm Bringer

To the FP fool who is sending messages in my name: Thank You!

GAME 52

Servants of Sauron:

We, the collective Free, acknowledge your terrible stench. We also admit that yes, you all win the most obvious award and the overall ugliest award. We will not cower at your behest. Rather, we will stomp your ugly faces into the ground. Prepare!

The Fellowship

Your juvenile and idiotic attempts at ruining my good name have backfired! I now have the phone numbers of all DS in the game and we are communicating regularly. Our efforts to destroy you will go much more smoothly now.

Khamûl-The Dragon Lord

Thoughts from the Contest of Champions

as seen by the Cloud Lord

Things had been rather quiet in the Cloud Lord realm for several months. The accursed Free Peoples had obtained the ONE RING twice and twice they let IT slip from their fingers. Now the armies of the Dark Lord were marching to victory after victory in the realm of Arthedain. Could a military victory be within reach?

Little Ji thought otherwise from his hiding place deep in Mordor. As best he could tell, there had been severe attrition to Sauron's minions. All of the Nazgul had been destroyed & only 4 nations still served Sauron. On the other hand, the Free Peoples counted 8 nations among their faithful. Little Ji knew it would only be a matter of time before Sauron would be forced to submit a second time, unless...

"Bring our best mages to me," said Little Ji. "Have Ar-Gular, Shoglic, and Volog brought before me," he demanded.

"But, Sir," one of the lowly servants whispered, "Ar-Gular died from the strange disease which killed your father."

"Very well then, send for the other two mages at once," he said.

The two mages were brought before the terrible lord. Shoglic and Volog had served Ji Indur faithfully for many years. They knew how demanding Ji Indur had been and his son was no less demanding. Many said he was worse because he had something to prove.

"Find the ONE and find it now. If anyone in our realm can find the ONE, it is the two of you. Don't come back until you have IT. Any questions?"

The mages knew better than to ask any questions.

Shoglic and Volog went to work immediately. They sought out all the lore on the whereabouts of the ONE. Within a few days, they were able to find the approximate location of the ONE. Little Ji was notified immediately.

"Well, what are you doing here, you imbeciles! Go get IT."

Off went Shoglic and Volog to the desert wastes of Harad. It was a bitter pill to swallow. After all the faithful years of service, it had come down to this. Nevertheless, the mages knew the price of failure...

Two months passed and the mages were unable to obtain the ONE.

"Are you sure IT is here, Shoglic? Could you have been mistaken?"

"No, I'm not sure. Maybe this vile Elven ring I've been using all these years has been a trick of the enemy. I'll try to find IT again."

Shoglic convinced himself that the ONE was in the desert & ordered more heroes to the desert to help unearth the ONE out of the dunes of Harad. Time passed & still no sign of the ONE. Word of this repeated failure was sent to Little Ji.

"Very well, then, I'll have to get the ONE myself," thought Little Ji.

Little Ji went to the desert to visit with his fellow mages. "It seems like you can't get good help anymore," Little Ji pouted, as he tried to maintain concentration on the ONE. "Dig here," he said, pointing to an unusual coloration in the sand. Within a few hours, they had found the ONE.

Little Ji took the ONE and pondered how to return it to his master before the Free Peoples discovered the ONE had been found a third time. "There is no time to waste," he said. "Prepare the wagons, we are going to Barad-Dur tonight. Summon all of the heroes to the Dark Tower."

Within a fortnight, nearly all of the heroes in Little Ji's employ were within sight of the tower. Unfortunately, few of the heroes of the other servants of Sauron had arrived in time. To make matters worse, his spies had discovered a score or more of Free Peoples heroes in the area. Most of them were known assassins. And if there was one thing Little Ji knew anything about, it was assassinations.

"Guard me, I'm going in there to return IT to Sauron. If I don't make it, you are all free from my service."

"But, sir," pleaded Shoglic, "what if the enemy agents target Volog and myself. Surely our faithful years of service rate some sort of protection."

"Use your magic to protect yourselves. I don't think it likely the enemy will target anyone who does not carry a knife. I suggest that you serve up some sort of strange disease to one of our guests. Aethelan has been a sore in my side for a number of years."

At that Little Ji turned and began the long climb. Before he was halfway up the mountain side, Amroth of the Sinda Elves stepped into the middle of the road and challenged Little Ji for the right to be there. Little Ji hesitated for a moment, but he knew there was no choice but to fight the Elven Mage.

Before the contest began, he slipped on the Elven ring Shoglic had recently given him. He also remembered the warning Shoglic issued about how he was unsure as to whether the Elven magic would work on a servant of the Dark Lord. Little Ji also knew that without the help of the Elven magic he stood no chance against a mighty opponent such as Amroth.

It was almost too easy. Little Ji pushed Amroth off a cliff to win the fight. Perhaps it was a bit cowardly, but as his father had taught him a long time ago, "The winners write the history books, son."

The remainder of the trip was uneventful. Little Ji climbed the rest of the way without incident. He was unaware of anything behind him. He kept going forward until he found HIM. Little Ji gave Sauron the ONE and turned to go back to his heroes. Surely there would be great rewards for his minions.

Little Ji returned to his faithful and discovered that nearly half of his heroes had been butchered by the Free People assassins. It was a tragic loss, but fewer survivors meant a larger share of the spoils for him. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Shoglic and Volog coming to greet him...

ANYONE CAN QUIT!

Anyone can quit! Yes, that's right. Anyone. I would like to take this opportunity to expound just a bit, if I may, upon those two famous little words, "I quit!"

Anyone can quit. It takes no special skill to quit a game of Middle-earth. It does not take any special education to quit (All of you college professors/students out there take notice!). It does not take any extraordinary understanding of strategy and tactics to invoke those two little words. No, as a matter of fact, anyone in the entire world can utter them. Thus, if you do decide to quit, you have done nothing to distinguish yourself, so that you stand out in the faceless crowd of PBmers. By quitting, you assume not the mantle of leadership, but rather, you relegate yourself to the realm of the common place and ordinary.

Anyone can quit. If you play the game only because you know you can win, then what is the point of playing at all? A game of Middle-earth should be looked upon as a challenge. Indeed, as an opportunity to demonstrate what you can do when the chips are down. Any coward can quit when the going gets tough. Any loser can quit when things don't go their way. However, it is when things begin to turn sour that one should find the most reasons to stay in a game of Middle-earth, for it is then, and only then, when one may truly find that ever-elusive opportunity to overcome adversity, and to prove that they are truly worthy of ruling their respective kingdoms. You have willingly assumed the role of leadership of a given race/people in a world of fantasy. Will you depart this world, as we all must at some time or other to return to the real world, and go down in the annals of its history as one of its greatest leaders, or as yet another of its quitters?

Anyone can quit. There is a world of difference between losing a game of Middle-earth and quitting a game of Middle-earth. There is no shame in losing, only not trying. Even in the midst of final defeat, one can often times find many small victories to cherish forever and a day. Indeed, it is those moments which we will remember far after we even forget your name, but they rarely, if ever, forget their most-resolute foes.

Anyone can quit. Yes, it would be so simple, and your game position improved enormously, if that one little thorn in your side would quit. But then what? It is that one little thorn which has dared to disrupt your best laid plans. It is that one little thorn which frustrates you and your army commanders to no end. If he/she is such a "little thorn," as you describe them, then why not pluck them and be done with them, 'O great and powerful One? Why not? I'll tell you why not. Because for all of your vast and boundless knowledge of every strategy and tactic ever conceived by the human mind, and for all of your numerous and powerful armies, and for all of your talented characters, you are virtually powerless to pluck this little thorn. Why? Because this little thorn is resolute. He/she will not quit, come hell or high water. Indeed, they have become quite attached to their "people" in this game, and one must begin to wonder whether they actually think that the game is for real, so dedicated is this little thorn.

Anyone can quit. Why even bother looking for an excuse? You seek to blame your own failures as a leader upon others. It is never your fault that you failed, is it? It could never possibly be that you are not the greatest player that ever lived after all, could it? Just as in the real world, the leaders of the nations of Middle-earth always seem to have some lame excuse for their pathetic failures. There is no greater failure than in becoming a quitter.

Anyone can quit. There are times when one must abdicate their throne, due to the loss of a job or some similar poor misfortune in the real world which has a direct bearing upon our ability to continue in the fantasy world of Middle-earth. However, each of you know in your hearts if your abdication is forced upon you, or if you abdicate quite willingly. If you lie to yourself in an attempt to "justify" your lack of will and dedication, then you are no less a liar than if you lie to another. Indeed, if one cannot be honest with themselves, who then shall they be honest with?

Anyone can quit. Yes, they can, but it is also true that anyone can try. Anyone can put forth what many of us call "effort." Even if you've quit in another game at some distant point in the past, that does not mean that you cannot redeem yourself by sticking it out in your current game or your next game. The mark of a true champion is striving against adversity and your own shortcomings, to achieve something worthwhile.

Middle-earth is a world of fantasy. It is said that in the realm of fantasy, all things are possible. Thus, how can one argue that it is impossible to continue the struggle against overwhelming odds? Indeed, what better time to take up the gauntlet against thine enemies, than when they pour over you like a tidal wave? Middle-earth is a world of magic, a world of covert undertakings, a world of imagination, populated by great personas known to one and all as "characters." You are not alone in your bid to alter forever the history of the greatest fantasy world of all time. Indeed, if the character you want does not exist in this fantasy world known as Middle-earth, you have it within your grasp to create this character.

It is not merely the fate of your own people which is at stake in Middle-earth, but rather, the fate of an entire world! In Middle-earth PBM, it is you, not J.R.R. Tolkien, who will determine how the "book" ends. Middle-earth was created by Tolkien in the inner-most depths of his seemingly boundless imagination. Through his great writings, he has given each of us a ticket into the theaters of our mind. PBM thrives, just as books do, because paper is not "dead," as many would have you believe. PBM will not die as long as there are those who possess an imagination.

Tolkien has given you a ticket. Game Systems, Inc. has given you an opportunity. Will you toss the ticket aside, and squander the opportunity? In the real world, if offered the opportunity to lead your people, your nation, would you take upon yourself the mantle of leadership, or would you leave the fate of your people to another, whose dedication to what you believe you know not? As such, why on Middle-earth would you ponder, even if only for just a moment, the possibility of quitting a game of Middle-earth PBM?

No one respects a great leader more than that person's enemy. While the people over which you rule in Middle-earth are not real, and you have no way whereby to truly gain their respect and admiration, the people you play with/against in the game you can earn the respect and admiration of.

While I am still fairly new to Middle-earth PBM, it is the most experienced and dedicated players whom I seek to compete against. It is not the win which I seek so much as the challenge. If quitting is an option, then winning is not. If I never quit, then winning is always an option. After all, even if when the end comes in a game of Middle-earth, if I am utterly crushed under foot by my enemies, a new game will await me.

Again, there is no shame in losing, only in not trying. Either lead, follow, or get the hell out of the way. There is no place for quitters here!

Death rides with me, for it fears to ride against me!!

Your little thorn, Charles Mosteller

The night seemed exceptionally dark to the thousands of tired and soiled foot soldiers gathered in clumps throughout the tortured, wooded area. The darkness was pleasing, though, revealing the full array of stars with no moon at all to disturb the view. Campfires could be seen, ringing a huge wood and stone barricade which in turn ringed a weirdly constructed major town, which itself had the sad duty of surrounding the high, forbidding keep of the king who had been human and was now known by the accolade Dragon Lord.

The scene was remarkably calm in light of the location. No evil army confronted the dwarves this night, unlike their previous visit. At that time, with the moon waxing full, Urgubal, minion of the Dragon Lord, led his army to crash in disaster against the armor and shields of the dwarven heavy infantry. Then, also, no friends had arrived. All had been kept for various good reasons closer to their own abodes. The forces of Sauron the Great were rising throughout Middle-earth and few had the luxury of a campaign abroad. The dwarves were an exception due to the strength of fortifications at Khazad-dum.

Now, though, Grand Warlord Bain I (he only yesterday having attained this rank) entertained Regent Amroth of the Sinda Elves around a low, fierce blaze. With them sat an unexpected ally, Regent Elatar of North Gondor. The young Elatar sat upright on an overturned log, looking uncannily like a close cousin of the handsome wood elf. Elatar had brought a small contingent direct from battle in the north of his lands, and had arrived in good order on the same day that the dwarven and elven armies arrived.

"But," stated Malantur, an inexperienced but highly energetic multi-talented dwarf and self-appointed guardian of Bain I, "the Eothraim said they would send cavalry! We heard from Gain and Thelor that the invaders were turned aside. Thelor force-marched through Mirkwood and, with another forced march can meet the Noldo at Goblin Gate within two weeks. Gain returned to the Iron Hills for recruiting and refitting. The Eothraim should be here."

Amroth and Elatar had the grace to remain silent during the dwarf's outburst, while Bain took in Malantur's statements with a serious demeanor. All fell quiet for more than a moment. It was Bain's wont to consider carefully his words, then utter few. Some thought it regal whilst others simply grew impatient. Malantur had difficulty waiting for his king's reply, but managed to do so.

"I admit concern for Captain Aluiric and his horse soldiers. Who knows what evil might have befallen them first on the road then the plains skirting the woods. We will, though, assault the fortress with or without them." Having used more than his usual allocation of speech, Bain ceased speaking.

Malantur was about to reply, and would likely have regretted his rash words, when a distant horn sounded, followed by one closer. Thrar and Falin remained quietly in shadows behind their king; having more than one agent guard Bain I seemed the only prudent action while at the very capitol of the Nazgul lord. Many others stood, joints and armor joints crackling on the way up. One horse approached, swiftly with a light load. The slight wood elf riding on the steed looked to be less than fifty pounds. It was clear the rider was a veteran, though, from the way his bow hung on the saddle near his right hand and from the lines on his fair face. He approached to within a dozen yards of the leaders' camp then swung effortlessly off his horse.

"Lord Amroth," he declared, bowing low, "and other leaders of the Free Peoples. Riders approach from the East. They have the look of the horse riders, some lightly accoutered and others heavily."

All looked to Bain for comment. Bain surprised not those who knew him well in saying only a single word: "Good."

The scout went on to announce the arrival of a Captain Aluiric, brother to the recently fallen Lord Mahrcared of the nation of Eothraim, with a small army of cavalry fresh from battle with the forces of the Long Rider. Thrar gave instructions to guide the horse riders to their already partially prepared camp, and to send Captain Aluiric to a strategy meeting as soon as he was available. He expected a long, grim night of planning. With the Eothraim and North Gondorian forces added to the dwarf-elf armies all could expect less casualties upon storming Dol Guldur, yet each leader knew many would still fall. The fire of battle would be on them soon enough; tonight there was more loathing than excitement.

Less than an hour later Aluiric came to the war council. He stood tall, a man who would have enjoyed the fair life of a noblemen with wealth and admiration, had it not been for the war brought on the by rise of the old evil. A deep scar, freshly wrought, lay across his left cheekbone. Aluiric brought news of events in the east, then all got down to local business.

Falin, Bain's Adjutant, said to the gathered captains "Remember what we agreed- CAPTURE, do not destroy. Have your soldiers do whatever is necessary to subdue the enemy quickly but do not set the fortress ablaze. We will certainly require it in the coming months."

"What tactics shall we use, Lord Falin?" asked Malantur.

"Let's hear from our allies on what is best." answered Falin.

It was a mercifully short meeting. All knew what to do, in fact had been preparing for this moment since before hostilities actually broke out. The troops were for the most part fresh, and the veterans would at least be rested before battle. With no orcish army facing them they had the luxury of days of preparation for the actual assault. As long as agents of the enemy were not quick with their knives...

THIS NEWS DELIVERED TO OUR ALLIES ON THE TWENTIETH DAY OF MARCH, 1650, THE FIRST YEAR OF THE WAR AGAINST EVIL.

BROTHERS

by
Zeus Ahern

"Glurk!"

What the hell was that? As I came running around the corner of the building, I slipped and skidded to a halt against the wall. It hadn't rained in days, what was that puddle doing the...oh no. Not another one.

Allow me to back up a bit. My name is Kasilon Monthodorus, Kas to my friends. I'm what I like to call an ambassador of my people, but what most of my nations enemies call at best a pain the ass and at worst a severe threat to their economic stability.

I was in town for a few days to try and convince the locals that their lord didn't really care about them, and that, with wars breaking out all around, my lord was much more capable of defending them. I also threw in a promise of

lower taxes and freedom from military conscription, and I just about had them in the bag. It's what I'm best at.

Unfortunately, the current lord of the area got wind of my presence, and decided to launch a little positive PR campaign of his own. One of my buddies tipped me to it, so I called home for reinforcements. Unfortunately, the boss decided to send my brother, Trin.

Don't get me wrong - I love my brother dearly. In his own field, he's as respected as I am in mine. However, his field is a little more problematical - he's a "re-education and re-assessment specialist" which is to say, he talks to people who are problems for our boss and solves the problem, usually with a lot of spilled blood. I'd say I slipped in that guy who'd been tailing me these last two days. Pity - he wasn't good enough for Trin to have bothered with. I was planning on having my own chat with him over breakfast.

One thing Trin is good at, though. Now that he's made his presence known, the city guard will be too busy calling in sick to bother me. And the raise in taxes to compensate for the revenue I know Trin's been lifting from the local banks will make my job all the easier. I just wish Trin wasn't so messy. I mean, granted, we do similar things to our enemies. But I feel taking entire towns and cities away without striking a single blow is much more effective and neater than eliminating individuals until no one's left to give orders. Trin and I always argued about this. "Go ahead!" he'd say, slamming his ale glass down on the table hard enough to crack it. "Condemn me because I take a more direct approach to victory! You take real estate and taxes from people - I take the people who collect the taxes. With no one to call the shots, they're going to collapse a lot faster than from you turning everyone against them!" He usually follows this up with a recitation of how many times he's saved my butt, or, if he's really steamed, how many people I "re-assessed" before moving on to stealing towns instead of cash.

As I pull myself up from the street, I get a good look at a crumpled pile in the corner. It's my tail, alright - looking just fine except for being a little pale. I clean myself off as best I can, and then head for the inn I've been staying at. Maybe a bath and a good night's sleep will clear my head - I really hate it when Trin does this.

Hi there. I thought before you really started to hate me, I should have a word with you. My little brother sometimes gets a little high and mighty about bloodshed.

My name is Trin. You can call me that if wish, or you can call me what everyone not working for my boss calls me - a goddamned #%#*(\$^#^*%^#%#!@& that ought to be skinned alive and used as a salt shaker. People tend to dislike me intensely, even violently, especially for the two or three seconds between when they realize I'm behind them and when I let them fall to the ground. Kas says I've become too mechanical, that I've sacrificed my emotions to become the perfect killing machine. I just think of it as a sacrifice I made to help my country. Emotions slow you down, and when killing the general while he's in mid stroke with one of his "camp followers," all without being seen, you can't afford to be slow. One time, after an argument with Kas, I went on a mission and was spotted coming out. I ended up having to kill all six guards as I left, which was very unprofessional.

Kas, though, can be one of the most annoying hypocrites I've ever known. I spent my first few tours in the service, training ground troops. He started with the strike groups, taking out lower echelon commanders and agents long before I started. He liked to go in for volume death - he'd give up a clean shot at his

target just so he could maybe catch him and two or three-hundred other people in the building or bridge collapse. By the time I joined the strike group, he'd moved on to "diplomacy". I guess he got bored when killing became too easy, and he thought he could do more damage this way. Maybe he's got a point. For me, though, it has to be personal - there's no honor in killing a man by starving him to death.

As I approach the inn, I see a familiar form lounging on the porch, pipe dangling from his mouth. He pushes off from the wall and joins me as I enter the inn.

"Quiet night?"

"Thanks to you."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Don't play innocent with me, brother. I saw the other three. I thought you didn't go in for this sort of thing anymore."

"What about the kid who was tailing me?"

"You must be slipping, brother - oh, wait, you did slip. I remember, because I thought you looked so funny sitting there."

"What makes you think I was slipping. I knew he was there - I just didn't think he posed a threat. I was planning on paying him a visit tomorrow."

"You'd have never had the chance. I took this off of him."

I unrolled the scroll Trin handed me. It was a letter of credit for ten thousand gold pieces upon delivery of my head. And it was made out to a man I thought dead for two years.

"You mean he faked his own death, just so people would stop hunting him? He used to revel in a good chase!"

"You really can be an idiot sometimes, Kas. I may be feared as the world's best assassin, but you've brought three kingdoms to their knees. Everyone wants you dead. They just had to come up with a price big enough to drag him out of retirement. I think you should be flattered - ten grand is a lot of money."

"Thanks for the pep talk - now what did you mean about the other three - I haven't done anyone since I've been here!"

"Well, then, we've got a probURKH!"

Oh, #\$\$**@!

(continued from front cover)

The Origins seminar will be held on July 5th at 6:30 PM. There will be two seminars at GenCon, and they will be held on Friday, 8/9, and Saturday, 8/10.

Both seminars will start at 8:00 PM. If you will be attending either (or both) of these conventions, we invite you to come out and discuss Middle-earth with us. We'll be discussing strategies, questions, secrets--everything you want to know about ME-PBM and the new scenario. We hope to see you there!

Just a few game needs this month. We have a 3 week 1650 game which is close to filling. We need neutrals for this game, so you diplomats should send in to join. We also have a 2950 one week all email filling. We have started several 1650 all email games and we're looking to fill the first 2950 all email game. If you're on the 'Net and want fast paced, furious action, this is the way to go.

That's it for this month. We'll see you again in thirty!

Stuart

The Hall Of Heroes

Game # 125 - The Dark Servants: #14, #11 & #4

Little Ji, the premier leader of the Cloud Lord, stood at the Crack of Doom. Excitement and anticipation made his heart race. With one simple act, the years of conflict and struggle would be at an end. His Master would take his rightful place as ruler of the land--and Little Ji would be at his right-hand side.

"Lord Sauron!" he shouted in the gloom. "I give you your legacy! Rise up and take your place as the greatest power in all the land! Throw aside your chains and bring a new Age to Middle-earth. This realm is now yours!" With that, Little Ji gave the One Ring to his Dread Lord. A great cataclysm ensued--lightning struck, fires raged, thunderclouds formed and burst--and the entire world knew--SAURON HAD THE ONE RING!!

#14 Cloud Lord: 2200

#11 Witch-king: 1900

#4 Arthedain: 1850

Top Free Peoples: #4 Arthedain: 1850

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Little Ji/Cloud Lord: 278

Highest Net Commander Rank - Durkarian/Witch-king: 140

Highest Net Mage Rank - Little Ji/Cloud Lord: 232

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Elona/Witch-king: 131

Highest Net Agent - Calmantir/Cardolan: 131

Most Mithril - Dunlendings: 1465

Most Artifacts - Witch-king: 21

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 28

(see p. 6 for a more detailed write up)

Game # 170 - The Dark Servants: #22, #14, & #20

Sauron chuckles with malicious glee and welcomes the Haradwaith, the Cloud Lord and the Dark Lieutenants as his regents in Middle-earth. All now bow to the new rulers and, in bowing to them, they bow to their ultimate master--Sauron, the Lidless Eye, the new overseer in Middle-earth. Final standings are as follows:

#22 Haradwaith: 1833

#14 Cloud Lord: 1783

#20 Dark Lieutenants: 1608

Top Free People: #23 Dunlendings: 1267

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Klavs Von Dûm/Cloud Lord: 209

Highest Net Commander Rank - Klavs Von Dûm/Cloud Lord: 177

Highest Net Mage Rank - Mûrazôr/Witch-King: 131

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Muranog/Dark Lieutenants: 115

Highest Net Agent - Gontran/Cloud Lord: 139

Most Mithril - Dark Lieutenants: 2064

Most Artifacts - Cloud Lord: 27

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 59

The Hall Of Heroes

Game #192 - The Dark Servants: #22, #23, & #25

In the first game of the new era, the Dark Servants, with considerable help from the Neutrals, have crushed the Free under their steel-shod boots. The Haradwaith, Dunlendings and Easterlings now stand highest in their foul Lord's esteem. Sauron's will now holds sway over Middle-earth. His Shadow blots out the Light and his Lidless Eye sees all. Final standings are as follows:

#22 Haradwaith: 1800

#23 Dunlendings: 1700

#25 Easterlings: 1467

Top Free People: #5 Cardolan: 1267

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 228

Highest Net Commander Rank - Gothmog/Dark Lieutenants: 120

Highest Net Mage Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 180

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Úrzahil/Dark Lieutenants

Roheryn/Haradwaith: 88

Highest Net Agent - Reaver of Souls/Ice King: 120

Most Mithril - Dog Lord: 330

Most Artifacts - Dark Lieutenants: 17

Most Kills - Long Rider: 8

Game #198 - The Dark Servants: #20, #21 & #23

Sauron's minions have spread throughout Middle-earth, dominating the land for their Dark Master. Under the tutelage of their most powerful leaders, the Dark Lieutenants, the Corsairs and the Dunlendings, the Dark Forces now spend their time turning the fair lands foul, remaking Middle-earth in their Master's image. Final standings are as follows:

#20 Dark Lieutenants: 2200

#21 Corsairs: 1983

#23 Dunlendings: 1967

Top Free Peoples: #8 Dwarves: 700

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Úrzahil/Dark Lieutenants: 268

Highest Net Commander Rank - Gothmog/Dark Lieutenants: 172

Highest Net Mage Rank - Úrzahil/Dark Lieutenants: 209

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Jatlh'ong/Witch-king: 114

Highest Net Agent - Dfn Ohtar/Long Rider: 143

Most Mithril - Witch-king: 591

Most Artifacts - Dark Lieutenants: 33

Most Kills - Corsairs: 8

Game # 220 - The Free Peoples: #7, #21, & #22

Under the leadership of Southern Gondor, the Corsairs and the Haradwaith, the Children of the Light have put a lance in the Lidless Eye, blinding Sauron forevermore. Sleep is much easier knowing the Dark One no longer haunts the dreams of the Free. Final standings are as follows:

#7 Southern Gondor: 1800

#21 Corsairs: 1450

#22 Haradwaith: 1284

Top Dark Servant: #14 Cloud Lord: 600

(continued)

The Hall Of Heroes

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 244

Highest Net Commander Rank - Ashdurbuk Zal/Witch-King: 101

Highest Net Mage Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 180

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Turin/Southern Gondor: 83

Highest Net Agent - Din Ohtar/Long Rider: 104

Most Mithril - Southern Gondor/Haradwaith: 180

Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 25

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 5

Game # 12 - The Free Peoples: #7, #22 & #8

Southern Gondor, the Rhûn Easterlings and the Dwarves rode at the forefront of the forces that brought the Light to every mountain top and every valley of Middle-earth, chasing the Shadow from the land and wiping the evil minions from the battlefield. Voices are raised in praise of the Valar who granted them the strength and fortitude to overcome the Lidless Eye's rising tide of evil. Final standings are as follows:

#7 Southern Gondor: 1984

#22 Rhun Easterlings: 1884

#8 Dwarves: 1766

Top Dark Servant: #14 Cloud Lord: 1600

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Elrond/Sinda Elves: 204

Highest Net Commander Rank - Bulrakur/Dog Lord: 146

Highest Net Mage Rank - Elrond/Sinda Elves: 157

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Hwana/Dwarves: 125

Highest Net Agent - Bill Ferny/White Wizard: 114

Most Mithril - Dwarves: 2435

Most Artifacts - Sinda Elves/Cloud Lord: 23

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 29

Game #20 - The Dark Servants: #16, #20, & #25

The Lidless Eye gazes over the war-torn land and feels a deep sense of satisfaction. Three of his own Servants--the Ice King, the Dark Lieutenants and the converted Khand Easterlings--now rule in his name and, in bringing misery to the surviving thorns who dared oppose him, make his victory over the sniveling Free even more delicious. His rule over Middle-earth now begins in earnest. Final standings are as follows:

#16 Ice King: 1709

#20 Dark Lieutenants: 1700

#25 Khand Easterlings: 1658

Top Free Peoples: #9 Sinda Elves: 1450

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Tónn Varthkûr/Dog Lord: 188

Highest Net Commander Rank - Tónn Varthkûr/Dog Lord: 150

Highest Net Mage Rank - Galadriel/Sinda Elves: 134

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Turack/Dunlendings: 125

Highest Net Agent - Bacchus/Dog Lord: 124

Most Mithril - Northmen: 2039

Most Artifacts - Dark Lieutenant: 23

Most Kills - Ice King: 18