

WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



**GAME
SYSTEMS
INC.**

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WORDS FROM THE WOOD

O.K. I'm 31. I realize that I'm no longer a spry youngster--or even a young spryster. I'm perfectly fine with the fact that I'm 31. I mean, who cares if I can't party till six in the morning and still make it into work? Who cares if most professional athletes are younger than I am (and making infinitely more money)? Who cares if I can't travel Europe and stay in youth hostels? Hey, I've got LEARNING! I've got WISDOM. That's right, my advancing years are offset by the myriad lessons I have learned that all you youngsters still have to experience. Things like maturity. Responsibility. And what works best for those times when you just aren't feeling regular. So I don't feel bad. Not at all.

Well, Origins has come and gone and it was a very exciting time for those of us here at GSI. Our seminar went well, with most of the excitement coming from discussion of the new Fourth Age scenario. The most exciting news came at the Origins Awards--where ME-PBM won the Best Play-By-Mail game of 1995! We're very proud of the reception ME-PBM has gotten and we only have you, the players to thank for our success. You were the ones who did the voting and so you were the ones who are responsible for our award. Our heartfelt thanks go out to all of you and we will work even harder to continue providing quality games and quality service!

One item we'd like to put to you players concerns the Hall of Heroes. GSI is considering printing the real names of the winners in the Hall of Heroes and we wanted to get your feedback on the matter. This way, the actual player gets recognition, rather than just the position and alliance. GSI will also be submitting the game winners to Paper Mayhem and American Flagship, so the winners will get further exposure. We think this would be a good way to further reward the winners--what do you think? We did it for this issue's Hall (see below) because of its special nature but we'd like to make it a regular feature. Drop us a line and give us your ideas on the matter--both pro and con. This is your newsletter and we want your feedback. So what are you waiting for?

Speaking of Hall of Heroes, this is the first month since I've been editor that we have not had any games end. As such, we will not have the normal Hall of Heroes. What we have is a Hall of Records--that is, we have the highest ranks, challenges, One Ring games, and so on. You should check it out to see where you stand against the best!

Just a quick convention update--GenCon is coming up and, as you know, GSI will be on hand to meet you and answer any questions you might have about ME-PBM in general or the Fourth Age scenario in particular. We will be in Booth #28 on the dealer's floor. We will also be holding two seminars--on Friday, 8/9, and Saturday, 8/10 (again, another shameless plug saying that this is my birthday!) at 8 PM. The event number is 700048 and we will be talking about the Fourth Age and ME-PBM in general. So if you're at the Con, make sure and stop by!

Game need time once again. The list really hasn't changed from last time--we are still filling a 1650 and 2950 one week all email game and we have a team of ten looking for either a Free People or Dark Servant team to take them on in a one week all email game. We are also looking for a Free People team for a 1650 and 2950 two week game. Those of you interested should contact GSI.

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

Stuart



ALONG THE PATHWAYS

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This Month's Cover: "Dark Ritual" 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

GAME 181

Sauron stood there mumbling to himself. "I had it all--10 servants, 4 neutrals--the world!"

He stuffed more socks into his suitcase. "Now I smell dwarf pony ding in the middle of Mordor, see huge armies of men, and free assassins." He tossed his glow in the dark tie in.

"I am not surrounded by idiots, but by good guys." Sauron left (the light on).

El & the Vaders
Dwarfs Rule!

GAME 195

Aonghas ponders the scroll found in the recently captured Mithlond-West, a message from the Dwarves.

"Captain!!"

"Sir!"

"Send a messenger to Elharian, tell him... let the dragons fly. Those words only, Captain."

"Yes, sir!"

Rubbing his temples Aonghas mutters., "hammers vs. daggers and still it saddens me...."

Orillion Darkblade

GAME 199

The Noldo own the Cardolan pops?? They were never active! The omnipotent Rhudaur once again show their true self. Are you sure you're not in league with the Noldo?? It would certainly seem so!

I'm sure your glorious lips will be flapping. I await every amusing pile that comes from them.

GAME 205

Only an ignorant mortal would say "The Nazgul are dead". In Mordor, the Nazgul survive at the will of Sauron. Killing the physical form does not kill the Nazgul. As you will soon learn! So blather all you can, but night has fallen on the east and is rolling west. Fall I might, but die you will!

Orillion Darkblade

GAME 212

The huge army under the banner of Cardolan lay camped on the plains just outside Thuningathost. The camp fires lit up the night sky like a thousand stars.

Carrog thought to himself how easy it was to get through these Cardolani "guards" as he silently approached the tent that bore the markings of "Hallas, Prince of Cardolan".

Carrog drew out his long knife and made a slit in the side of the tent just large enough for him to get through. He paused and listened. Nothing. He knew he had to be careful. His victim this night was insane and therefore unpredictable.

As Carrog slid through the opening, he saw the sleeping form of Hallas snoring away not three feet from where he was kneeling. Suddenly, Hallas moved. He rolled over in bed, sat up, eyes wide and yelled "I am the finest general in Middle-Earth. I am unstoppable. I'll have Sauron's head on a platter." He paused, suddenly he laid back and closed his eyes...for the final time.

The Warlord

"Where did that other donkey come from?" Dendra looked down into the city square where previously had been the masked rider.

"It's Hallas, Sire. Seems he miscast a spell trying to take the city and made a real donkey out of himself in the process."

High Plains Drifter

GAME 216

On the Old Forest Road in Mirkwood, as battle sounds faded and his army regrouped, Uvatha sneered down at the dwarf called Rick Boye. "Fool," he chuckled, "this debacle was your own doing. Did you truly think 1900 naked dwarves with wooden mallets had a chance against my metal-equipped warriors? I do believe you'll make a fine slave..."

GAME 223

"How goes the battle, my Lord?"

"Poorly, lad, still... the thrill of battle quickens the soul!! Come... our foe awaits!!!"

Orillion Darkblade

GAME 228

The 'beef' you were asking about last month is on your door step. It used to be Athaulf. Would you classify him as red or white meat?

Orillion Darkblade

GAME 235

My Lord, could it be we have the servants of the Dark on the run?

We shall see but let us not end our watch too soon. The war is far from over. Sound the charge, and we will continue to push forward.

Yes my Lord!

GAME 241

Regent Vinyaran proudly reviewed his knights and infantry before the walls of Minas Ithil. His mighty war steed cantered anxiously before the troops as cheers arose from the parapets of the town. He knew his men were confident and able, having recently arrived fresh at their new post from camps in Northern Gondor. After years of relative peace, stirrings from the depths of Mordor were becoming increasingly evident. Nazgûl and their filthy minions had been sighted more and more often. Was Sauron awakening? The Free Nations would not be caught unprepared. Vinyaran had been dispatched with the greatest army Northern Gondor could field to guard the western gate of Mordor. Tarondor, said by some to be the foremost of Northern Gondor's sons, had accepted a mission to travel to Barad Ungol, the capital of the Fire King's domain.

Vinyaran was interrupted in his reveries by a sudden silence which had fallen over all. The exuberance of the troops had been replaced by a tense unease, and the loyal populace appeared stunned. He cast a questioning glance at Hathaldir, whose brow was creased with worry. As he turned his mount, he saw multitudes pouring through the mountain pass from Mordor. Even at this great distance, vile forms of hated goblins, trolls, and orcs were discernible among their degenerate human collaborators. Traitors!

As the great army of the Fire King advanced toward Minas Ithil and the defending forces, a message arrived from the Gondorian camp with a personal challenge for Captain Uklurg issued by Regent Vinyaran. Laughing, Uklurg crumpled the missive in his mighty, sinewed fist and, tossing it aside, ordered the attack.

Orcs spilled down the mountainside toward the enemy position. Goblins poured through the ravines and trolls surged forward to join the fray. For their part, the Gondorian Knights spurred their war-horses upward to meet the onslaught, followed by their infantry.

Before the rushing waves of flesh could come together in a bloody clash, balls of cold amber light burst among the defending troops, sending bodies flailing and leaving death in their fading glow. The very air shimmered around several cohorts of the Fire King's minions as mystical barriers were thrown up by accompanying mages to protect their companions. Skargnakh rode forth with his glowing mace into the ranks of the Gondorian army, striking down foes to the right and left.

. . . . When the dust of battle had settled and carrion birds began to circle the great slaughter, Ren the Unclean strode forth among the dead and dying. Not a single warrior remained of Northern Gondor's largest army--all had fallen or fled.

"Where is this Vinyaran with his challenge?" he asked. No one answered as all eyes turned toward the walls of Minas Ithil, from which a mournful wail had begun to rise.

Kweo

Chronicles of the Third Age

Middle-earth™ PBM
circa 2950

GAME 26

Two Dark Servant armies are on the loose in the Rhovanion-Rhûn area. They are cut off from Mordor and Khand. Free People armies are tracking them and there's nowhere to go.

Zarendarger

GAME 43

A Cloudy Requiem

Lairathin, Mortibus, Zaken,
Thought gold was theirs to be taken.
Like many a thief,
They each came to grief.
And sleep now, never to waken.
Chronicler of Rohan

GAME 50

Let all who would be free rejoice! Murazor the king of Nazgul has been terminated. Galadriel, you have become greedy. Time to take a journey; a long one way trip. Sorry, allies. She had to go! Let all who read this know that Aragorn is not to be trifled with. You cannot take advantage of one who has the advantage! I've killed Ashburgnul, Celedhring and now Galadriel. Since none of my "allies" will help me, I'll help myself.

Strider

P.S. All hail the king!

Murazor, Angûlion, & Ashdurgnul are dead, the WK is reeling in the north! Celedhring is dead & his artifacts & the Ring of Wind are in FP hands. 2500 Dk Lt. troops are destroyed-things are going well.

Someone has taken my access to Southern Gondor by blowing the Bridge to Pelagir. I am now being forced to move north. Let it be known that any who do not bow before Sauron, which are in my path, shall fall before the Corsairs.

Sincerely Yours
Sangarunya

Writing Turn Reports, Part 1

by Sheldon Campbell

Disclaimer: What you are about to read is true, all of it. Every single word. Names have been omitted to protect the guilty, or to conceal the fact that I made most of it up. And I've only played an FP nation twice, and the Elves have been fine. Really.

Whether you talk with your teammates by Email, letters, 3x5 cards, the Psychic Hot Line (*my favorite*), or phone, one of the critical elements in your performance is coordination. If you provide your teammates with the information they need and vice versa, your chances of vaporizing that inbred mob of vicious swamp dwellers on the other team improve. A lot.

Here are 10 reasons to provide thorough turn reports:

1. To tell people that you're still alive. Dropped positions are the ultimate in lack of coordination, are appallingly common, and are a leading cause of brain hemorrhage among long-term ME-PBMers. Even if you're *really* busy, at least send a message that says: "Sorry gang, my dog died, my wife ran away with the plumber, all 6 kids got the bubonic plague, and they found toxic waste in the swimming pool. No report this turn, but I'm sending in orders, and if they delay my trial on the embezzling charges I'll be back with you next turn. Oops, I think the furnace is on fire again -- gotta run." It'll save your teammates endless stress, worry, and the expense of hiring someone to kill you when they think you've dropped without telling them.

2. To avoid stupid catastrophes. If you're playing the Ice King, and you and the Cloud Lord both raid Minas Tirith the same turn, and Ji Indur turns your best agent into a cooling pile of orc yummys, don't blame *me*. I warned you.

3. To avoid embarrassing duplication of effort. There's nothing more revealing than for your 2000 HC ST/ST army to show up at the same strategically worthless enemy village/tower as your ally's 500 naked HI. It reminds your teammates that you're playing for the WIN this time, just when you hoped they'd forgotten. Plus if he destroys it you don't get the pop center. Better to coordinate and tell him that his army is 'badly needed' elsewhere.

4. To be able to pull off really cool stuff that you couldn't do alone. Maybe together you and an ally have enough troops to torch an enemy capital. Maybe together you can make a curses squad. Maybe the Elves could spare an agent to keep you from losing your fifth army in a row to agents. Nah, that's too much to ask. But try anyway. Frustration builds character, and you could probably use it.

5. To help people who really need it. If you've got some commodities but can't recruit at the moment, mention it so someone who can make use of them can get them. And if you're down to your last gold piece and the 'huge' enemy cav army is a turn away and an ally's turn report says he located the Ring of Wind and Cloak of the Abyss on enemy characters 'at or near' your capital, tell

someone you've got a problem. The Blind Sorcerer will probably have some urgent artifact hunting to attend to, and the Cloud Lord will be mounting a 9 agent capital raid on Rhudaur, but what the heck. At least a few turns later when the Free are rampaging through Mordor you'll be able to say 'Gee, guys, I can't spare any troops right now' with a clear conscience, and gloat virtuously while the smoke from Uurlutsu Nurn spirals lazily into the sky.

6. To educate teammates. One of the pleasures of ME-PBM is that it's a team game. Especially if there are newbies on your team, your turn reports can be a great source of information on being an effective player. If you *are* an effective player. If you're not, don't tell anyone you read this article, at least until you shape up. I don't want people to think you got your idiotic ideas from *me*. I had the good fortune to play my first couple of games on teams with really good, experienced players, and learned a lot watching what they did. And now I'm writing articles about ME-PBM as if I really know what I'm doing. Oh, if the guys who used to call me 'that annoying fool' in their turn reports could see me now!

7. To learn something yourself. In my Cloud Lord game I somehow got the goofy notion that kidnap comes before assassination, and managed to lose 2 agents and the Cloak of the Abyss to Elves before I figured it out. This was particularly embarrassing because I made the same mistake 2 turns in a row. If I'd just written in my turn report "and Erennis will kidnap Tharudan -- hope it happens before he kidnaps me" one of the experienced players on my team would probably have written back "You moron, try assassinating. You'll never go first if you kidnap (order 620) and he assassinates (order 615)." And then not only would we have nailed that pointy-eared creep, but I would have had the additional pleasure of plotting revenge against my teammate for the public humiliation through the rest of the game.

8. To ask permission to do things that affect others. If you're going to put down a camp on someone else's map, it's a courtesy to tell them so they don't send an army to expunge an enemy incursion. If you're planning to send a character to the other side of the board via an ally's pop center so she can guard along the way, tell them. That way they don't kill your agent figuring "Flowerface" has to be a Dark Servant. Look, *you* decided to play with these people.

9. To tell people things they might need to know. One time I was talking on the phone trying to get some notion of what in the world was going on in a very strange game, and asked my teammate what was going on with his position. He innocently replied "What do you want to know?" What I really wanted to reply was "YOU INCREDIBLE IDIOT, IF I KNEW WHAT I WANTED TO KNOW I WOULDN'T HAVE TO ASK YOU! I WANT TO KNOW THE NAMES AND POSITIONS OF ALL THE ENEMY CHARACTERS AND POP CENTERS AND WHERE ALL THE ARTIFACTS ARE, BUT I'D SETTLE FOR WHAT ARMIES ARE CLOSING IN ON MY FEW REMAINING POP CENTERS AND WHETHER ANYONE BUT ME AND ABOUT 3 OTHERS ARE EVEN CONSCIOUS, BUT I GUESS THAT'S TOO MUCH TO ASK. DIE, DIE DIE!" But a slave to the ingrained habits of a lifetime, I remained polite. I asked a few feeble, despairing questions and hung up. And the doctor wonders why I'm always asking to have my medication increased. Lord, folks, you never know what will be valuable to someone out there. So try, try to give your teammates a reasonably complete picture of what's going on.

10. To entertain and edify your fellow players. Life is misery enough, heaven knows. It's a great comfort to the Northmen player when Din Ohtar's eradicated his last commander and Lomelinde's cleaned out the treasury for the sixth turn in a row to know that Elrond blew Murazor away and Tharudan just assassinated Uvatha. It reminds him, that though *his* life is drab and wretched, somewhere there is music, and joy, and laughter: and he isn't getting any of it. Don't suffer alone -- your whole team can share your agony. And conversely, when you have a success, let others know. Make scathing comments about the intellect, morals, and personal hygiene of the other team. They aren't reading it. Or maybe they are if there's a real good Internet hacker in the bunch, and then they deserve the insults even more.

The Report

I've seen lots of good report formats from experienced ME-PBMs. And some really wretched ones too. There's one guy, I swear, who includes every detail (gold thefts to the penny, production details on new camps, what the portrait of the character who killed his agent in PC looked like...) except the ones the rest of us need to know. That's all right, accidents happen, especially if they're carefully planned. Pay attention to the reports of people who give you the information you need to play well, and imitate them. The one below is the one I've developed and like. Feel free to use, modify, borrow, or despise it.

Report Format

Summary Statement
Military
Characters
Messages
Economy
Plans

I use the **summary statement** to set the tone for the rest of the report and to convey anything I want to make sure my denser teammates see. It's a courtesy to your readers to give them a hint so they can get the aspirin ready. Examples:

"We continue to rampage. Morannon lies in ruins, and short ugly pony riders have entered Mordor, where property values are dropping like axed orcs. Details at 11." (I play the dwarves in ME 2950:17 and call myself the Short Ugly People. Just latent racism, I guess.)

"Runts 4, Cloud Lord zip."<ditto>

"The flames of Metriath lit the night sky as Ashdurbuk Zalg laughed with glee (a truly repulsive sound). One down, nine to go."

"Oh, Elbereth, how I hate curses squads."

"Does anyone know where I can recruit a reliable dragon? Must work cheap."

"I hope someone else can defend the Gap of Rohan."

"If anyone's got a good emissary and some gold, I know where you can pick up some new characters."

The **military report** should cover what your armies are doing and what the enemy is doing to you, militarily. Make sure to cover enemy and friendly map icons. I also put pop center changes to my map in this section unless they're of no interest to others, e.g. your own camps on your map and not on anyone else's. When you report battles make sure you mention who was with the enemy army and what artifacts they had. Maybe the Elves will get around

to sending assassins after them sometime. Maybe Elrond will lose a personal challenge with a new emissary.

The **character report** is for all your non-military nation actions; the stuff your agents, emissaries, and mages do to discomfit the enemy. If they do anything at all to discomfit the enemy instead of serving as training dummies for Cloud Lord agents and marauding curses squads. In addition to the obvious stuff (kidnappings, influencing away enemy pop centers, artifact location and retrieval), mention scouting results, unknown characters or NPCs in your pop centers, and the like. Tell people if you've been able to put down camps. I generally try to squeeze every bit of glory and pathos I can out of this section. If the enemy assassins are cutting down my people like ripe wheat, I try to make my character-rich teammates feel responsible. If I've finally trained an agent up to be able to take a stab at assassination, and nail a newly-named emissary, I make sure to dramatize the awesome strategic significance of this bold action. Also, every couple of turns, make sure you detail the names and skill ranks of the characters you've got fighting the character wars. I know it seems far-fetched, but other players sometimes try to formulate grand strategy and coordinate efforts between positions, and need to know what resources are available. If this is a novel concept to you, you might want to change games. Try Parcheesi. Or Snakes and Ladders. But don't get into a game with my 3 year old -- she's a shark at Snakes and Ladders.

List all the **nation** messages that anyone else might be able to use. Leave out dragons dropping loyalty in your pop centers and detailed accounts of gold theft, but leave in anything that mentions a name, even if it's a known teammate. It helps to know that the enemy probably hasn't gotten that message. Leave in rumors about gold and commodity transport -- those may be clues about the enemy economic state and military plans.

Under **economy** I generally list my tax rate/surplus or deficit/reserves in a simple format:

99%/-83K/1.2K in reserve (meaning a tax rate of 99%, a deficit of 83,000, and 1200 in reserve. This would be bad.)

Then include any other economic information that others might find useful. Thank teammates who send you gold, commodities, etc., even if you plan to backstab them in the endgame.

The **Plans** section often has to be delayed until the members of your team who actually have lives (as opposed to living for THE GAME) get around to submitting turn reports, sometimes as much as 2, 3, even FOUR hours after the turns are sent out. Delays, delays, always delays. Sluggards. But eventually you should get your teammates' turn reports so you can make intelligent (well, informed, anyway) decisions on your next moves. At some point then you should get around to telling people what you plan to do, if only to keep the rotten neutrals (OK, OK, newly enlightened allies) from getting in the way of your armies. Again. And to make sure your best agent doesn't go somewhere she shouldn't and get assassinated by your 'friends' the Elves. Again.

Assorted Things to Remember

Just four more points and you can go do something useful with your time. First, write your turn reports for the ignorant, since that's who's reading them. Don't assume all your teammates remember that Ignatz is your c10 a20 who's carrying the Ring of Wind and got cursed to 1 health last turn and is probably doubled by the Eothraim. They won't. If your 3000 mithril/mithril heavy cavalry army just destroyed the enemy camp of Dwarf Bread Here, mention a hex number, even if you told people where this massive strategic danger was

last turn. Please. Don't assume your teammates can keep track of all the characters and armies and pop centers for all 10 or 12 or 15 positions in your allegiance.

Second, **NAME NAMES**. Tell your teammates the names of enemy characters and of yours. If you decide it's too much trouble, see above about Ji Indur and orc yummys.

Third, speculate about the other team. Try to figure out what they're up to in the short and long term. Try to figure out who's ready to crumble and who needs more softening up. Most of all, try to anticipate their next move. Bounce your ideas off your teammates. If nothing else presents itself, speculate about their twisted psychology. (That's the fifth Cloud Lord agent I've captured stealing there. What in the world is he thinking of? What in the world is he thinking *with*?)

Finally, read your teammate's turn reports, no matter how painful it is. Answer their questions. Ask them questions if things aren't clear. Tell them if they're doing something imbecilic, like trying to kidnap an enemy super agent instead of assassinating. Maybe, in time, you'll get them trained to minimal competency, so you don't have to play under a pseudonym any more. And think how proud your mother will be then.

ME-PBM is a wonderfully complex game. Twenty-five players, up to twenty-one characters per player. Nobody knows as much as everybody; but each player can draw on the collective knowledge only if they communicate. The basic tool of communication in PBM is the turn report. Learn to write them well, and use them effectively, and win. Unless you're the Dragon Lord; but even then you can make your piteous whining lots more annoying.

Coming Attractions

In part 2 of this series, I'll provide a turn report I wrote during ME 168 where I played the Witch-King. Well, I won't provide the actual turn report which I long ago deleted from my E-mail, but I'll look at the turnsheet and rewrite it. And it'll be perfect. Because I'll spend hours and hours writing and rewriting and polishing every line so that everything you read until the end of your miserable life will seem a pale, desiccated imitation of the shining perfection of that magnificent turn report. Or something like that.

Gondor Report

by
George Martinez

The following is a report from Sinda agent 007 assigned to watch over Tarondor, King of Gondor and Keeper of the Tree!!

The two armies met off the road leading towards Mordor. King Tarondor had ordered General Elatar to camp his army north of the Black Gate and east of the road approximately four days ride from the Dúnadan town of Romenost. He

met General Elatar outside the armed camp of the Royal Army of Gondor. These war hardened warriors had been with Elatar since the first arrow flew and the first orc fell. Of all who were there in the beginning, less than 1700 remained and now they were joined by the 500 heavy cavalrymen of the king. Soon this combined force, the last Host of Northern Gondor, would march towards the Black Gate of Morannon.

The Royal Guard of the King arrived first, swords drawn, to secure the area. They already had experience many assassination attempts on the king by the vile agents of Sauron. Each attempt has been thwarted, a few by myself. And each time an assassin tried and was stopped the number of the Royal Guard was less than before. So they knew that the king could be slain within the time it took to unsheathe a sword. Their swords were drawn.

Upon Tarondor's arrival, General Elatar kneeled before his king. Elatar was weary with the burden of command and the life in the field. From reports I have received, Elatar has been fighting since day one.

"Rise, kinsman," said the king. "Let us speak before we say farewell once again."

"My king," said the general. "I have moved your army to this barren plain as you requested. Glad am I to see you well. What are your next commands?"

"We move on Morannon in the morning. I will take the last army of the North before the Black Gate. And with the aid of the Dwarves, the Eothraim, and the dragon we will destroy Morannon." All could see that his resolve was firm.

Elatar's face was washed with anguish as he spoke. "Morannon," he spat. "My liege, only death awaits all at Morannon. Let us instead secure the plains of Rhovanion while you return home to Minas Anor and build another army."

"Aye, death awaits me at Morannon," said the king. "But death awaits me at home as well. The agents of Sauron have slain too many of our leaders within the safe walls of our fair city. I have already relocated the Royal Seat. You have been at war too long. So you have not heard. The Black Breath has slain my son Telumehtar as well as Alandur and Arantar. Vinyaran was captured by the enemy after he conquered Barad Ungal. Caranthir died in battle defending Barad Ungal, and Vagaig was assassinated as he marched to Barad-dur. And within Minas Anor, enemy agents have slain Minardil, Taranil, and Turin."

Elatar's face was filled with grief. "Dear Elbereth, the price is being paid."

"Aye, general," continued Tarondor. "We have lost many, but so too has the enemy. He curses us at every opportunity as we harass him and buy time for our allies. Already the Dunedain of Arnor muster their forces to march south. The elves have begun to infiltrate their agents among the enemy. I know that right now they are within the walls of the Morannon and are at work. The Northmen launch cavalry army at the eastern pass of Mordor as crushed. The southern fiefs send their forces but they are only enough to secure the west side of the Anduin at this time. Our allies will come, but we must buy just a little more time. Remember General Elatar, continue with your original plans and orders. Fight the enemy at every pass, contest them for every town, die for every inch and never, never, never quit."

The two men moved from my earshot and I could hear no more as they continued talking in hushed whispers. I marvel at them. The Dúnedain have suffered the most among the mortals against the dark servants. They have been by our side since the First Age and the wars against Morgoth. And yet, it appears the enemies rage is now geared towards the descendants of Numenor more so than the sons of Feanor.

At this time a lone horseman filthy with mud and dirt arrives. He is quickly disarmed by the royal guards and escorted towards the king.

"My liege," he says. "I have word from your emissary, Anarion"

"Speak"

"Anarion reports that the dragon Throkmau will join us in our cause," said the soldier. "However, the dragon refuses to follow the king before the gates of Morannon. He will, however, follow the General Elatar on the field of battle."

There was silence. All knew that only one thing had changed in the plan to burn Morannon.

"Farewell, King of Gondor," said Elatar. "I go and will command your army to Morannon. And with the aid of our allies we will conquer the Black gate. I go, and with my allies, face death."

"I know," said Tarondor

They embraced each other and went their separate ways.

The next morning, as Tarondor rode east to investigate a new settlement northwest of Morannon, a huge shadow passed over head and the wind began to blow unnaturally. Throkmau the dragon had arrived and, much to the discomfort of the Royal Guard, he landed before the King of Gondor.

"I come to join the Keeper of the Tree," stated the beast.

"Why are you not with Elatar marching to Morannon?" questioned Tarondor. "My emissary reported you would not join me but instead would fight with Elatar on the field of battle"

The earth shook with the laughter of the dragon. "Aye, I would not have joined you at Morannon. If you would have lead your host before the Black Gate I would have instead joined Elatar of the fields of battle in Rhovanion. However, since you do not go to the Black Gate I will join you for awhile."

Double talking dragons! You can never get a straight answer from any one of them. Damn dragons, thought the king.

The Cloud Lord Omelet - 2950

by
Mike Hunnensen

Ask any Free player in the 2950 scenario which Dark Servant nation scares him the most, and the answer will almost always be "the Cloud Lord". Even if another Dark Servant nation creates more problems than the Cloud Lord, he will at least be the second choice. With 40 starting agents, stealth ability and +20 skill bonus to the dreaded assassination and kidnap orders, the Cloud Lord deserves to be feared! Working alone, he can rob you of your best characters and in a team game he can ruin your best laid plans, wiping out several characters and whole armies in one stroke. Elven players (Sinda and Noldo) with the best characters in the game, and North Gondor, being on the front line, need to be particularly concerned with the Cloud Lord's continued survival.

It is for this reason, that I consider the Cloud Lord to be the primary target for the Free side. His elimination cripples the plans of the Dark Servants and allows for an immediate balancing in the agent war. The agent war is one of support for the main economic and military campaigns, but losing control of it is much like losing control of the air in today's conventional engagements - you

will be in serious trouble. To this end, I began to look at ways in dealing with the Cloud Lord as quickly as possible. I soon became aware of three critical facts worth noting.

1. The Cloud Lord's capital (Barduath) is at 3428 - a plains Hex!
2. Barduath is the ONLY UNFORTIFIED CAPITAL of any Dark Servant.
3. Barduath does not start with an army.

These three things make Barduath extremely vulnerable to a military assault. A small army with only 5000 strength and 10,000 constitution (about 1000 Heavy Infantry) could take it out. But being where Barduath is, the problem is how does one get an army to it. One idea would be for North Gondor to try and punch through the Witch-king and Fire King and, once inside Mordor, head for Barduath. Another option would be for the Riders of Rohan or North Gondor to send a speedy, supplied Cavalry army around the back end of Mordor and try to run the gauntlet. In fact, I am sure that many a free player has considered (even tried) either or both of these ideas. I would be surprised if they actually made it, but it is the thought that counts. The other problem is that the longer this or any other plan takes to reach its fruition, the variable events become increasingly hard to predict and the less likely it is for the plan to succeed. As well, these plans have the element of telegraphing one's intent to the Cloud Lord and without surprise, he can react effectively to protect himself. Speed and surprise then, are mandatory.

With this in mind, I began to think of a plan that could do the job in the fastest possible time and would leave the Cloud Lord player totally unprepared. After tinkering with the math and different requirements needed to complete the plan, I focused on the resources and abilities of the Sinda Elves. This may be a shock to some, but the Sinda are the perfect (maybe only) nation that can make it all come together. Without further preamble, the following is the "Plan" on how to make a Cloud Lord Omelet in 4 easy steps/turns with Chef Du Sinda.

Turn 1 Galadriel, who starts at 2325, learns the best defensive combat spell possible and moves to 3328. Celeborn, also at 2325, trains his army. Galandeor moves to 2325. Tharudan and Helkama learn the best defensive spell possible and move within range of Barduath. Character with Anarmacil should also move within range of the target. Characters at capital buy 400 steel and 200 mounts.

Turn 2 Galadriel creates camp at 3328 and learns defensive combat spell. Celeborn transfers army to Galandeor and moves to 3328. All characters within range move to 3328. Mithril, steel, mounts, leather and 400 food transferred to 3328. At this point you should have 5 characters, and all your artifacts at 3328. Your camp at 3328 is likely to be considered a Dark Servant camp by your opponents (depending on how close they are working together). They may investigate, but it won't matter.

Turn 3 Galadriel improves camp to a village and joins the army created by Celeborn. Celeborn hires army consisting of 200 Heavy Cavalry in steel/steel and moves it East to Barduath. Helkama, Tharudan, and Feamire(?) join army. All three learn defensive spells.

Turn 4 Capture/Destroy Barduath. The combat numbers are as follows. 200 Heavy Cavalry in Steel armor can take 2500 points of combat damage and

survive with 100-110 troops. This would require a minimum of 1800 points in defensive spells to absorb damage taken from the Population center. For guaranteed safety (i.e. the PC is at 100 loyalty) a minimum of 2500 points in defensive spells would be needed. If Galadriel has Shields and Tharudan/Helkama have Blessings, then you will have no problems with your constitution. Army strength needs to be a minimum of 4400 and for a guaranteed assault, 5,000. With Steel weapons, a 30 Morale, 25 training (special Sinda ability) and a 63 Commander, the army strength is approximately 1400. All three Sinda combat artifacts will add 3250 points for a total of 4650. This would be enough to take out the PC with a loyalty rating as high as 85. If you want to assure victory, ask to borrow Stewards blade or a similar combat artifact, make two war machines for the assault or use Mithril Weapons instead of steel. And Viola! A Cloud Lord Omelet.

The above plan has fantastic potential and far reaching ramifications. Yes you can actually take out a Major Town with 200 Heavy Cavalry as long as they are supported with spells and artifacts. It is a great plan, but it is not without its caveats and dangers. There are several things that could spoil your dinner and these are discussed in order of risk factor.

1. Cloud Lord moves his army from 3630 to Barduath. There are many reasons for him to do this and many reasons for him not to. One can say there is a 50/50 chance of this happening. If he is going to do this, it will likely be done on the first turn. To find out about the status of the army in question, the best thing to do is have North Gondor scry the hex with his palantir or have one of your mages scry area. If an army is there, you will have to deal with it. There are two methods that can work. Send your army to 3528 first by going around. The Cloud Lord has a village there. There is a good chance he will react and send his army after you, especially when he sees that it is a "small army". If he is coordinating with the Blind Sorcerer and Fire King, then the three of them will try to pen you in. If he is not, then he may want to send his army to 3626.

On the following turn send your army first south to 3529 and then northwest to 3428. With any luck he won't be there; if he is, it will likely only be a seed army. The second way to deal with the army is to just jump on it. Your defensive spells will stop you from taking any damage in the attack and you will then have free reign to continue with the plan.

2. One or more of your characters get assassinated during execution. This is a scary thought, with about a 1/10 chance of this actually happening. It is likely that the best Cloud Lord agents will be out stealing gold or similar such agent things. The Cloud Lord will generally feel very secure. So in his mind, leaving agents in his capital for defensive purposes is a low priority. Even if this does happen, only Galadriel is vital to your long term success and she is hard to kill. All your other characters are expendable (to a point) and losing one of them will save you some funds. Obviously, the only way to protect against this is to have one of your allies provide agent support. Perhaps the Silvan would be willing to put their 35 stealth artifact to good use or the Woodmen could scout and Galadriel would then turn the best agent she finds in the hex.

3. This plan is expensive. You are going to have to invest a large chunk of your reserves to pull this off. 6,000 for the village, 5,000 to hire an army, 10,000 in materials, and various expenses totaling about 25,000. You can afford it, but I would suggest soliciting financial assistance from North Gondor who would benefit greatly from your actions. Offer to help him take out the Ice King or pay back the loan with interest. If he refuses to help you out, then at least you will

know that you are not obligated to perform rescue operations when he starts screaming about a huge army at Imdorad or Osgiliath.

4. You meet up with a Dragon in the Mountain hex. This could put a wrench in your plans, but the small chance of this happening coupled with the fact that there is a decent chance you can survive, even win the encounter, makes this a small risk. The benefits of putting your camp in the mountains outweigh this risk, but if you are really worried about a dragon, launching from 3427 (in the plains) is an acceptable location.

5. Someone transfers a Major Town to the Cloud Lord so he doesn't get eliminated. Unless you are in a team game, he may be out of luck. Even if it can be done, the new capital will have a low loyalty. If you can convince an ally (Woodmen?) to go to 3222 the turn you attack Barduath, they can uncover secrets and hopefully learn the location of the new Cloud Lord capital. If no help is available, you can calmly carry out this task on your own, the following turn. OR you can stop at this point, knowing you did your job, and move on to other things.

In conclusion, this plan is theoretical in nature only. A modified version of this plan did work - It was on turn 6 with 300 Heavy Cavalry. The Noldo were involved using the Mantle to hide the Population Center and an additional turn was needed to get all the administration in place. This plan is risky and requires nerves of steel. If you ever get a chance to play the Sinda, and try this plan, I'd like to know how it all turned out. So go ahead and break an egg or two.

Herald of the World

by

The Reverend Ludicrous Wack

The summer months on the plains bring a crisp dry wind that whispers tidings of the world. No man nor beast is immune to its herald. A lone figure sat upon Bree's ramparts pondering the wind-borne messages. Straining to catch news of his brethren in far distant lands, he breathed a sigh and raised his head to better hear the world's ramblings.

"What weighs upon your conscience, heir?"

The voice had not surprised Elladan. He knew the Lady of Grey had been standing behind him for some time mulling over similar doubts and worries.

"The same milestones that press upon all our hearts. It has been too quiet. Only the wind speaks," he replied. "The watch fires have yet to be lit."

"Your brother is capable and wise. He will bring us news." Lady Elowan moved to stand beside Elrond's kith and laid a hand upon his weary shoulder.

Elladan spun slowly to face her with eyes deeper than even the greatest seas. "I worry for not only him, but for us all. The dark spawn sit in not so distant mountains and gather the seeds of evil which I am sure Mûrazôr wishes to plant here soon. There has been no word from my father or any of the others in our cause. Save Saruman, who plans what we know not."

The Dúnedain queen stood facing out on the plains of her kingdom allowing her own thoughts to wonder on the air. "His ways have always been strange and mystic."

The setting sun cast its last warmth upon the stone of the fortifications as the beginnings of campfires freed their smoke to the heavens. "Our allies sit in our midst and do not even announce themselves. Do they take Sauron's threat lightly? What can be crossing their minds?"

The elfkin jumped to his feet with a sudden quickness and desperation that set the Lady back a pace. Elladan quickly moved to the steps leading down from the heights with a purposeful stride.

"And what is crossing your mind at this moment," Elowan half questioned, half demanded.

"Tomorrow I join my brother in the lair of the Witch-king, and together we will bring the fight to Mûrazôr's doors. Together we will put an end to the beginning which has yet to reveal itself." Never turning he moved quietly and swiftly down the flight of stone and was gone.

"Then the spirit of my people go with you and my greatest wishes for you both," she whispered. With that she turned and took vigilance upon the watchtower of Bree, listening for news borne on the eternal wind.

That same spirit met others in their duties. The eyes of the Lady's lover and husband accepted that spirit as he looked about the ruins of Fornost Erain. Long abandoned, but soon to be put to use for the coming storm. Aragorn moved around the rocks of the forgotten fort and made mental preparations for its restoration. A train of carpenters, masons, and advisors had followed him here to prepare for the job. Camp had already been set and soon townsfolk would wander out to settle around these walls in the hope of carving out their own place.

The cloaked figure turned from his musings and called out, "Send me a messenger."

A young boy responded, eager to do his duty. Leading a horse of good stature, the teenager came before Aragorn.

"Set hooves to dirt and ride to Bree, Bring word to Arador and bid him move what troops he and Elboran possess here. Return with what news they may have received and meet us north of here. We move on."

The boy took it all in and swung to mount. "Yes my liege!" He wheeled the horse and started off.

"And tell Enealion to get his nose out of those damned books and do something to help us out!!" the Ranger King shouted after. The boy simply waved over his shoulder in haste as affirmation and sped off across the grasslands.

"Aragorn turned to a weather-worn man in his mid-life. "Chief mason, Arador and his men will shortly join you in the work. My contingent moves north." The same camp fires seen from Bree drew his attention south. "Looks like we are in this by ourselves," he mumbled, and his voice was carried off by the wind and orders to mount.

"... we are in this by ourselves."

The words met Meneldir's mind as clear as the setting sun's rays. Conscriptation was going slow in the west and time was running out. Frustration racked the commander's body.

"Time is certainly not our ally. Something needs to change." Scouring the towns and villages over the past month, Meneldir had tried everything to speed up recruitment.

With desperation at his side, he mounted his own horse and rode breakneck to the town square. He sent people sprawling and scrambling to move aside as he thundered down the avenue, not even slowing his steed. Meneldir leapt down in the midst of curious townsfolk and climbed atop barrels of imported goods.

"Good people, good people, hear my plea!" Everyone stared as if this respected leader had gone mad. "The Dark One has risen and even now his minions attempt to spread the blight their insanity produces. It will take us all to defeat him, but defeat him we must. Our very lives depend on it. If you will not fight, then stay and support those who will and do your part. Set the watchfires this evening for the enemy is upon us!"

Folk moved and milled about, but listened to every word spoken, their faces stoic and undecided. Meneldir could tell he was not making the connection he so desperately needed.

"We are in this by ourselves," the wind whispered again. Then by ourselves we will be victorious, he thought.

Summoning all the courage and pride of centuries of Dúnedain, he reached into a travel bag and withdrew the signal horn of his command and let its sweet note carry on the wind. A mighty shout met his call as the ground quaked with the thunder of many hundred pairs of hooves striking the road.

"If you hear not the call, nor feel the rumble of horse-borne glory, then you be not a kinsman and I wish you well. But, if the sound swells your heart as it does mine, then join me and let us move east and bring victory to the Free!!" Meneldir shouted. He then ran down from his makeshift podium to join the head of the column of cavalry heading for Bree. When he looked back, his numbers had increased twofold.

The wind met them all that day and lifted their spirits, for then there was only one thought in their minds . . . we will win!

As recorded midsummer 2950, Dúnedain scribes

The Hall Of Heroes

Hall of Victory, Hall of Fame

Most Net Victory Points/Ring	2700 58/22, 29/17
Most Net Victory Points	2500 many
Highest Challenge Rank	372 206/10 Elrond
Highest Net Commander Rank	241 80/10 Glorfindel
Highest Net Mage Rank	313 29/17 Malezar
Highest Net Emissary Rank	150 37/25 Thuringwethil
Highest Net Agent Rank	215 72/14 Rashid ed-Din
Most Mithril	12693 5/8
Most Artifacts	90 15/10
Most Kills	142 68/14
Shortest Game	14 163, 202, 217
Longest Game	105 13
One Ring Games	77/12, 5/8, 4/22, 61/10, 108/9, 58/22, 29/17, 35/15, 179/20, 45/14, 125/14

58/22 - Daniel Harnden
 29/17 - Chuck Beerck
 206/10 - Martin Blair
 80/10 - Karl Stembol
 37/25 - Thomas Lemont
 72/14 - Nathan Hellmers
 5/8 - William Paxton
 15/10 - Coleman Charlton
 68/14 - Dena Kiker
 77/12 - Gordon Kotora
 4/22 - Ronald Cudworth
 61/10 - Vincent Burchett
 108/9 - Joseph Aparisi
 35/15 - Michael McElroy
 179/20 - Douglas Scholz
 45/14 - Darren Beyer
 125/14 - James Rousselle