

WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



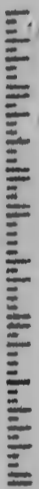
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WORDS FROM THE WOOD

It's election time once again, and all I can say is---GET IT OVER WITH!!!! If I see one more pandering, overbearing, officious-looking political advertisement, I think I'll go insane. Watching these so-called "ads" makes me feel like I'm on the playground in the third grade. "Teacher, Billy raised taxes!" "Nuh-uh!! Bobby cut welfare and education!" "Did not!" "Did too!" "Did not!" "Did Too!" "Did not!" "Did Too!" "Did not!" "Did Too!" "Infinity!" Come to think of it, third graders have more sense.

I'd like to take this opportunity to address the topic of character names. We have noticed an increasing number of players trying to name their characters "A Dragon," "Town Militia," "A Demon," etc. GSI cannot accept these names. While GSI has no problems with players trying to "disguise" characters by naming them with variations of existing character names, using names which may be interpreted as NPCs or game related encounters will not be allowed. Names such as these can alter gaming strategy because players may believe they are NPCs, and GSI does not want this to happen. We ask that you refrain from using such character names.

Well, by the time you get this newsletter, the Fourth Age materials should be on their way to you, if you haven't received them already. That's right, the Fourth Age is on its way. We at GSI are very excited about the new game and we hope that you, the game playing audience, feels the same.

Speaking of the Fourth Age, our web page has recently been updated to include the new Fourth Age material. We have included an abridged version of the rules as well as the Fourth Age articles which were printed last month. If you haven't visited before, you might want to check the web page out. Not only does it have Fourth Age material, it is also chock full of information and articles on the 1650 and 2950 scenarios. Those of you with access to the net should check out the web page for this nifty new material.

November is here and that can mean only one thing--55 shopping days until Christmas! I know that all of you have that friend who is just IMPOSSIBLE to shop for. Now GSI has the answer--Game Systems Gift Certificates! That's right, these nifty gift certificates can be used for any game that GSI moderates, either for game turns and/or game setups. You can now give the gift that keeps on giving. Just send in your payment and tell us who the gift certificate is for and we will take care of the rest. So what are you waiting for?

That's about it for this month. I'll talk to you all in another thirty!

Stuart



ALONG THE PATHWAYS

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Credits

Editor.....Stuart Taft
Assistant Editor.....Stephanie Jones
Staff.....Yaman Battikhi, Harold Ford, Michelle Heath, Michael Heckart,
Juan Carlos Jasahui, Sabrina McNeely, Anthony Vialon
Publishers.....Pete Stassun & Bill Feild Jr

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This Month's Cover: "Magic in the Woods" by Frank Gembeck Jr.

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PERSONALS: BARBS & BRAGS

Every current GSI player is entitled to a free 60 word personal in this column each issue, for each game they're in. Submissions require a \$2.00 charge for each additional set of 40 words (61-100 is \$2.00 etc.). Submissions should be in by the 15th of the month prior to the publishing date. GSI reserves the right to edit or refuse material deemed unsuitable.

Middle-earth™ PBM

circa 1650

GAME 178

Well, Gandalf's dead. Ho hum, the life of an exterminator is dull but necessary.

Sneaker

GAME 181

Bain,
Laid to final rest,
Upon a mound of purest mithril,
Image highlighted by funeral pyres.

Barduath

Kul Tarkoral

Kal Nargil

El & the Vaders'

GAME 186

Lord Marshal Consomar barked his orders down the vast lines of his host. Behind him the mighty Arch-Mage Voisiol shattered the spell of hiding that had been cast upon the city between the trees. Drungandra chuckled. "Someone announce us. It's time to party."

GAME 199

We know you are here.. my precious! Come to uss! You are tricky! Very tricky... my precious!!
Orillion Darkblade

GAME 205

A warning to my enemies in the west... find shelter, a storm of death approaches!!

Orillion Darkblade

GAME 212

Dendra wandered through the burning pits of Hades in the company of Sauron, discussing plans for a world without light, when . . . what a sight . . . Hallas was there chained to a wall!

"Please, somebody beat me! Whip me! Slap me around and call me Suzy!" Hallas begged for attention as idle whips, branding irons, thumb screws and numerous other devices of torture lay scattered about.

"Some people just can't get enough abuse," Sauron laughed. "Every time you think he's had all he can stand, he begs for more. Marquis de Sade would be proud."

High Plains Drifter

GAME 215

Freeps,

I have 3000 cavalry going through the pass south of the Misty Mountains. They are being followed closely by 5000 foot soldiers. These are just my armies. My allies are also sending armies to the lands west of the Misty Mountains. How long do you expect to survive?

Sir Psycho

GAME 218

To the Followers of the Dark:

You may have stopped my armies, but you have failed to hurt me. You steal my gold, but I have none. You kill my leaders and troops, I replace them.

My nation is as strong as ever and now I am inside of Mordor. You know your time is short.

Ovatha II

Emperor of Khand

GAME 222

"Well, the advantage of losing all your starting pop centers is that the Freeps have to work harder to find what you have left."

Khamûl

& the power of positive thinking

GAME 228

The Hordes assaulting Mordor began to stagger in their own blood. The judgment day is at hand.

Orillion Darkblade

GAME 229

Threlin: What are you doing there, soldier?

Dwarven Soldier: I got orders to start building the Dwarven Amphibious Assault Vessels.

Threlin: The what? We hate water! It rusts our armor & we sink. Are you mad?

Dwarven Soldier: No, sir. Reports say the Corsairs have attacked Harad, an ally of ours, so we just build up our "DAAV" and we land on their beaches. The Gondors say they will lend us their warships. All we have to do is get our Dwarves there.

Threlin: Good idea! Heck, the Corsair's navy can scratch itself when I land 15,000 Dwarves on top of their capitol. And if worse comes to worse, I'll land our troops in Harad and take everything back. Good work! Carry on!

Dwarven Soldier: Thank you, sir! I just want to see the Corsair's look when this becomes reality. Start crying because the Dwarves are back in town.
TO BE CONTINUED...

GAME 230

War Bulletin:

"Oh Elrond where art thou? Thine home Rivendale belongs to Dark Servants! Come get it! Arthedain, your armies are no match for the

Dark Servants, bow down to Sauron! Cardolan, your help comes but you belong to me! I will pave the ground with your armies. To All Dark Servants--the ground stinketh of Free People corpses west of The Misty Mountains!

Dark Servant
Rhudaur

GAME 231

This is a formal declaration of a third force in Middle-earth! The Confederate States of Harondor are breaking away from the Free People Union! We will have the military power of South Gondor, the financial support of Haradwaith, and religious leadership of the Corsairs! We will be open to limited offers from either side. In the end we will look out for our interest first.

GAME 235

Hear me Nations of the Free!

Communication is the key to victory. It is what got us to this place in the war, and it is the only thing that will bring an end to it.

We can no longer act solely for the benefit of our own nation but must support one another for victory.

Éothraim, Sinda, Dwarves, Arthedain and Noldo, I'm sorry.

Sincerely,
King Tarondor

GAME 237

As the official cheerleader of the Freeps, I would like to once again take credit for my more modest teammates' victories. Ahem:

Dear Ren,

Perhaps you should ask the Ice King for your major town back. That way we can take your capitol twice.

Da Godfather

GAME 239

To the pointed ears,

I give you complete credit with the killing of Uvatha (very well done). But do not take credit killing Din Ohtar.

Famine

GAME 242

Still wondering who I am?

Ask the Duns--my navy transported an army to their rear.

I am--SIR PSYCHO!

I have come for evil heads to put in my trophy case.

Sir Psycho

GAME 247

The report Sir Psycho received said-- "Finally, Haruth Ramam fell to a savage barrage of blows by Teldûmeir. Teldûmeir was noted to have suffered minor wounds in the fight."

To whoever leads the Harad people: Surrender all your pop centers south of the river and I will end my assault.

Sir Psycho

GAME 248

Northern Gondor--you're in trouble. Do you hear me peaking up your back door? Surrender now while there is time and Sauron might go easily on you. If not, Dark Servants will destroy you. If the Dark Servants can even communicate that would be a plus for now they are silent. Wake up DS!! I await Sauron's command.

Neutral
Haradwaith

GAME 250

An active Eothraim. This could be interesting. I wonder who else is active, Free and Dark alike.

Neutrals--go dark. I don't intend

to lose.

The Prophet

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

The way this game works is the Free People attack the Witch-king, not vice-versa. However, I'm tired of waiting.

Mûrazôr

First of the Nine

Over-Lord of the North

All Around Righteous Dude

GAME 252

The dark is on the rise once more. From the polar regions of the north my armies have been raised. Though out numbered, I have no fear. Together the dark will conquer the light.

Neutral nations hear my commitment. Communication and cooperation will thrive among the Dark Servants. Join us and you will not regret your choice.

Long Live the Dark
Mûrazôr

War Bulletin:

Sniff, sniff, as go the Northern men, what happened? Who turned out the lights? Northern Gondor, are you an ORC? FP motto is, how many orcs does it take to screw a light bulb in? Answer: What's a light bulb?

Dark Servant
Long Rider

Middle-earth™ PBM
circa 2950

GAME 35

"Sire, news from the front. There's Noldo elves about."

"What? How could this be? We've not seen a trace of them for at least 15 turns. Do the Free People we have so gloriously battled for so long know they exist? And if so, why do they let them live? It's obvious the cowardly Elves have been hiding in the weeds while their brave allies fight the battles. If you drop now, Noldo, it will be like you were never there anyhow."

Stormbringer

GAME 48

Sorry Úrzahil, did you want Methir? Next time send a real army--that was too easy. By the way, Nazgûl don't even consider stepping foot into Gondorian lands--if you do I'm gonna

chop that foot off right about at neck level.

Prince Imrahil

GAME 50

Hey Imrahil (slave cockroach),

You speak of the price to be paid for lies and betrayal--Ovatha is finding out how a Sea King and Nazgûl(s) repay the deceptions and lies of a coward. Ya know what, dead prince? I'm not gonna stop until every last one of your puny leaders' heads are on a pig pole and your lands are in flames. Gondor's gonna be the new Mordor.

To the rest of the pathetic Free--

When I'm done with the slave Prince, I'm gonna tear you all a new one.

Stormbringer

Unleashing the Dogs of War

Part II: Army Combat in Middle Earth
by Bradford Fisher

Eomer, Captain of the Riddlermark, gazed across the field at the forces besieging Minas Tirith. The enemy host was immense, blackening the surrounding farmland like locusts. The dotted smoking ruins of burnt-out farmhouses were scattered among Sauron's legions, no doubt co-opted by several of the opposing commanders as bases of operations. His scouts had reported that the largest host were under the command of the dread Witch King himself, and two of Morgoth's worms were enlisted into the dread sorcerer's service. It looked hopeless.

"Yars!" A seasoned Rider materialized at his side.

"Yes, Captain?"

"Get the Riders into formation. We attack at once..."

This is part II of an article on armies in Middle-earth. Part I focused primarily on the mechanics of army movement. Part II focuses on the mechanics of army combat, and takes you step by step through determining whether you'll win a battle or take a population center. Part II, like Part I, uses Gothmog's army as an example:

Gothmog's army: Currently located at 3221, Dark Lieutenant City.

Army has a 50 morale, and belongs to the Dark Lieutenants.

Army Commander Gothmog 80 (100) command, 40 agent

Sub-commander I, Vikenor 33 (45) command, 80 agent, 20 mage

Sub-commander II, Masraden 40 command, 20 agent, +500 combat artifact

1500 Heavy Cavalry (20 training, 20 weapon), 60 armor (steel)

1000 Heavy Infantry (10 training, 10 weapon), no armor

1000 Light Infantry (10 training, 10 weapon), no armor

Calculating Army Strengths:

Although covered in GSI's rulebook, there is still some confusion about how many strengths are calculated.

1) Calculate the troop modifier (a percentage) for each type of troops. It is an average of training, weapon, and terrain (see the "troop terrain combat performance" chart. Good=100%, Average=80%, Poor=60%). Note that you can simplify calculations by "converting" troops to HI and HC, though it is less accurate because the various modifier percentages won't be identical. 2 LI or 5 MA=1 HI, 2 LC= 1 HC. I also usually assume troop tactic modifiers to be 100% to simplify calculations.

Example J: Gothmog's Army at 3221: Gothmog has 1500 HC, 1000 HI, and 1000 LI.

Doing things the fast way, this "converts" into 1500 HC and 1500 HI.

HC modifier (20 weapon+20 training + 100 tactic + 60 terrain) divided by 4= 50%.
HI modifier (10 weapon+10 training + 100 tactic + 60 terrain) divided by 4= 45%.

2) Calculate the army modifier. This is an average of natural command rank, morale, nation climate/ terrain, and nation climate/ terrain a second time (listed on your nation startup sheet).

Example J continued: Assuming cool/ mountains: (80 command + 50 morale + 92 dark lieutenant climate/ terrain + 92 dark lieutenant climate/ terrain) divided by 4= 78%. Note that Gothmog's natural command rank was used, not his command rank "enhanced" by his 20 pt. command artifact. Artifacts add to the chance of success in an order, but not the effects of an order! (If Gothmog were issuing a threat, then the command artifact would help.) Also note that the "actual" army modifier in this example is not an exact science, so you'll want to underestimate your strength slightly.

3) Calculate the basic troop strengths and multiply by the troop modifier, then add the numbers together for the total strength of all troops. Multiply the sum by the army modifier.

Example J continued:

1500 HC * 16 strength each * 50% = 12,000

"1500 HI" * 10 strength each * 45% = 6,750

Sum of Troop strength: 18,750

18,750 (sum troop strength from above) * 78% (army modifier) = 14,625 (army strength)

4) Multiply the "army strength" by the relations modifier (110% if disliked, 125% for someone you hate). Technically you'd also multiply by the tactics vs. tactics modifier, but I leave this step out (I assume 100%). Although the tactics vs. tactics modifier can make a big difference in a battle, such as if you charge into an ambush (very unpleasant) there's no good way to calculate this and you can avoid worrying about it if you're careful in picking your tactics. However, it's not such a hot idea to always do whatever tactic is "best" for your main troop type. I often assume my opponents will do just that... and they proceed to charge into my ambushes, attempt to flank my standard formations, etc.

Note what a big difference hating your opponent can make in the final army strength versus merely disliking him.

Example J continued: 14,625 (army strength from above) * 125% (relations modifier, assuming "hated") = 18,281 final army strength.

5) Although the "final army strength" is the army's attack value, some things (spells, dragons, ents, war machines, etc.) add to the army attack value during the first round of combat only as a bonus. They do not affect the army's attack value for any other round of combat.

Example J continued: 18,281 final army strength, (but + 500 for combat artifact used by Masraden during the first round of combat only).

6) To calculate army constitution, multiply each troop type's base constitution by 100% + its armor value, then add the totals together. This gives you the army's constitution. Technically you'd add any bonuses for defensive spells, but I don't bother for simplicity.

Example J continued:

1500 HC * 16 constitution each * (100% + 60% armor value) = 38,400

"1500 HI" * 10 constitution each * (100% + 0% no armor!) = 15,000

Final army constitution: 53,400

Example J conclusion: Gothmog's army has a 18,281 attack strength (+500 for the first round of combat) and 53,400 constitution. This is an approximation... remember the various simplifications made, such as converting LI into HI for calculations, ignoring troop tactic modifiers, etc. It is easy enough to include these factors if you wish to take the time.

Who'd win a battle? To determine who'd win a battle, calculate each army's attack strength and constitution. You'll have to make some educated guesses for the enemy. Next, subtract each army's attack strength from the enemy army's constitution. Determine what percentage of each army's constitution survived (90%, of the army survived, etc.) and reduce the attack strength of that army by to that percentage (if only 90% of your army survived the round, then reduce your attack strength to 90%. This gives you the army's attack strength for the next round... repeat until one army is destroyed.

Example K: Gothmog's army (18,281 (+500) attack/53,400 constitution) is fighting an Eothraim army (12,000 attack/24,000 constitution).

Round 1: The Eothraim do 12,000 damage to Gothmog's army.

53,400 -12,000 = 41,400 constitution at the end of round 1 for Gothmog's army. 77% of Gothmog's army (and each troop type) survived (41,400 ending constitution divided by 53,400 starting constitution). Thus, Gothmog's attack strength for round 2 is 14,076. (77% times 18,281).

Gothmog's army, at start of round 2:

14,076 attack strength/ 41,400 constitution

1155 HC, 770 HI, 770 LI.

Meanwhile, Gothmog's army did 18,281 (+500) attack to the Eothraim army. 24,000 -18,781= 5219 constitution at the end of round 1 for the Eothraim army. 21% of the Eothraim army survived (and each troop type). (5219 ending constitution divided by 24,000), so the new round 2 Eothraim attack strength is 2520.

Eothraim army, at start of round 2:

2520 attack strength/5219 constitution

Gothmog's army is clearly going to annihilate the Eothraim force round 2 (the Eothraim have less than 14,978 constitution remaining). If you wish, you can get a rough approximation of what Gothmog's army will have left.

Population Center Assaults: Do I have enough?

The result of population center assaults is very easy to predict. Whatever happens, the population center is going to inflict its defensive value in damage to the attacking army. The army may or may not survive, and it may or may not take the population center. The population center will have been "under siege"

(fortifications could be reduced if the attacking army had war machines) regardless. There are three possible outcomes:

1) Army is destroyed. The army didn't have enough constitution to survive the population center's defensive "blow". All characters in the attacking army are killed and the population center is unharmed and under the control of its original owner. It doesn't matter if the army's attack strength was greater than the population center defense-- the army controller still doesn't take the population center. (This situation usually occurs when a small army with a dragon attacks a heavily fortified population center).

2) Army survives with at least one troop, but army's attack strength (for round 1) was greater than the population center defense. Population center captured or destroyed, depending on which order you issued.

3) Army survives with at least one troop, but army's attack strength (for round 1) was less than the population center defense. Population center remains under the control of the defender, but your (heavily damaged) army survived.

Calculating Population Center Defense Strength:

Add the population center defense strength to the fortification value (minus 200 for each attacking war machine until the fortification value is zero) and multiply by the loyalty of the population center plus 100%.

Example L: Suppose North Gondor has a City/ Citadel with a 100% loyalty. It's defensive strength is: (5000 (city) + 24,000 (citadel) * (100% base + 100% loyalty) = 59,000 defensive strength.

Example L, modified: Suppose Gothmog's army attacked the City/ Citadel (assume it is in the mountains).

City/Citadel defense: 59,000

Gothmog's army: 18,281 (+500) attack/ 53,000 constitution.

The city/citadel is unharmed, and Gothmog's army is destroyed killing everyone in it (It had less than 59,000 constitution). The results are identical even if Gothmog had several dragons helping him, (18,281 (+45,000 for dragons/ 53,400) because Gothmog's army was destroyed. If Gothmog had 6000 more constitution plus the dragons, (18,281 (+45,000)/ 59,400) Gothmog's army would take the city because it survived and its attack strength was greater than the city/citadel's defense. Note that Gothmog's army would disband after the battle as it would have less than 100 troops surviving. (400 constitution survived, or less than 1% of the attacking army!) The attack value of dragons (good only for round 1) is a made-up number in this example.

Example L, modified: Suppose Gothmog's army attacked the City/ Citadel, but had 50 war machines assisting him. Although the city would not fall, the city/citadel's defense strength would drop significantly. Additionally, the citadel would probably be reduced to a keep or a castle).

City/Citadel defense: (5000 city + (24,000 citadel - (200 * 50 war machines)) * 200% = 38,000 defense strength. Gothmog's army still doesn't have enough to take it (18,281 (+500)) without dragons.

Dealing with Dragons:

Although this is a "technical" article, since dragons seem to cause players on the receiving end of them so much trouble they're worth discussing here. Only a few dragons are recruitable by the Free, so generally Free players are going to suffer their huge impact on army battles. Dragons do tons of damage (think of them as 30,000 point combat artifacts) and there are lots of them. How do you deal with dragons militarily and stop those dragon armies from taking

your population centers? (Aside from overwhelming them with hordes of troops, preferably armored).

The key is the way dragons work. Free Peoples players take note! Dragons fight ONLY in the first battle in which the army is involved during the turn. Thus, dragons will not assist in population center assaults if they fought an army the same turn.

Example M: Suppose Gothmog's army (with dragons) is involved in a battles with an Eothraim army of 100 men-at- arms and also an Eothraim city/keep at the same location. Gothmog issues an order to capture the population center. Gothmog's army will not take the city/keep!

Battle #1: army combat:

Gothmog's army: (18,281 (+45,000 for the dragons) (+500) attack/53,400 constitution)

Eothraim army (33 army/ 220 defense).

Result: Eothraim army annihilated, and Gothmog's army for all intents and purposes unharmed... but the dragon is "used up" for the rest of the turn.

Battle #2: Population center assault on the same turn:

Gothmog's army: (18,281 (+500 combat artifact) attack/ 53,400 constitution.

Eothraim city/keep, 100 loyalty: (42,000 population center defense).

Result: city/keep undamaged and remains under Eothraim control. Only 21% of Gothmog's army survives! Had the dragon not been used in the battle with the 100 men-at-arms, the city/keep would have fallen under dark lieutenant control as a major town/ keep, (though only 21% of Gothmog's army would survive).

So what would a clever Dark Lieutenant do? Destroy the army with an attack enemy order, then wait to issue a capture order the following turn so the dragon will not be "used up" and will help with the assault. The clever Eothraim response is to hire an army the same turn. Thus, though Gothmog destroys the 100 men-at-arms Eothraim army, the following turn there is another Eothraim army waiting for them to absorb the dragon's wrath. This little trick can keep a dragon at bay indefinitely.

Another trick to dealing with dragons is knowing where they will "go" once encountered... Dragons seem to go to the army whose commander has the highest total skill ranks.

Example N: Suppose Gothmog, Vikenor, and Masraden each commanded an army. Meanwhile, another Dark Lieutenant character recruits a dragon. Where will the dragon go?

Gothmog: 80 command + 40 agent = 120 total.

Vikenor: 33 command + 80 agent + 20 mage = 133 total.

Masraden: 40 command + 20 agent = 60 total.

Vikenor wins. The dragon will join Vikenor if recruited. (Note that no artifacts were included in the calculations!) The Dark Lieutenants should plan on using Vikenor's army with the dragon to his best advantage. Meanwhile, the Free should keep in mind that as long as Vikenor's ranks are higher than the other commanders, none of those other Dark Lieutenant armies will have dragons aiding them.

Applying the Mechanics of Army Movement and Combat:

Understanding how everything works is extremely useful in winning the war. There are so many ways in which this can be applied that it is impossible to discuss them in this article, but here are some examples: Trying to decide if you can march out and take Goblin Gate? Crunch the numbers. If you come out short, ask for help from your allies, keep recruiting troops, build war machines, or arrange to sabotage the fortifications. Is there a Heavy Cavalry army in your area that you need to destroy and you're not sure your army is tough enough? Crunch the numbers. If you'll come out on the losing end of the battle, make sure an ally is there to help!

Similarly, the mechanics of army movement can be used to great effect. Need to protect two places at once, or pin down the enemy armies streaming into Rhovanion? Look at all the routes that they can take into your area, and bottle them up by moving your own armies to be "in the way". If you know how army movement works, you can maximize the likelihood you'll stop the enemy forces trying to get past you.. or to avoid them. It can also be used to keep your armies and your neutral ally's armies from tripping over each other (if you're careful), even though you're moving through the exact same hexes. The "home" direction is extremely useful in army maneuvering, but alas, I forgot to cover it in part I so you'll have to figure out that one for yourself!

The blooded Captain lay upon a cot in the House of Healing within Minas Tirith. The last, desperate charge had carried him nearly to the gates. He remembered striking repeatedly at orcs with his blade, trying to reach the gates. His mount screamed, struck with a spear, flailing with its hooves...

"Captain?" The soft voice broke his reverie, and Eomer's eyes opened. A middle-aged man with piercing eyes stood over him.

"Lord Denethor!" Eomer tried to rise, but the man reached down to prevent him.

"Rest, Captain."

"But the city..."

"It will hold. Your valor was not in vain. Your final charge broke up the assault they had prepared. Their remaining forces are insufficient to take the city. The City of the Guard still stands..."

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. The following armies/navies are in the same hex. Commander A has a navy off shore with 636 Infantry and 10 warships/16 transports. Commander B has an army with 2700 Infantry. Commander C has an army with 400 Infantry.

Commander B orders Transfer Troop (355) 2600 Infantry to Commander A; then Commander A orders Recruit HI (408) for 300 Infantry; then Commander C orders Transfer Troop (780) to Commander A; finally, Commander A orders Move Navy (830).

The question is: Does Commander A move with ALL his ships including the warships? If no, which command takes his ships away? Note: the grand total of $636+2600+300+400=3936$ is less than the 4000 Infantry, the maximum for 16 transports.

A. In the above scenario, Commander A would be able to issue the Move Navy order, since the troop total does not exceed the maximum number of troops the transports can carry.

Please note that, even if the troop total exceeded the maximum number of troops the transports can carry, the ships would not be anchored. The navy would simply become an army with ships attached to it. If, on subsequent turns, enough troops were transferred OUT of the army so that the transports could carry the troops in the army, that force would then become a navy.

Q. In the 1650 rulebook that I have, Order 850 says that an army moving without food may only use 9 movement points, and Order 860 says an army may only use 10 movement points. However, the 2950 rulebook says only that the range of movement will be reduced. Is movement in 2950 the same as 1650? Do 2950 armies only have 9 or 10 movement points when moving without food?

A. To answer these questions in (almost) reverse order, movement is the same for both 1650 and 2950. The old 1650 rulebooks were misleading in that they stated that moving without food only gave you 9 movement points, 10 when force marching--THIS IS INCORRECT!!

On p. 31 of the rulebook, there is a chart which gives the movement penalty for moving without food. This penalty is normal movement cost PLUS 1/3, ROUNDED UP FOR EACH HEX!! Please make note of this, as this movement penalty is quite different from the guidelines given in the old 1650 rulebooks.

Q. I was wondering what would happen if the same character issued the following orders:

355 Transfer Troops: Army to Army and transfer ALL the troops in the army; then the character does one of the recruit troop orders (400, 404, 408, 412, 416 or 420).

Is the army considered disbanded after 355, forcing me to issue a 770 order and pay the hiring cost? Or do you judge the army status at the end of the turn?

A. The status of the army is determined after all of the orders of that TYPE have been processed. In other words, after all of the 355 orders have been processed, the computer will check to see if the army has been disbanded. Therefore, if a character transfers all of his/her troops then he/she will have to issue the 770 order to create a new army.

If, however, there is another army there and that army issues a 355 order for the minimum of 100 troops, then the army will still be considered active. Since the check is done at the END of the 355 orders, the original army will have 100 troops at the end of the order and the army would still be active.

Q. When a mage researches a spell, is the "natural" or "net" rank used to determine success? Which is used to determine the initial casting rank?

A. When a mage researches a spell, the NET rank is used to determine whether that research is successful. However, it is the NATURAL rank which determines the initial casting rank.

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.

Herald of the World

Part II

by

The Reverend Ludicrous Wack

A wall of solid rock stood fast against intrusion of any kind. An uncaring barrier to the politics of good or evil, human or not, but the twins had come here anyway. They couldn't remain idle any longer. Eagerness of spirit was pushing the limits of prudence and common sense. The war had been brewing for nearly three seasons now and still all was quiet in the west. No signs of any other living being had been spotted since either had left Bree.

"A bit unnerving. It's almost too quiet even here in the mountains," whispered one.

The other looked at his mirror image. Similar thoughts had been pressing on him for a week. His reconnaissance of the territory had revealed nothing. When by all rights this area should have been boiling with activity, nothing stirred.

"You're right. There's none of the usual dwellers that scamper on and among the rocks of the heights," Elrohir replied to his brother.

"I don't see how you can stand this paranoia."

"I can't. Let's move; it'll be getting dark soon."

They began their trek towards the summit of the great rock monstrosity, moving as silently as elven nature would allow. Hours of scrambling among the boulders and narrow paths brought them to a large plateau that reached to the west end of the mountain. The rest of the chain seemed peaceful, but for a single cloud of smoke hanging not far from the two.

Elladan pointed in that direction. "I wonder who that could be?"

"No time to take risks. We may have been spotted already."

Cloak hoods were pulled overhead, and the curious twin began a sprint towards the origins of the fire. His brother followed a few paces behind and to the side with hand on sword hilt.

It wasn't a sound that made them both dash behind cover, but rather a feeling. Call it intuitive sense or nerves stretched to the breaking point. Neither twin dared to even blink, afraid that any movement might betray the charade of posing as rocks.

Seconds later, the trail they were on became a traffic jam of dwarves leading small carts off in the direction Elladan and his brother were traveling. Their voices were low and gruff. Obviously they weren't very content to be put on this duty. Elrohir moved from hiding as the dwarves moved down the trail and began tailing the oblivious demi-humans. With no signals between the two, these agents shadowed the caravan all the way to the outskirts of what seemed to be a recent conquest for their nation. Only a hundred or so of the mountain kin appeared to be rummaging about the camp, but then again, most had probably found some cave to work nearby.

"Let's not announce our presence yet. At least not until we find out some more information," Elladan whispered. Even two startled dwarves could be bad news.

Elrohir peered about from atop his stone perch. "I don't see any kind of baggage train or signs of a military force. Still, some representative of Bain's kingdom should be here," he proffered. "After you." He gave a stiff bow of invitation which Elladan accepted in style. They then moved off as silently as the rock they tread upon.

Aragorn could make out the beginnings of the hills northeast of Bree and an obscure blotch of dust or smoke slightly west of that spot. Arador had obviously reached the newly named Valna with his forces. He figured that this was a decent spot for his contingent to begin building the base camp for the forces. Still within sight of a watchfire from the tower there at Valna and just a short jaunt into Angmar. It was long past time to start a campaign against his dark rival.

"What say you Ellis?" he asked the young man mounted on a slender piebald next to him. Ellis had shown promise and was coming up in his studies of diplomacy quickly. This was to be his first test before being named to a position in the Dúnadan emissary ranks. Ranks that were desperately slim.

"A good choice. Plenty of grazing area for our horses and timber shouldn't be too difficult to transport here." Ellis moved his head about slowly, surveying the remaining terrain. "I don't see an army sneaking up on this position too easily either, but that's not my area of expertise."

"Your observation is still a wise one. See to the unpacking. I need a brief rest."

"Yes sir," Ellis replied before moving off to disgorge the supplies they would need.

Aragorn didn't mind the casualness with which his people operated. After all, he was only as human as they were. He slipped down from his mount and stretched his arms to the heavens in a plea to straighten his cramped back. Several creeks ran through the grasslands nearby and he moved to the nearest one. Hoping to rid himself of a bit of the trail grime he had accumulated over the past few days, Aragorn splashed a couple handfuls of the cool, clear water on his face. He wondered how long it had been since he had a real bath. A couple of weeks probably, by his reckoning.

As he shook the water from his being, the king looked across the narrow bank and caught the hint of something out of place. A squat shape, darker than the tallow wheat, was hidden a few feet from the creekbed. Aragorn slowly withdrew his sword, its well oiled surface not making a sound against the leather and bronze sheath. Creeping forward to surprise this new invader, he slid into the knee-deep water. A tingling sensation began to make its way down his spine, not unlike that same feeling he got when probing the Palantirs his nation possessed.

The object made no motion, and the wind died down to a gentle breeze. He stuck his sword out to pry the grass apart for a better look. It was a stone. A simple gray piece of granite that had certainly been hand carved into a short round obelisk. The surface of the marker was glass smooth and bore no signs of aging or collection of dust. Temptation and curiosity overcame him as he reached to touch this enigma.

Suddenly, at the point when his fingers made contact with the stone, the grasses Aragorn parted snapped his hand back. It had startled him, but he didn't raise any alarm. Looking about revealed a path through the wilderness ending some twenty yards distant. The wind picked up again, but the trail still remained. Not a single stalk bent to cover it. Without hesitating, Aragorn began walking down the corridor.

"Somebody must want me to see something," Aragorn said.

Ellis jogged from one quartermaster to the next, pointing to placements for supplies off the wagons. He hadn't seen his leader for some time, but was only slightly concerned. Their king had a way of taking care of himself. Besides, there was still much to do before nightfall.

Encalion's workroom was a mess. It always was, and in all likely-hood would ever be. This day, however, the clutter was to the point of becoming a living entity of its own. Only the table he now had his work towered on showed any signs of order. The mage himself was bent over his scrying stones in abject concentration.

The single door to this self-made disaster area slowly swung open. At least a little way. A young boy's head appeared from behind it, but the mage paid no attention to him. He was aware of the intrusion, but he needed his efforts here.

The boy was not new to the workings of the scholarly and how they hated interruptions, nor was he nervous about entering. He had been in Encalion's lab before and always enjoyed visiting with the mage. Even if Encalion wasn't always present in consciousness. The wizard was simply seeking knowledge and devoted all his time to the pursuit.

A brilliant flare of light erupted from the tabletop and Encalion sat staring at the stones petrified. After a few breaths, he stood up.

"Damnable pieces of rock!" He stomped off across the room and grabbed a large leather bound book and began flipping through it.

"What is it, young Holt?" he said, his voice much calmer than seconds before.

Holt cleared his throat. "Master Aragorn bids you to join Arador in the field."

"Where is APPRENTICE Arador now?"

The boy walked into the maelstrom of collected papers and made a seat of one of the oak chests strewn about the room. "He's at the ruins north of here. They need your wisdom and talents with the army as it moves east." Holt knew a little flattery might dampen the blow of the request.

"How am I going to get anything accomplished bobbling around on horseback?"

"I believe our liege means to assault the dark forces with or without the other nation's help, and your services are direly needed. Your colleague Ghoust has already moved out."

Encalion grimaced. Leave it to that nitwit to go running off at the mention of some quest or adventure, he thought to himself.

"Go to the stable master and have him ready a wagon."

The youngster hopped down from the box filled with spirits knows what. "Yes sir." Again Holt ran the gauntlet to the door, hoping not to get ambushed by falling textbooks.

"And Holt..."

"Yes sir?"

"Bring a broom."

Holt simply smiled and held back his giggle as he ran off to find the stable master...and a broom.

To be continued . . .

The Hall Of Heroes

Before we get to this month's game winners, I want to offer my apologies to the winners of Game #27, circa 2950, which was reported last month. It seems I was negligent in my editorial duties and the wrong names were printed for Game #27. Not only that, but it was reported that the position of the Dúnadan Rangers was a winner in Game 103--even though the Rangers weren't around for another 1000 years or so.

The correct winner in Game 103 was the Arthedain. In Game #27, the winners were as follows:

#14 Cloud Lord - Michael J Donovan

#13 Dog Lord - James Rouselle

#19 Long Rider - Daniel Carey

Again, our apologies to these players for not getting it right the first time!

ME-PBM Circa 1650

Game #81 - The Dark Servants: #25, #19 & #16.

Patience has its privileges, Ovatha II of the United Easterling Empire mused as he gazed into the fire. Bedecked in the finest indigo velvet cloak that Sinda slaves could produce, he reclined in a massive throne wrested from the throne room of Arfanhil himself. Barely managing to stifle a yawn, he considered the predicament he had gotten himself into. Complete power is a great goal when you're at war, he thought. But now that all opposition had been brutally crushed, he found himself bored by the petty day-to-day dealings of the court. As Emperor, his word was considered to be the word of Sauron himself, and was never questioned. For the most part, he spent his days enjoying the fruits of his labors, wearing expensive finery, eating rich foods, drinking the most expensive wines, and yet he was tired of it all. Deep inside, he longed for another war . . .

Final standings are as follows:

#25 Easterlings - 2200: Patrick D Stanton

#19 Long Rider - 2117: Daniel R Loveland

#16 Ice King - 2017: Paul J Cumberland

Top Free People: #9 Sinda Elves - 1233

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Malezar/Easterlings: 233

Highest Net Commander Rank - Gelmir/Sinda Elves: 139

Highest Net Agent Rank - Dfn Ohtar/Long Rider: 160

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Gothmor/Blind Sorcerer: 122

Highest Net Mage Rank - Malezar/Easterlings: 187

Most Mithril - Long Rider: 4011

Most Artifacts - Blind Sorcerer: 24

Most Kills - Easterlings: 27

Final Turn - 92

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

Game #194 - The Dark Servants: #17, #19 & #14.

The setting sun shone through the trees at the heart of Mirkwood, casting the already autumnal leaves in a brilliant light. The ruby rays trickled through the treetops and reflected dazzlingly from Queen Adónaphel's spiked mithril armor, giving the unsettling appearance of fresh blood. Though she stood silent, unwavering in the November wind, her men rushed madly through the forest in search of the last cabal of Noldo mages to have escaped her exhaustive forays. Frenzied shouts and the ring of mithril on steel filtered back to her from deep in the forest. No doubt, her legions had discovered the mages' hideout. An earthshattering boom resounded in the distance, no doubt magical in nature. Terrified screams rose in unearthly agony, and then it was over. Her mages' protective spells had shielded her main forces while agent companies had stalked the unknowing Noldor from behind. All was complete; Sauron's bride smiled in realization of total victory.

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The Hall Of Heroes

Final standings are as follows:

- #17 Quiet Avenger - 2350: Jeremy Richman
- #19 Long Rider - 1767: Clifford F. Hall
- #14 Cloud Lord - 1717: Mark D. Sprang

Top Free People: #10 Noldo Elves - 1000

Interesting Notes:

- Highest Challenge Rank - Dendra Dwar/Dog Lord: 194
- Highest Net Commander Rank - Gargal/Quiet Avenger: 165
- Highest Net Agent Rank - Jí Indûr/Cloud Lord: 127
- Highest Net Emissary Rank - Ar-Gûlar/Cloud Lord Kelai/Witch-king
Orianna/Long Rider Odysseus/Quiet Avenger: 100
- Highest Net Mage Rank - Dendra Dwar/Dog Lord: 160
- Most Mithril - Noldo Elves: 1986
- Most Artifacts - Witch-king: 28
- Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 26
- Final Turn - 40

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

ME-PBM Circa 2950

Game #36 - The Free Peoples: #24, #10 & #9.

Saruman stood with Elrond and Galadriel in his throne room at Angrenost. Together, they had hunted Ren and his unwashed hordes until the last Nazgûl fell to their forces. It only seemed appropriate, in Saruman's mind, that an Istari and the leaders of the First Born were now heading the Free People Coalition ruling Middle-earth. It was even more appropriate that now HE was the leader of the Coalition. He would remake Middle-earth in his image

Final standings are as follows:

- #24 White Wizard - 2400: Mike Hunnensen
- #10 Noldo Elves - 2250: Jeffrey L Zaugg
- #9 Sinda Elves - 1950: Christopher Dexter

Top Dark Servant: #18 Fire King - 825

Interesting Notes:

- Highest Challenge Rank - Galadriel/Sinda Elves: 234
- Highest Net Commander Rank - Bugrug/White Wizard: 180
- Highest Net Agent Rank - Balli/Dwarves: 122
- Highest Net Emissary Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves Saruman/White Wizard: 100
- Highest Net Mage Rank - Galadriel/Sinda Elves: 182
- Most Mithril - White Wizard: 2984
- Most Artifacts - White Wizard: 23
- Most Kills - Woodmen Dog Lord Fire King: 1
- Final Turn - 32

Congratulations to the Free Peoples!

Game #39 - The Dark Servants: #25, #19 & #18.

Grinning wickedly, Ovatha IV of the Khand looked down upon the peasant cowering in mortal terror before his horse. Hefting his war axe, he killed the man quickly and mercifully with a skull-splitting blow. Where were the great warriors of the Dunlendings? Looking around him to make sure that no enemies approached him from behind, all he saw were running peasants fleeing the terror that the Khand inspired. Since Ovatha had decided to throw his lot in with the minions of Sauron, his nation had been prosperous indeed. City after city had fallen to the highly mobile and vicious tribesmen, and few remained standing that did not fly the banner of the Khand. Running down a fleeing peasant, Ovatha concluded that there would soon be far less.

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The Hall Of Heroes

Final standings are as follows:

- #25 Khand Easterlings - 2300: John Kenny
- #19 Long Rider - 1917: John M Keller
- #18 Fire King - 1875: William F Keller

Top Free People: #23 Dunlendings - 950

Interesting Notes:

- Highest Challenge Rank - Hoarmûrath/Ice King: 173
- Highest Net Commander Rank - Avas of Igath/Khand Easterlings: 132
- Highest Net Agent Rank - Carrog/Dark Lieutenants: 127
- Highest Net Emissary Rank - Eek Herta/Khand Easterlings: 95
- Highest Net Mage Rank - Hoarmûrath/Ice King: 149
- Most Mithril - Riders of Rohan: 574
- Most Artifacts - Dark Lieutenants: 23
- Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 32
- Final Turn - 29

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

Game #45 (GSI Grudge Match) - The Dark Servants: #16, #18 & #20. (GSI!)

Making hardly a sound, a figure detached itself from the inky shadows of the corridor and pressed onward. Half a dozen similar black-cloaked figures followed closely, not daring to risk losing themselves in the sewers of Imladris. Since the fall of the Capital, it was whispered that Sauron's minions had unleashed foul creatures in the sewers to discourage unauthorized activity therein. These were the last heroes of the Noldo nation, however, willing to risk death or worse for freedom. As they trod quietly down the corridor, Glorfindel spotted a body lying in a crumpled heap beneath a shaft to the surface. Rushing to examine the fallen form, he pulled back a familiar black cowl to reveal the face of his old friend, Círdan. Stapled brutally to Círdan's chest with a mithril dagger was a parchment depicting a circular seal divided into three sections; one of fire, one of ice, and one of shadow. The Dark Triad had struck again.

Final standings are as follows:

- #16 Ice King - 1450: Robert Koger
- #18 Fire King - 1334: Robert Koger
- #20 Dark Lieutenants: 1325 David Grossman

Top Free People: #10 Noldo Elves - 1250

Interesting Notes:

- Highest Challenge Rank - Tónn Varthkûr/Dog Lord: 186
- Highest Net Commander Rank - Tónn Varthkûr/Dog Lord: 149
- Highest Net Agent Rank - Chugalug/Cloud Lord: 175
- Highest Net Emissary Rank - Strulug/Witch-king: 99
- Highest Net Mage Rank - Saruman the White/White Wizard: 95
- Most Mithril - Noldo Elves: 742
- Most Artifacts - Cloud Lord: 19
- Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 21
- Final Turn - 19

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!