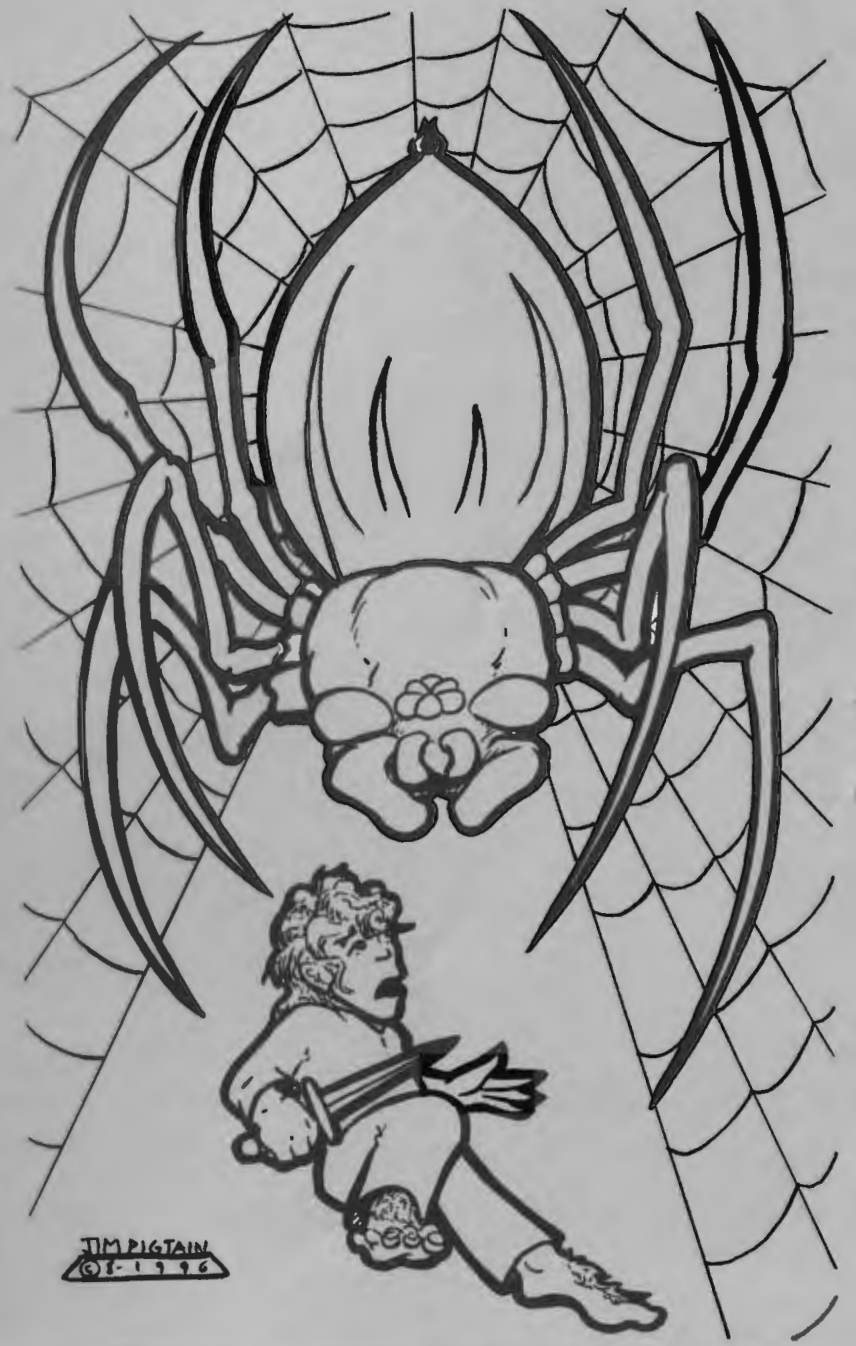


WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



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WORDS FROM THE WOOD

Welcome to this month's *Whispers*! This is a special issue, as we have dedicated this issue to the new Fourth Age scenario! We have two articles on the new game--one on nation design and one on kingdom placement. These are good introductory articles for the new game, which should be ready for release by the second week in October. We also have our Fourth Age New Game Guidelines below. Those of you interested in joining a team game or a grudge game should take a look at the guidelines, as they are a little bit different from the other two scenarios. GSI is accepting registrations for the new game at this time, so those of you interested should contact our office.

Initial ME-PBM Fourth Age, circa 1000 New Game Guidelines

All Games:

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

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

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

Team Games:

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

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

No team may have both Kingdoms as their team.

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

Grudge games:

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

Thus, games can be filled with either:

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

Two 8-player teams and a 7-player team, with the two Kingdoms assigned by GSI; or

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

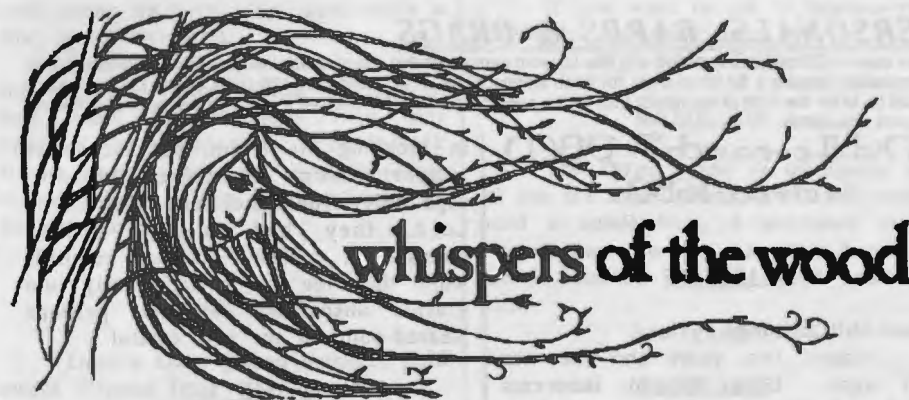
Variations of the above (variant games) can be arranged with consent of all teams.

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

One last note before I sign off. You should take a look at the Oracle this month. We have clarified an item in the rulebook which is misleading and/or confusing. Take a gander and pass the information on to your friends. As always, you are welcome to give our office a call if you have any questions regarding this matter.

Well, until next month, I can only say--GO DOLPHINS!!!!!!!

Stuart



ALONG THE PATHWAYS

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This Month's Cover: "Welcome to My Parlor . . ." by Jim Pigtain
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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 66

Those still fighting,

Almost two years and the war still rages. Cities burned, innocents butchered like cattle, meaningless violence, and destruction. I have lost count of the dead. Like some bizarre dream you can't wake from, it goes on. I have forgotten what started it. I do know this. We must bring order back into Middle-Earth.

Cloud Lord

GAME 178

To Gorlim:

Sorry you couldn't kill me but you've been doubled. That is why you stood there as Bain died. Just wanted you to know that I've got fourteen double agents working for me, so I know what you're doing before you do.

Adunaphel

Keeper of all secrets

P.S. Stop by my capital sometime and see me.

GAME 186

No! Please!! Please don't make me kidnap any more of your characters!!! I'm begging you please!!!

Somebody stop me!

C.S.I.S.

(Cardolan Secret Intelligence Service)

GAME 191

Murazor looked out upon the plains of Angmar and was content. The Free People had almost succeeded

in breaking his realm, but thanks to support from Southern Mordor, especially Adunaphel and the Cloud Lord, they had instead broken themselves. Now, Angmar rebuilds while the Free People fade away into Eternal obscurity. Hmmm- perhaps Khazad-dum for the new capitol...

GAME 197

The People's Republic of Arnor wishes to restate their defiance of Sauron. Although our aristocratic leaders are dead, our will remains strong. Having been abandoned by the Elves, Dwarves, and other Men, we will fight to the end.

Chairman Minastir
for the Politburo

GAME 203

I would like to thank the Eothraim and Rhudaur for the help, advice, and the splendid conversations. This was my second game and you made it really worth while. I would also like to thank the Dwarves from my initial game, 179. Your assistance has helped me achieve a victory. To the last Dark Servant: What happened? Did you go bankrupt or just give up? Next time you Nazgul should be more friendly to the Neutrals. My observations are you can not win without them like us.

Draugnim
Emissary of the Northmen

GAME 209

Ji Indur thought over the last year. It had been tough Ren had fallen asleep and North Gondor sneaked into Mordor only to be destroyed, but at a cost to us all. We fought back and

forth many on both sides quit, while a few were destroyed.

Finally Nick-Nack stumbled upon the Precious while killing Sinda who had taken the Precious from our brother the blind one. Nick-Nack found Sauron and gave him the ring. Again Sauron is the supreme ruler of Middle Earth.

Ji Indur

GAME 212

Dendra Dwar jerked awake. Cold sweat dripped from his snout.

"Master, more napmares about Hallas?" quizzed his bed boy.

"Yes my dear. Hallas may be dead but his spirit lingers," Dendra whispered.

"Master, Thuringwathost is Ruins. The siege train cometh!" Bed boy sneveled.

"Well, send the dogs!" Dendra barked.

"Sire, they're bloated on troll cadavers left from the last Cardolani attack."

"They can't possibly assault my city keep! Do they know who I am?!?!"

"You're the big jawed, nasty breath of Mordor!" the boy gaily sang.

"Shut up Dullard! Pack my nighties, we move."

(Knock, Knock)

"Who is it?" Dendra whimpered.

"Pizza boy, with extra pepperoni."

The Spirit of Hallas

Song on the top ten list in Morannon - sung to the Ozark Mountain Daredevil's "If You Want to Get to Heaven"

I never read it in a book I never saw it on a show,

But there are armies in my city now it's in my rock and roll,

If you want to kill a Nazgul-- you've got to go to where it dwells,

If you want to get to heaven--go to Mordor and raise some hell

High Plains Drifter.

GAME 214

The heroic stand is admirable to all but it's time to end it. I will only need a small boat, 4 unknown arch mages, and oh yea, anyone have a metal detector laying around and an idiot.

Armageddon

GAME 215

To the battle weary, but determined FP:

Do not make excuses...

Meet me on the field of battle...

Cowards die a thousands deaths, heroes die only once.

If you want to meet Evil-

I'm the One

I'm the One

Sir Psycho

GAME 218

The Dark has declared the war over, but they will not give up. Make their deaths quick so they don't have too much fun.

The Dark has resigned itself to losing the war, but they have declared they will fight to the end. In the meantime they have resorted to punishing the nation of the Easterlings for their choice of friends. To the Dark: I expected this so much sooner. Where have you been? To the Free: Has your scrambling to make your nation victorious taken your mind off the concerns of others. I thought I was joining a team. Thanks to the Sinda for continuing to keep in touch!

GAME 219

Eight to seven in favor of the Free People, while Harad watches. If the Mumak King thinks he can jump in front of our parade he is sadly mistaken.

"Sir, the Nation of Rhudaur has collapsed."

"Good, the Dungs are next, then Círdan will be avenged."

GAME 221

Thanks to you friendly Dark Servants whom revealed Kaza-Dum! I've had my fill of dragons, so if you haven't figured it out; guess who dies first! Go TONG NINJAS go!!!

Krooton,
the Monkey Boy Tree King

GAME 223

All of Gondor wept when Minas Anor fell.

Orillion Darkblade

The Bay of Belfalas is under the domination of the Corsairs, now that the Sinda and Gondor navies have been destroyed in a series of naval engagements. Camlin, Argirion and Malantur rot in the Corsair's holds, while Amroth feeds the fish.

To those who still resist, the southern flank is collapsing! Declare allegiance to Umbar, and you will be spared!

GAME 229

Thrar III:

Our leader, Bain, is now dead. He was killed by an unhonorable act. Azaghal our fiercest military leader was also slain. We all must rise to the

occasion. Our human and elven allies need strong dwarven backs and sharp dwarven steel now more than ever. Bain & Azaghal must be avenged!!! We go out and destroy all of Sauron's minions, but most of all we seek the total destruction of the one called Gorthog. Pray for mercy Gorthog, we come for YOU!!!

GAME 230

War Bulletin

Announcing the fourth battle of Osgiliath. The Ice King was both shaken and stirred. The Lord Mayor noted that the countryside stinketh mightily from the many Fire and Ice King corpses. What putrefaction!

Chronicles of North Gondor

GAME 231

Thus, the dark foe Uvatha challenged King Eoder to a duel. But alas, King Eoder had acquired an ingrown toenail only that morning and had to refuse. Likewise Mendelon had come down with the flu, and Lord Gaerandil had developed tennis elbow.

Instead, they ordered cannon-fodder into battle by the thousands.

"Lead from the rear." -- Northmen motto.

Rhys

A curse squad in the capital! Five Nazgul in my capital! I'd hoped it wouldn't come to this, but I'm afraid I must declare a holy war. Never mess with a religious leader.

The Prophet

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

GAME 232

Lamthanc, you pathetic lizard! You left us without any warning or cause, just when the Servants of Sauron needed you most. You would have eaten well, but instead you left

for parts unknown after just a month. Damn you and your brood!

GAME 237

To the Nation of the Easterling:

One call in ten minutes doesn't mean you're safe, while you covered up the D.S. movement for them and told of ours. You're lucky only two of your towns fell this turn, some of our armies missed their movement. You can crawl back down south and lick your wounds like a good dog. Be prepared. You haven't seen the end of us.

Amroth

Murphy's Military Law:

#1 Do not forget to downgrade before you TRY to threaten.

#2 When you do ATTEMPT to threaten, be sure your commander has the huevos to do it.

#3 When in doubt, burn.

To my neighbor and his friend in the deep south, I have cleared my dance card if you care to tango.

Lord Hallas

P.S. I hear Corsair troops make good fertilizer.

GAME 238

To the Cloud Lord:

The neutrals who have gone Free have decided to take up residence in Kar Nagil. You can hand over the keys or lose to a superior army. The choice is yours.

Enion

GAME 239

Bulrakur licked the blood from his sword, raised it overhead, and let out a howl of victory which echoed amongst the hills surrounding once-hidden Imladris. 1900 elves lay dead, the Noldo city lay defenseless, and though their leaders had escaped, soon

the folk of Imladris would bow down before the Houndmaster...

"Ted, why did you have to sit in that chair?"

Despite minor setbacks, the Freeps grow weaker as I grow stronger.

Amroth is dead! Gisulf still held hostage! I do not want to see his yellow blood yet. I enjoy his constant begging for mercy!

'Famine'

GAME 242

Angamaite viewed the huge pile of bright shining objects behind the Dark Servant emissary. "I think I'd like some of those if you don't mind."

"Oh no!" The man gasped spewing out his putrid breath. "We can't give you any of those. Perhaps a few thousand timber or steel. In return all we ask is that you help support us with gold, resources, and major towns for the rest of the game. How could you expect a better offer?"

Angamaite frowned and the evil envoy shifted nervously. "I've been told to quote this line to you 'Millions for defense, not one red cent for tribute'."

Angamaite smiled, "OK, start spending."

High Plains Drifter

Neutrals,

It appears that the Dunlendings have chosen to cast their lot with the slaves of the lidless eye. We are not amused. Be warned that the destruction of the fool hearty Duns is our highest priority. The same fate awaits any who duplicate his poor judgment.

Earnil

Lord of Cardolan

At last my armies march! My only regret is that it took so long. Who am I? You will know soon enough!

The winds off the hot sands blow fiercely this season, and ambassadors and couriers have become less numerous on the trade roads of the south. As I sit in my fortress and ponder these things, I must wonder what dark secret Angamaite knows that is worth 20,000 gold to Haruth Ramun to keep quiet... Be assured that no secret can remain hidden long, and that choices made are not always easy to undo...

Deslock

GAME 245

Forces gather and powers surge, and on your shores they will break.

Washing you back to the abysmal deeps Darkblade.

Victory to Team Tong!!!

Krooton,

the Monkey Boy Tree King

Hey, Darkblade! Say hello to the kiddies on Eothraim's walls. They have been awaiting a show for a long time. Barney is one of their favorites!

Reverend Ludicrous Wack

GAME 246

Shogmog grinned. Before him, Minas Ithil, protected only by a few hundred troops under Captain Alandur, and its own walls. Behind him, 5000 eager trolls, orcs and goblins. Flamebringer would be pleased; soon Minas Ithil would kneel to the Fire King's burning Will! Let the

weak quiver in fear- Flamebringer is near!!! Better recruit more troops, though...

GAME 247

This is a formal declaration of the Union of the South. The Corsairs & Easterlings will act as one force, with the naval and military leadership of the Corsairs. Plus the natural diplomatic talent of the Easterlings! Anyway we go, we will go together!

Sir Psycho

GAME 249

In the quiet stillness of ancient halls, the four come together. The last member arrives to offer his knowledge to the sage wisdom of all. They know the dark rises again from Mordor and expect nothing less than the total annihilation of the evil spawn.

Be warned all who oppose them! The Tong Ninjas have awakened to the challenge.

Rev. Ludicrous Wack

Stormbringer

Krooton, the Monkey-boy Tree King

Blackmoon

GAME 250

The choice was not easy to do this soon but we must. To our allies we fight beside you and our enemies, you have been warned as of now. Busting heads, hell bent on leather.

Brother's Grim

Middle-earth™ PBM
circa 2950

GAME 27

Hmmm, I had 32 kills and at least a dozen kidnaps, performed by 10 different characters, and I never

lost one of my characters the entire game. The one agent of mine who was caught stealing gold escaped and then assassinated his captor. Is it a great mystery why the Dark Servants won?

Ji Indur

P.S. The best thing about all of the Neutrals going against you is that none of them get any of the winners certificates when you win the game.

GAME 50

It seems the Corsairs have fallen upon hard times the price for lies & betrayed promises.

Prince Imrahil

Hey Fire King-have you built that bridge yet or did you go bankrupt?

S.G.

Yo, Ho, Ho, you boasting Freeeps and undeclared neutrals think twice before moving onto Dark Servant territory! For the mighty Corsairs

keeps his word! And even at 1/2 power, THE TONG NINJAS WILL PREVAIL!!!

Krooton,
the Monkey Boy Tree King

GAME 52

Hail Mighty Free People and undecided Neutrals! The time approaches whence doom will befall you all! Long live the Tong!!!

Krooton,
the Monkey Boy Tree King

GAME 54

Gondorians, Elves and Free Men alike, Ovatha and Khand's finest roll into the fight. Betrayed and outwitted, Nazgul nerves writhe, Horrid screams of their fallen- under steel scythes! To Huz in Rhûn: Listening to battles all 'round' free your mind of petty demands, else be sown into the ground.

-Liberte-

Middle-earth Play-By-Mail

Fourth Age, circa 1000

Nation Design Ideas

by

Erving Bolinski

So, here I am, staring down at my Nation Design Sheet, trying to figure out where to begin. Which allegiance should I join? What race should I be? There are so many SNA's, what if I make the wrong choices? What kinds of characters should I start with? THERE ARE TOO MANY CHOICES!!

As my initial anxiety attack peaked I found myself wishing for the easier days, back in the Third Age, when nations were just handed to you. No tough decisions, no fatal mistakes. Why couldn't it still be that easy - why do things always have to get more complicated?

And then the answer hit me - it doesn't have to be complicated. I could simply model my nation after some of the nations found in the earlier Middle-

earth PBM scenarios - Third Age, circa 1650 & circa 2950! If they worked then, why not now?

So I settled down and reviewed the rulebook one more time. Pages 8-13 were full of hints and ideas. And then, alas, I found that the rulebook warns me to be careful about trying to model success in Fourth Age, circa 1000 after the earlier scenarios. Does this mean that my idea was sunk even before I had begun my journey?

Fortunately, the answer is "NO". Because, although the successful nations of Third Age, circa 1650 & circa 2950 will not always work in Fourth Age, circa 1000, the kinds of nations found in those scenarios very often will. And thus I hit upon ten different kinds of nations that could be considered during the nation design.

Of course, none of the ten different kinds of nations below are guaranteed to win, nor are they even the best possible designs for that type - the character selection is simplistic (only a few are multi-skilled), PC locations are hardly even discussed, some SNA's were selected to use up points, etc. But they do provide some ideas for how to design a nation with a particular theme in mind. You should change and enhance these models to suite your particular tastes, needs, interests, and style of play.

Furthermore, you may well think up even more different kinds of nations. GREAT - the more the merrier! In fact, as you begin to consider a greater variety of nation types, you may soon discover that you ARE designing your own nation after all. You just needed some ideas about where to start. Good luck - the game has begun...

1: Non-human:

The Snaga Lords
Evil - Non-human
SNA's: 26, 29, 30
2 artifacts
10 war machines
VC #6

300 Heavy Infantry

Fortify PC 1 with a Fort
Fortify PC 2 with a Tower
Fortify PC 3 with a Tower
Add a new Camp

2: Dwarven:

The Barakul
Good - Dwarven
SNA's: 3, 15, 20, 21
2 artifacts
VC #4

300 Heavy Infantry

Fortify PC 1 with a Fort
Fortify PC 2 with a Tower
Improve PC 4 to a Village

CH 1: 60-A
CH 2: 50-C
CH 3: 50-M (314,412,416,418,428)
CH 4: 50-E
CH 5: 30-A 30-M (314,410,417)
CH 6: 30-C
CH 7: 30-C
CH 8: 30-E

All points used. Several unique DS SNA's. Well-defended PC's. Good economic base. Sound military strength. Good emissaries, agents, and mages. Well rounded.

CH 1: 60-C
CH 2: 60-C
CH 3: 50-E
CH 4: 40-A
CH 5: 30-C 30-M (4,104,416)
CH 6: 30-E
CH 7: 30-A
CH 8: 30-C

Almost all points used. Several unique Dwarven SNA's. Defended PC's. Good economic base. Sturdy military. Good emissaries. Fair agents and mages. Very good military potential.

3: Elven:

The Dolenraní
Good - Elven
SNA's: 5, 10, 14, 18
2 artifacts
VC #2

400 Archers

Fortify PC 1 with a Tower
Fortify PC 2 with a Tower
Fortify PC 3 with a Tower
Add a Port & Harbor
Add a new Camp

4: Naval:

The Pirates of Belfalas
Neutral - Men
SNA's: 12, 17, 32, 34
2 artifacts
8 transports
12 warships
VC #3

800 Men-at-Arms

Fortify PC 1 with a Tower
Add a Port
Add a Harbor
Add a Harbor

5: Riders:

The Easterners
Neutral - Men
SNA's: 12, 21, 24
2 artifacts
10 war machines
VC #3

200 Heavy Cavalry

Fortify PC 1 with a Tower
Fortify PC 2 with a Tower
Add a new Camp
Add a new Camp

6: Agent:

The Derngorgor
Evil - Men
SNA's: 11, 31
VC #1

100 Men-at-Arms

Fortify PC 1 with a Tower
Improve PC 4 to a Village
Add a new Camp

CH 1: 60-M (4,6,302,408,410,413,422)
CH 2: 40-C 20-E
CH 3: 40-A
CH 4: 20-C 20-M (102,202)
CH 5: 20-A 60-M(4,412,418,428,416, 420)
CH 6: 40-E
CH 7: 40-E
CH 8: 30-C

Not all points used. Several unique Elven SNA's. Defended PC's. Probably opt for coastal location. Good economic base. Some military strength. Numerous emissaries. Excellent mages.

CH 1: 20-A 60-E
CH 2: 60-C 20-A
CH 3: 30-E
CH 4: 40-A
CH 5: 40-C
CH 6: 30-C
CH 7: 30-E
CH 8: 30-M (102,302,412)

Not all points used. Several naval SNA's. Undefended PC's with port/harbors. But, location is everything - capital insurance taken! Sound military strength. Good mobility. Good emissaries and commanders.

CH 1: 60-C 30-E
CH 2: 40-C
CH 3: 40-C
CH 4: 40-A
CH 5: 40-A
CH 6: 40-E
CH 7: 40-M (4,214,302,508)
CH 8: 40-M (412,416,418,508)

All points used. Several military SNA's. Defended PC's. Good economic base. Good military strength. Mobile. Good commanders. Balanced emissaries, agents, and mages. Eastern location.

CH 1: 50-A
CH 2: 40-C
CH 3: 50-A
CH 4: 40-A
CH 5: 60-E
CH 6: 30-C 20-A
CH 7: 30-M (408,412,422)
CH 8: 30-E

Not all points used. Some helpful agent SNA's. Undefended PC's. but many excellent guards. Good economic base. Little military strength. Good emissaries and agents.

7: Emissary:

The Grey Hand
Good - Men
SNA's: 9, 22, 23
3 artifacts
VC #3

100 Men-at-Arms

Fortify PC 1 with a Tower
Fortify PC 2 with a Tower
Add a new Camp
Add a new Camp

CH 1: 20-C 60-E
CH 2: 40-C
CH 3: 20-A 60-E
CH 4: 30-M (412,418,502)
CH 5: 30-A
CH 6: 60-E
CH 7: 40-E
CH 8: 30-C

Not all points used. Several useful/different SNA's. Defended PC's. Good economic base. Many artifacts. Little military strength. Excellent emissaries.

8: Mage:

The Vanamarf
Good - Elven
SNA's: 5, 10, 16
3 artifacts
VC #5

300 Archers

Fortify PC 1 with a Fort
Add a new Camp
Add a new Camp

CH 1: 30-C 60-M (4,102,106,208,302,406)
CH 2: 40-A
CH 3: 60-M (412,416,418,420,428,430)
CH 4: 60-M (408,412,418,422,428,432)
CH 5: 40-M (4,8,412,416)
CH 6: 30-A
CH 7: 40-E
CH 8: 30-E

Not all points used. Several useful mage SNA's. Defended PC's. Good economic base. Fair military strength. Excellent mages. Many artifacts. Good for finding more artifacts.

9: Economic:

The Black Cartel
Evil - Men
SNA's: 8, 9, 19, 25
VC #3

200 Heavy Cavalry

Fortify PC 1 with a Tower
Improve PC 2 to a Major Town

CH 1: 60-E
CH 2: 50-C
CH 3: 40-A
CH 4: 60-E
CH 5: 60-E
CH 6: 30-A
CH 7: 40-E
CH 8: 30-M (2,416,510)

Not all points used. Many useful gold-saving SNA's. Defended PC's. Backup capital. Very good economic base. Sound military strength. Excellent emissaries.

10: Hidden:

The Lost Tribe of Dain
Good - Dwarven
SNA's: 3, 4, 19
1 Hidden PC
VC #7

300 Heavy Infantry

PC 1 Hidden
Fortify PC 2 with a Tower
Fortify PC 3 with a Tower
Add a new Camp

CH 1: 60-C
CH 2: 50-E
CH 3: 50-A
CH 4: 50-M (208,220,412,418,428)
CH 5: 40-C
CH 6: 40-E
CH 7: 30-A
CH 8: 30-M (412,416,420)

Not all points used. Several useful SNA's. Defended PC's. Hidden capital - insurance taken! Good economic base. No military. Good emissaries, agents, and mages. Well rounded.

*Of Desert Kings, Giant Killers, Ice Runners and other would be Emperors.
A study in nation placement for the Fourth Age circa 1000
by Mike Hunnensen
[edited by Game Systems Inc]*

In Middle-earth PBM the Fourth Age (circa 1000), a new and fantastic aspect of the game is that players can choose the specifics of their nation (unlike 1650 and 2950 where everything about each nation is predetermined). One of the most important decisions for the player to make is that of the nation's homeland location on the Middle-earth map. A player can have some fun with the Special Nation Abilities, Character skills, and Population Center improvements, but taking your nation's starting homeland lightly will only lead to frustration and possibly an early exit from the game.

Smart investors know that it is better to buy the least expensive house in the best location than to buy the most expensive house in the worst location. Successful retail businesses and restaurants know that the three most important things to their success is first, location; second, location and third, location! In order to find the best location, and hence give your nation a fair chance of prospering, three things must be considered about the area you are surveying. These are:

a) **Defensibility** - is the area you selected secure from invaders?

b) **Economic potential** - is there room for growth and is the area likely to be rich in resources?

c) **Strategic influence** - does the location provide you with access to areas that you want to be/expect to be important during the game? Will your tactical map (the one that comes with each turn) be a good one?

d) **Popularity** - the more popular a location appears to other players, the less likely you are to be able to secure this homeland for your nation.

With these three things in mind, I have combed the Middle-earth map to find some prime locations. Twenty or so locations were considered and narrowed down to twelve for the reader to consider and hopefully make a wise decision on where to plant their flag.

1. South East Mordor (Capital around 4028) Overall: Excellent, but popular!

Defense: Excellent+ Economy: Excellent Influence: Average

The most defensible real estate you will find! It also promises a booming economy, a good tactical map and access roads (without vulnerability). An army trying to assault this capital would find the going very tough. From 3628 or 3729 (both of which you can see on your tactical map) an army would take no less than 4 turns to reach your capital. In this time, you should be able to scout the army and build a sufficient force to repel the invaders. In fact, it is likely that you will never have to suffer the indignity of a foreign army at your capital - your opponents just won't bother.

From 4028 you can see the eastern edge of the map. You have access to a rich area of rough to your immediate south and a bottle neck of plains hexes, right on the road, for which to build cavalry and bring them to battle quickly (if you so desire). Of course weather will be favorable all year round keeping the economy producing. This is a particularly excellent location for a mage and/or agent based nation and would be suited to a hard nosed free player (a Dwarven kind of guy) or a Dark servant who wishes to be left alone to pursue his sinister goals.

2. Umbar (Capital around 2337) Overall: Good+, but popular!

Defense: Average Economy: Excellent Influence: Good

A fantastic location overall, particularly for a nation that wants to cultivate a solid economy supporting a powerful navy. Defensibility is good because you will see any attack coming and will have a turn at least to react. Access to numerous rough hexes will give you all the gold you need. Three forest hexes are nearby and will supply the timber required. The capital location was chosen because it provides immediate access to all three forest hexes (2135, 2136, 2137) and is the natural spot to build a population center with a port. If a port does not interest you and you want a slightly better tactical map with better defensibility, then 2435 is a good alternative. This location lets you see more Eastward while still being able to keep an eye on the Coast. Your navy will allow you to get to the action very quickly even though you are at the south edge of the map. I recommend this position for all allegiances - particularly as a non-traditional Elven homestead.

3. South Enedwaith (Capital around 1621 - hidden) Overall: Good+, but popular!
Defense: Fair Economy: Excellent Influence: Excellent

An excellent location for a Neutral player in this writer's opinion and good for all political leanings. Close (but not too close) to the action, Enedwaith is the perfect area to take full advantage of the hidden capital option and to see which way the winds are blowing while churning out a solid economic base. This has one of the best tactical maps (with capital placement at 1621). You can see the Coast to the West and South; as far North as 1715 - an important bridge hex; and as far East as the bottle neck at 1920! I also like this area a lot because it is not likely to be considered that good by many surveyors. If you don't want to pay for a hidden capital, you may want to fortify with a fort or opt to be a neutral player. Alternatively, I would suggest a capital location a few hexes South to tuck in below the mountain range (such as 1524). This will give you more defense but a worse map. Note, Enedwaith is also a great area if you wish to dabble with a navy - an option I highly recommend - by putting one of your satellite population centers at 1322 or similar, with a harbor.

4. The Sea of Rhûn (Capital around 4412) Overall: Good, but popular!
Defense: Good Economy: Good Influence: Average

This area has it all. The only problem is that it is likely to be popular (nations will naturally congregate near a large body of water). You may want to try your capital at 4415 and fortified satellite population centers at 4417 and 4413, you create a defensive perimeter that is tough to crack. Because you are at the edge of the map, you will likely be able to see other nation's capitals where they won't necessarily see yours (their maps will be centered, where yours will be offset from the edge of the map). You have access to the mountain hex in the middle of the sea of Rhûn - an unreachable hex for any army. The economic potential is fantastic with access to each of the different terrain types and good weather. Roads to the North and South allow for your armies to range far and if you are daring, a harbor at the capital allows instant access to Mirkwood (the timber factory and likely location for nations that you can plunder or assist if needed). An excellent starting point for any allegiance, but a neutral nation will benefit most. The choice of 4412 is a little more vulnerable, but would allow you to see the group of rough hexes around 3707 - a great place to build camps.

5. Fangorn Forest (Capital around 2218) Overall: Good
Defense: Average Economy: Good Influence: Good

This location is recommended for Neutrals and Free. From 2218 you can see the Road leading into Mirkwood, and the road through the "pass". Well placed and

protected satellite population centers will allow you to march your armies East or West as the situation demands. A nation in Fangorn is too far away from the either of the twin kingdoms to be a target, but is situated such that both will want you as an ally. With time to build, your nation should be able to give the North or South King some serious trouble - you may end up as the game's "Giant Killer". Your economy will do fine with access to all 4 terrain types in acceptable climates. Defensive considerations are taken care of with the Misty mountains to your west and army slowing forests all around. This location works well with the Special Nation Ability of "build fortifications at half timber cost" and allows a wide range of viable options for your nations starting characteristics. An alternative is to hide your capital and place it a few hexes East for a better tactical map and additional defense.

6. North East Mordor (Capital around 3722) Overall: Average+
Defense: Average Economy: Good Influence: Average

A decent second choice if you want to be in Mordor and you figure the best location in the game is going to be nigh impossible to get. Economic growth should be brisk. Double row of mountains to the top will force attackers to go the long way around to get to you. You won't get back-stabbed here. The minus is that the tactical map is not all that great and it will take you a long time to march armies to where you want them to be. This location is another mage/agent type and is particularly suited to Dark Servant players or daring free players. A option here for a Neutral player would be to build several hexes East at 4022 for a better tactical map but less defensibility.

7. East Arnor (Capital around 2106) Overall: Average
Defense: Average Economy: Average Influence: Average

An exciting location to be for any allegiance. Here you are nicely secured in a cul-de-sac, and are impervious to naval assault but 'ware the North King! If not for him Defense would be 'Good'. You are on his side of the Misty Mountains and any wrong move on your part will most assuredly send him after you. Economy has potential but the weather is going to work against you. The tactical map is fair but the Misty Mountains run down the center of your map and it would be best if they were on one edge or the other. You have access to the Northern road, the Misty passes and Moria is at your Southern Edge. I recommend this location as the best "second choice".

8. North Mirkwood (Capital around 2909) Overall: Average
Defense: Average Economy: Average Influence: Average

A conservative location choice, North Mirkwood should allow for quiet expansion whilst not being hard pressed by neighbors. Cold weather will slow your production, but being in the middle of the timber factory will offset this disadvantage somewhat. Your Tactical map is acceptable. At 2807 you can see the top edge of the map the Misty mountains to your West, and the road running down Mirkwood is on your East edge. At 2909 you can see all of Mirkwood and you can commission a small navy to harbor at 3111, but you are a little more vulnerable to armies coming through Mirkwood on the road that bisects. A compromise between these ideas would be 2808.

9. South Gondor (Capital around 2023) Overall: Average
Defense: Average Economy: Average Influence: Fair

A solid second choice and perhaps first in some situations. This position would seem at first glance better than it is and many players are likely to try and jump

on it. Defense would seem higher because of the mountainous pillow surrounding the capital, but plains hexes to the south make you vulnerable to naval attacks without much warning and the mountain hex 1922 is a single mountain, so it can be traversed by a determined opponent. Economy would seem to be fantastic, but you will have to fight with the South Kingdom for the valuable rough hexes to the East; there is no real timber on your map; the plains hexes to the south are vulnerable; and placing anything on the North Side of the mountains is a temptation for anyone in the area that would be hard to resist. And lastly, the tactical map is such that much will be happening all around you, but you won't know about it. There is much waste on the map with an unwanted view of the ocean deeps and if anyone locates at 2227 or 2430, you will find your starting location choice to be very disappointing. I stress this spot is only average, yet many will find it to be just what they want.

10. Near Harad (Capital around 4438) Overall: Fair
Defense: Average Economy: Average Influence: Poor

This is the second most isolated spot on the map. A desert king ye shall be! You won't be in the thick of things any time soon and your tactical map shows much that is useless, but there is a large chunk of rough for the taking and you are so far away that no one is likely to bother with you. The road nearby does allow you to send a scout/raid army north to take a peek, but will they find anything? This location is a decent second choice for anyone wanting to study arcane lore or explore the realm of shadows.

11. West Forlindon (Capital around 0507) Overall: Fair
Defense: Average Economy: Fair Influence: Average

This location becomes MUCH better if you are friends with the North Kingdom player and intend to ally with him; otherwise it is recommended only as a second choice. The line of mountains will help protect your main group of population centers and will deter the North King if he has designs on your holdings. The tactical map is a good one as you can see the West and North edges of the map and effectively see any naval movement North of the 13th line. Economy will be sluggish due to the short "growing season". You have a little room to expand, but the area protected by the mountains will fill quickly, forcing you to consider venturing forth and leaving yourself vulnerable. If you are into navies, this location is the second best area on the map if you want to build an armada. In this case capital placement at 0508 with a port is a good variation for capital placement.

12. The Northern Waste (Capital around 4401) Overall: Fair
Defense: Fair Economy: Fair Influence: Poor

This location is mostly mentioned for its role-playing potential. As an Icerunner, you will truly be in the most isolated area of the map. It's polar all year long and there are no roads nearby - you won't be bothered any time soon. Anyone that could reach you is unlikely themselves to be able to afford an army of any size. This location does have some potential if no one builds in North Rhûn. The Iron Hills will be all yours and you can get by with 6 to 10 villages placed intelligently in the North East. The tactical map has the advantage of being able to see an attacker long before he gets to your capital. If you want to be more in the thick of things and like the challenge of playing in the waste, an alternative capital location would be at 2903 or 2803. I call this area the "Horseshoe". It gives you more influence and access to more terrain types, but you will be

penned in a bit and a determined army can come through your single line of mountains or come around. This area is a strong candidate for a hidden capital.

And that is my list of 12!

Please note, the above information is very subjective in nature. It represents my personal opinion on nation placement and does not necessarily take into account particular variables that may exist from game to game. I strongly advise that you temper the suggestions given with your own insights and personal judgments. Furthermore, the more popular that a location is perceived, the less likely you will be able to secure the location as your homeland's primary choice.

To conclude, there is at least one other very desirable (Excellent+) location on the map that I have not discussed. Simply because that's where I intend to be! Take a look and see if you can locate this "secret" area. If you do, you'll know where to find me . . .

Hobbiton Square

An open forum for the exchange of ideas and opinions.

I have heard quite a number of comments on GSI's customer service policies and feel that I may be able to offer a different slant on the matter. Perhaps even I might have a few tidbits of wisdom.

As someone who sits on both sides of the customer service table, I find GSI's service to be efficient, fair and consistent. Depending on one's viewpoint though, this could be seen as cold, biased and inflexible.

One a positive view point and one a negative. I think that it is important to keep in mind that GSI applies their customer service in a holistic fashion. That is, if you contact them with a problem, they have to consider if dealing with your problem in a manner that you personally feel satisfied with, will it impact unfairly on others in the game you are playing.

The answer to this question is most likely yes it will, and thus GSI can not make you happy. But if we look at this practice with the big picture in mind, it can be said that most of the customer service decisions GSI will make in your favor, you will never know about. It is in fact when they are wrestling with one of your opponents trying perhaps to gain some sort of favor from GSI, that they are giving you quality service.

You always know what you are going to get. And even if you don't fancy vanilla all the time, at least you won't be surprised with a scoop of Dijon supreme. And, even though you may not always like the answer you get, you will always get an answer (a rarity these days).

The other thing I can say is that while GSI's consistency (inflexibility?) can be frustrating to some, I think as "gamers", we are spoiled. We are used to being able to directly affect the system(s) we choose to involve ourselves in. I would hazard a guess that the GSI customers who have little or no "gaming" experience, are not overly concerned with specific game mechanics. We also have to consider that our opinions may be directly opposed to others. For example, I

find dragons in 2950 to be far, far too powerful for the context of the game; however, I've seen arguments that without them, the DS would not have a chance. I doubt this, but it is the opinion of some. So if you were in GSI's shoes what would you do? Change the game to make some happy and (apparently) some unhappy?

Anyway, I mention this because I find I often have people talking about this or that bad experience with GSI where usually the complainant in question was attempting to receive an exception to GSI's clearly stated policies, was unsuccessful, and took it personally. (Just the other day a good friend ranted at me for 30 minutes about being special serviced because he sent his Email turn in at 9:10 - 10 minutes late. My friend sees this as inflexible, I see it as consistent, no exceptions, and I appreciate it, even if it makes life difficult for my side).

What ever the complication, don't take it personally. GSI's service for good or ill is designed around the whole, not the part. In the long run, it's helps you out, even if you can't immediately see it.

Have a great day!
Mike Hunnensen

P.S. having shared the above with you, I don't want anyone to think I am a smoozer (smile). I have had my little duels with an unnamed individual at GSI myself. And I have dropped a game or two to show my protest. But in reflection, I probably acted emotionally, when my stress level (game wise) was high and the problems seemed larger then they really were.

The Oracle Speaks

Got a question about your game you can't seem to find an answer to? Ask the Oracle!

MIDDLE-EARTH PBM

Q. If I have an army in a hex and I give that army a Stand & Defend order, will it stop enemy armies who are moving evasively from moving through the hex?

A. If the armies both start in the same hex, the answer to this question is yes. If there is an army who comes in from another hex, however, the army has a chance to get by the defending army because of its evasive movement. Essentially, if both armies start in the hex, the Defending army knows there is an enemy force in the hex and can make arrangements to prevent that enemy army from moving. If the enemy army starts from a different hex, then the Defending army is unsure if any enemy forces will pass through; thus, evasive movement might work. The rulebook is a little confusing on this matter. Please refer to p. 100 for clarification when filling out turnsheets.

Address any questions you may have about your game to "The Oracle Speaks". Printed inquiries may be signed or anonymous but please include your name and game number when submitting.

The Hall Of Heroes

ME-PBM CIRCA 1650

Game #103 - The Free Peoples: #9, #10& #4.

The strain of war has been lifted from Middle-earth. No more shall the peasants choke on the thick, black smoke from their own fields. The lapdogs of Sauron have been killed or exiled, and all has returned to peace. With the aid of their cousins, the Noldo Elves, as well as the Dúnadan Rangers, the Sinda Elves have made Middle-earth free. Final standings are as follows:

#9 Sinda Elves: 2167 - Jeffrey D. Pluhar

#10 Noldo Elves: 2133 - Thomas P. Fagedes

#4 Dúnadan Rangers: 1942 - Mark Jackson

Top Dark Servant: #18 Fire King: 1650

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Minastir/Arthedain: 288

Highest Net Commander Rank - Minastir/Arthedain: 235

Highest Net Mage Rank - Baranor/Noldo Elves: 160

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Calendriel/Sinda Elves: 130

Highest Net Agent Rank- Elrohir/Noldo Elves: 140

Most Mithril - Noldo Elves: 4463

Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 34

Most Kills - Dunlendings: 62

Game #191 - The Dark Servants: #13, #19 & #17.

A harvest moon hung obscured in the smoke-filled skies over Dol Amroth. Winding his way through the city's familiar alleys, Enodir made his way toward the outskirts of town. The boy's quiet footsteps drew no attention from the hastily-posted patrols that circulated the streets. Not that they would have cared. Now that the city's adult inhabitants had been conscripted to the ore refinery by Dendra Dwar's brutal militia, children wandering the streets were a common enough sight. As he approached the scrubby treeline outside of town, Enodir could hear the clang of metal picks on stone and the screams of the tormented. Dwar's men ran the mines and refinery with a brutal efficiency that Sauron himself would have appreciated. The town's inhabitants were fed only enough to survive, which is why children like Enodir secretly foraged in the woods at night. Young as he was, Enodir had adapted well in the months since the collapse of the Free Nations. Pausing thoughtfully, he considered his future (as he saw it, as a hero of his people uniting them to overthrow Sauron's minions). Stooping to grab a switch, he feigned and thrust, dodged and parried against an imagined foe. Or foes, he thought with an exhilarating rush! He could see himself pitted against a whole squad of Dwar's militia, fighting for his life . . .

The sound of a twig snapping on the trail ahead of him brought him to his senses. What if it was the town guard?! They would surely want to know what a ten-year-old boy was doing in the woods after curfew! Scrambling into the brush, Enodir crouched in fear and peered into the darkness. Far ahead, a ghostly figure trudged down the path, shimmering in the pearlescent moonlight. As the figure neared, Enodir could hear him whispering faintly. He could not believe his eyes. The stories about Prince Celdrahil's tormented spirit wandering the land were true! Finally, the spectre was so close that Enodir could see ethereal blood trailing from its slit throat. Just when it seemed the spirit would pass him, it seemed to sense his presence and stopped dead, turning to stare at him. Only then did he hear what the dead prince whispered:

"Failed . . . I failed . . ."

Final standings are as follows:

#13 Dog Lord: 2250 - Clifford T. Siebert

#19 Long Rider: 1960 - Dina M. Comeau

#17 Quiet Avenger: 1900 - Lori S. Siebert

Top Free Peoples: #7 Southern Gondor: 800

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

The Hall Of Heroes

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Khathog/Ice King: 251
 Highest Net Commander Rank - Rogrog/Witch-king, Bulrakur/Dog Lord: 140
 Highest Net Mage Rank - Khathog/Ice King: 241
 Highest Net Emissary Rank - Arassuil/Sinda Elves: 122
 Highest Net Agent Rank- Wirsh/Ice King: 168
 Most Mithril - Quiet Avenger: 1078
 Most Artifacts - Ice King : 17
 Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 28

Game #201 - The Free Peoples: #22, #7 & #10.

The merciless sun beating down upon his withered frame, Uvatha trudged along a northern course through the desert toward Khand. He muttered to himself as he walked, apparently furious at his inability to procure a mount. Imagine Uvatha, the Long Rider, Ninth of the Nazgûl, walking anywhere! With the collapse of his own empire, he had taken quite an interest in the doings of the other Nazgûl. For some time, it had seemed as though the Dog Lord, the Cloud Lord, and the rest might succeed. Despite the fact that Nazgûl were dropping like flies, their nations continued. Uvatha had watched with baited breath as the nations of the late Dendra Dwar and Jf Indûr had peaked and fallen. Now, with Middle-earth in the hands of the damnable Free Peoples, life as a Ringwraith was considerably more difficult. He was headed toward the south of Rhovanion, where it was rumored that the One Ring had finally been found. With any luck he would steal it from whoever had stumbled across it, killing them if necessary, and offer it up to Lord Sauron. Ah, what it would be like to wield power again . . .

Smiling, Angamaité watched his progress from a hilltop a mile away. Little did Sauron's lackeys know that it was one of his men, a mage known as Meriot, who had located the One Ring. Acting on Angamaité's orders, Meriot had used his magic to Teleport to Mount Doom a week ago. The only thing waiting for the few surviving Nazgûl in Rhovanion were armies of South Gondor and the Noldo Elves under the command of Warlord Cledrahil and General Gaerdae, respectively. The trap was set. The continued freedom of Middle-earth would finally be assured.

Final standings are as follows:

#22 Haradwaith: 2117 - Matthew S. Siebert
 #7 Southern Gondor: 2050 - Benjamin F. Williams Jr.
 #10 Noldo Elves: 1983 - Brian D. Mason

Top Dark Servant: #13 Dog Lord: 700

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Tarondor/Northern Gondor: 205
 Highest Net Commander Rank - Tarondor/Northern Gondor: 188
 Highest Net Mage Rank - Círdan/Noldo Elves: 155
 Highest Net Emissary Rank - Stenmeier/Cardolan: 129
 Highest Net Agent Rank- Elesser/Southern Gondor: 158
 Most Mithril - Southern Gondor: 799
 Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves : 21
 Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 18

The Hall Of Heroes

Game #209 - The Dark Servants: #22, #14 & #13.

Huddled in the darkness, Jhave listened for her grandmother's shuffling footsteps. So intent was she on listening for the sound of her grandmother's approach that she jumped when she felt a bony hand on her shoulder. Laughing, the young elfling entreated her grandmother to sit with her. This was Ascarnil's way of reminding her that she was as able as ever, regardless of the long and wearying centuries that twisted her frail form. With a wheezing sigh, Ascarnil settled into a chair and lit a candle, all the light they could risk. Even now, Sauron's minions scoured all of Middle-earth for the surviving heroes of the Free Peoples. Ascarnil had led a company of highly-skilled agents for the nation of the Noldor, and her demise was high on Emperor Carlon III's agenda. She had literally gone to ground, hiding in a little-known cavern in eastern Angmar. Her daughter, Jhaeve's mother, had been executed in an attempt to draw Ascarnil from hiding. Though she had wanted to avenge her daughter, she was physically unable due to extreme age, and had instead raised Jhaeve for the task. Every waking hour was devoted to the young agent's training.

Opening a well-worn book, she read from a widely-known passage:

" . . . and so traveled Nick-Nack to Mount Doom, and the One Ring was returned to Sauron!! There was a great roar and the mountain shook to its very core. The land for miles around trembled as great fissures divided the plains and dark thunderclouds approached. Great fires leaped from the summit, lightning crackled through the skies, and heavy rains fell. Suddenly the minions of the Dark Lord cried in ecstasy as their Dark Lord began his rule in earnest. The cry was heard in the minds and hearts of all the Dark Servants . . . SAURON HAS THE ONE RING!!"

Final standings are as follows:

#22 Haradwaith: 2050 - Jeremy Reeves
 #14 Cloud Lord: 1934 - David Herron
 #13 Dog Lord: 1900 - Jason Cody

Top Free Peoples: #9 Sinda Elves: 950

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Tónn Varthkûr/Dog Lord: 194
 Highest Net Commander Rank - Tónn Varthkûr/Dog Lord: 160
 Highest Net Mage Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 127
 Highest Net Emissary Rank - Professor/Cloud Lord Namrodel/Sinda Elves: 90
 Highest Net Agent Rank- Dîn Ohtar/Dog Lord: 109
 Most Mithril - Easterlings: 2844
 Most Artifacts - Dog Lord: 30
 Most Kills - Dog Lord: 20

Game #210 - The Dark Servants: #19, #15 & #18.

For the first time in months, the sound of battle is absent from Middle-earth. Now the only sounds are those that come from the slave camps, where the "Free" Peoples toil endlessly to the great amusement of their captors. The screams of the tormented waft across the plains, and Sauron chuckles. . .

Final standings are as follows:

#19 Long Rider: 1675 - Russell D. Cleveland
 #15 Blind Sorcerer: 1625 - Thomas G. Lutke
 #18 Fire King: 1550 - William W. Parker

Top Free Peoples: #1 Woodmen: 500

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Finduilas III/Cardolan: 173
 Highest Net Commander Rank - Tónn Varthkûr/Dog Lord Hoarmûrath/Ice King: 114
 Highest Net Mage Rank - Finduilas III/Cardolan: 161
 Highest Net Emissary Rank - Tervuren/Dark Lieutenants: 99
 Highest Net Agent Rank- Hollingsworth/Witch-king: 114
 Most Mithril - Dwarves: 788
 Most Artifacts - Cloud Lord: 19
 Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 41

The Hall Of Heroes

ME-PBM CIRCA 2950

Game #26 - The Free Peoples: #4, #10 & #9.

Shadowy figures danced around a bonfire in the center of a clearing deep in Mirkwood. Elves, Sinda, Silvan, and Noldo as well, danced alongside their newfound Dúnedain allies. Their victory had been hard-won, and they celebrated to forget the horrors they had seen. The journey, though difficult, had been worth it: Middle-earth was finally free!!

Final standings are as follows:

#4 Dúnedain Rangers: 2350 - John H. Lamulle

#10 Noldo Elves: 1992 - David B. Rosenberg

#9 Sinda Elves: 1850 - Ronald S. Valli

Top Dark Servant: #16 Ice King: 675

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Aragorn II/Dúnedain Rangers: 213

Highest Net Commander Rank - Elboron/Dúnedain Rangers: 142

Highest Net Mage Rank - Encalion/Dúnedain Rangers: 140

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 100

Highest Net Agent Rank- Zezibell/Khand Easterlings: 126

Most Mithril - Dragon Lord: 606

Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 25

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 19

Game #27 - The Dark Servants: #14, #13 & #19.

The morning sun shone down on the fork in the road outside the city of Pelargir, where almost two thousand men milled about anxiously. A hushed silence fell and all nervous movement ceased when Aglor stepped out from his tent. All eyes were on him. Pausing to adjust his hauberk and take a deep, steadying breath, he spoke:

"You have all been kept aware of the status of our ongoing war with the minions of evil. Prince Imrahil's untimely death, the fall of our kinsmen to the north . . . the situation has looked grim for some time now. No matter our strength, the best we can hope for at this rate is to die honorably in battle. Therefore, the decision has been made to withdraw while we can, effective immediately. We will march west, where we w-URRGGGHHH!!!

Aglor's eyes bulged wildly in his head as he looked down incredulously at the spreading stain of blood on his fine white hauberk. A long mithril blade protruded from his heart. Blood gushed freely from the wound and from his mouth. For several agonizing moments he swayed, finally falling face-first in the dust. A piece of parchment was stapled to his back care of the offending dagger.

As soldiers raced about in search of the assassin, the agent known only as Sentry knelt before his lord's corpse. Blinking back tears of failure, he seized the parchment and read it. And it said, in the same Black Speech of Mordor that was engraved on the legendary One Ring:

"Thus does the curtain fall and unending night begin.

--Din Ohtar."

Final standings are as follows:

#14 Cloud Lord: 2150 - Jeremy Reeves

#13 Dog Lord: 2067 - David Herron

#19 Long Rider: 1600 - Jason Cody

Top Free Peoples: #7 Southern Gondor: 633

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Bulrakur/Dog Lord: 200

Highest Net Commander Rank - Bulrakur/Dog Lord: 175

Highest Net Mage Rank - Múrazór/Witch-king: 134

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Coronada/Witch-king: 121

Highest Net Agent Rank- Duchess/Dog Lord: 165

Most Mithril - Blind Sorcerer: 3717

Most Artifacts - Dog Lord: 20

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 32

The Hall Of Heroes

Game #29 - The Free Peoples: #10, #2 & #4.

Reclining in his bedchambers, Elrond silently recounted the progress they had made. Though many had died along the way, the Free had triumphed over Sauron's lickspittles, the Noldo leading the way. Today had seen the execution of the last of the Dog Lord's men. Dwar himself had become dog food some time ago, and only his followers remained. Most of them had stubbornly chosen a quick death, but there were exceptions. Elrond grinned as he admired the incredible shine on his boots sitting in the corner. A lifetime of servitude. Oh well. At least Elrond would always be assured of having well-shined boots.

Final standings are as follows:

#10 Noldo Elves: 1767 - Jeremy Reeves

#2 Northmen: 1708 - Marc A. Parker

#4 Dúnedain Rangers: 1667 - Mark J. Urdmann

Top Dark Servant: #13 Dog Lord: 750

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Ohtar/Silvan Elves: 196

Highest Net Commander Rank - Ohtar/Silvan Elves: 139

Highest Net Mage Rank - Shoglic/Cloud Lord: 192

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Glorádhel/Noldo Elves: 118

Highest Net Agent Rank- Lintrandir/Sinda Elves: 125

Most Mithril - Dog Lord: 1120

Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 29

Most Kills - Dunlendings: 25

Game #42 - The Dark Servants: #25, #12 & #23.

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

Final standings are as follows:

#25 Khand Easterlings: 1917 -

#12 Dragon Lord: 1800 -

#23 Dunlendings: 1683 - Timothy R. Johnson

Top Free Peoples: #7 Southern Gondor: 400

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Dendra Dwar/Dog Lord: 164

Highest Net Commander Rank - Bolg/Witch-king: 135

Highest Net Mage Rank - Dendra Dwar/Dog Lord: 125

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Angúllion/Witch-king: 119

Highest Net Agent Rank- Din Ohtar/Long Rider: 130

Most Mithril - Khand Easterlings: 3807

Most Artifacts - Dark Lieutenants: 15

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 18