

# WHISPERS OF THE WOOD



# GAME SYSTEMS INC.

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# WORDS FROM THE WOOD

It's holiday time once again and, as such, it's supposed to be a time for cheer and forgiveness. Right? Well, there's something that's really been chapping my cheeks and I just have to get it off my chest. What is that, you may ask? It's these people who can't wait for a movie to open before they have the entire plot laid out before them--and then they proceed to blab it to everyone they even remotely come into contact with. Never mind that SOME of us prefer to wait for the MOVIE to open so that we can be surprised when we actually WATCH it. But no, these goombahs have to lord it over us all as to how they are so much superior because they have figured out the movie beforehand. Guys--IT'S JUST A MOVIE!!! Let us enjoy it as we choose!

December is here once again and you know what that means--yes, it's the ol' mail delivery blues. This time of year invariably brings mail delays and that can be frustrating and costly to those of us who depend on the US Snail to deliver the fate of kingdoms into the right hands. As such, we suggest that you all allow a few extra days for the Post Office to deliver your mail. If you cannot, we suggest that you call our office the day before your turn is run to see if we have received it. If not, you can make arrangements to get your orders in to us.

Another word of warning--those of you who prefer using Priority Mail should use the same guidelines noted above. I heard from a postal worker last year that the usual 2-3 day delivery is stretched to 5-7 days during the holiday season. So if you ARE going to use Priority Mail, we suggest allowing AT LEAST five days for delivery.

Speaking of the holidays, Christmas is right around the corner--and GSI **WILL BE CLOSED** on Christmas Day and on New Year's Day. We will be running the turns normally due on those days (which falls on a Wednesday, so anyone with a turn run on Wednesday will be affected--either on Christmas or on New Year's Day) on the Tuesday before. Thus, turns which are supposed to be run on December 25 will instead be run on December 24 and turns due on January 1 will be run on December 31. Please take note of these changes, as the last thing we want is for someone to miss their turn because they were unaware of the due date. Please make sure to check your turnsheets carefully, as the correct due date will be printed there.

This brings up another issue which we want to address: that of email turns. Normally, email turns are due 24 hours BEFORE the turn is run. Since the due date will be moving for the turns run on 12/25 and 1/1, the email deadline will also be moving. We ask that email players do their best in getting their turns to us 24 hours before the turn is due to be run. This will reduce the chance of turns being late and not being run.

Since the holidays are here, we know that there will be a large number of address changes. In order to facilitate this process and insure that your turns reach you, we ask that you notify us of changes in any and all games that you are in. It is also helpful to indicate whether the change will be a temporary or permanent change (if it is temporary, it is also helpful to indicate how long the change will be in effect). This will help us keep down the number of problems which might occur after the holiday.

Now that the Yuletide spirit has infected us all (and I hear that penicillin can do nothing for this), there is one cure for this insidious affliction--Game Systems Gift Certificates! These gift certificates can be used for game turns



## ALONG THE PATHWAYS

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This Month's Cover: "The Campaign" by John Kissee

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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 186

Tis twilight and yet we stand,  
resisting for spite's sake.  
Outnumbered and out agented, we  
continue to resist. We fight to the  
last...

Zarendarger.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dum Ohtar:

We know the Easterlings  
dropped and we were quite  
disappointed considering he was the  
only one who gave us any challenge.  
As for the reason I'm still on his  
characters is to influence over all the  
MTs and cities he built on my map. I  
get to the active characters soon  
enough..

King Hallas III

P.S. If you really think your side is  
winning, I'd stay off the medication,  
it's affecting your judgment.

### GAME 190

Dear Adunaphel,

Don't mind us, we're just killing  
all of your characters. That, and  
stamping all of the Dark Lieutenant  
major towns out of existence.

Love,

Rhys of Rhudaur

### GAME 205

Even now the hammer falls.  
When it strikes, all will fall into  
darkness.

Orillion Darkblade

### GAME 212

2522 Cardolan troops, 3248  
Sinda troops, 2629 Noldo troops,  
Dwaithohir Eagles, Throkmau, and a  
thundering barrage from war  
machines--all to destroy a camp and a  
tower? I hate to think what the Freeps  
might bring when they decide to  
assault my city!

High Plains Drifter

P.S. If you decide to visit again  
remember . . . don't drink the water!

### GAME 215

Looks like the children of the  
free have moved their capitals. No  
matter, my emissaries are now free  
and soon your capitals will be infested  
with agents again.

Sir Psycho

### GAME 216

Uvatha took a deep breath.  
Ahh... the sickly-sweet smell of  
decaying horses, mixed with the dead  
leaves of autumn and the dead men of  
the western realms. So fine to be  
"alive" as the last minions of the Light  
fade... But enough musing - time to  
clear General Meneldir's troops away  
from the gates of Imladris. "Charge!"

### GAME 218

Messenger: I bring terrible news, the  
Emperor is DEAD!  
<GASPS AND SOBS>

Tros: There is only one thing to do.  
Saddle my horse! I shall lead a new  
army and crush the ones responsible  
for this foul deed. We shall follow the  
path of the free and trample those  
miserable thieves and assassins of the  
dark. Now go at once!

Messenger: Right away, my lord.

\*\*\*\*\*

Teldumeir and Angamaite,

Your nation has prospered,  
far and wide.

Now you shall suffer the wrath of  
One-Eye

### GAME 219

Seven to six in favor of the Free  
People. If every neutral had not gone  
D.S. this would have been a walk.

### GAME 223

Our lands in the south and west  
have fallen. The skies darken as the  
hammer falls. However, even a dying  
insect will still try to sting!

Orillion Darkblade

### GAME 228

"Ouch!! This is starting to get a  
little painful!"

Orillion Darkblade

\*\*\*\*\*

Orillion Darkblade, thy tongue  
dost overpower thy hindquarters.  
Surrender, thy can not hold back the  
tide with your hands.

Grystzl of the Eothraim

### GAME 231

"Aargh!"

"What's wrong, my liege?"

"I can't sleep--it's too noisy.  
Every time I start to doze off I get  
woken up by the sound of Dark  
Servant bones splintering."

Rhys.

\*\*\*\*\*

Greetings Dark Servants,

You do want a truce with the  
Southern Confederacy. Allow this  
strike into Mordor to help convince  
you. Peace with us, though it will not

gain you victory, will gain you revenge  
against a few- even in defeat.

The Prophet

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

### GAME 235

To the Fire King,

The deaths of Vinyaran and  
Caranthir have been avenged. Your  
capitol is mine (foul place that it is),  
and your armies destroyed. Who's  
next? Dendra Dwar perhaps?

Argeleb,

First you have seen my wrath,  
and soon you shall see another.

The coming is foretold  
of One-Eye's Brother.

The Coming of Exodus

### GAME 239

Why has my messages to the  
pointed ears been cut short by the  
gods? Do even they deny what is  
obvious? Victory for the DS and Four  
Horsemen.

Famine

The Horsemen shall fall,  
so says I.

The Dragon Lord first,  
so says One-Eye.

### GAME 241

DS,

We are not yet finished with  
you. Stop running away.

Northern Gondor

Lords of Middle Earth

\*\*\*\*\*

Slaves of the Istari, thy doom  
approaches. Khand and Rhun now  
serve the Lord of the Rings and his  
servants bathe their feet in Celduin.  
Join thy master willing or suffer the  
fate of Buhr Waldmarh.

Grystzl of the Dog Lord

### GAME 242

The quiet western front has exploded with the Duns & Rhudaur going dark. When the world explodes and blood is shed--I am there holding the sword.

Sir Psycho

\*\*\*\*\*

Drifter and Psycho  
you soon shall find,  
that your characters are falling  
way behind.

One-Eye

\*\*\*\*\*

"Sire! The taverns are out of Cardolani wine and Gondorian rum! The men are rioting in the streets!"

"What?" Angamaite was convinced this man had managed to find the last available bottle. "This has been the calmest Saturday night I can ever remember."

"Well, it's not exactly our streets they're rioting in."

High Plains Drifter

### GAME 246

To all,

There is a great difference between threats and actions.

El & the Vaders

Haruth Raman now sleeps with fish.

### GAME 247

"Is it getting darker in Mirkwood? Odd, considering all of the burning towns I left to light the area!"

Orillion Darkblade

\*\*\*\*\*

I will be willing to attack the Fire or Dark upon completion of my Harad campaign. Who awaits me?

Sir Psycho

### GAME 250

Burn the witches,  
burn your bridges  
don't take time  
to sew your stitches  
good is the thing you favor  
evil is your sour flavor  
you cannot 'sedate'  
all the things you hate  
I don't need you hate  
I decide my fate

The Prophet

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

### GAME 252

Dragons, dragons everywhere!  
Now where to find them? Oh, there's one over there. Let's go get him! Long live the Dark!

Murazor

\*\*\*\*\*

"Hey, watch those scissors. You damn near cut my ears off again." The Drifter was disgusted. He hadn't been able to get a decent haircut ever since he went to that party with Elrond. Galadriel was plastered and thought he'd make a "fine elf" so now he was. Now he understood why elves always seem to have such long hair.

High Plains Drifter

### GAME 254

Hear ye. Hear ye:

Let it be proclaimed throughout the length and breadth of Middle Earth: A new force has risen and emanates from the Wolf Den. Any nation-- whether Dark Servant, Neutral or Free--that attempts to thwart total domination by the Wolf Pack shall be brought low. \* Any who discover the Secret of the Den shall be exalted. In any event, a howling good

time shall be had by all!!

Wolfie

\*How, you may wonder, would we bring low one of our own allegiance? We have our ways!!

Middle-earth™ PBM  
circa 2950

### GAME 50

So the Corsairs are no longer an ocean nation? Climb back under the rock where you came from.

Mordor is not the fortress DS propaganda would have us believe.

### GAME 57

Now you see them, now you don't! First they're there and then they're not!

Where have all the players gone... long time passing.

Of Cities and Castles (but you can't have both!) - Population Center Improvements - The Fourth Age circa 1000.

by Mike Hunnensen

[edited by Game Systems Inc.]

In the Fourth Age scenario, you are given the opportunity to invest initial gold in Population Center improvements. There is much you can do but, with limited funds, finding the most efficient improvements is important in ensuring that you get a good start out of the gate.

In this article, I will discuss each of the Population Center improvement options (the primary choice) and then discuss various combinations for secondary options, such as fortifications, naval bases and insurance. Please note, the information that follows represents my own personal and sometimes hotly debated ideas on game play. It may be that I have missed certain concepts that would alter the nature of my suggestions. I strongly advise that you apply your own experience and knowledge to any ideas that I have presented to derive the maximum advantage of this article. Following is a break down of your choices (prices are correct at time of publication, but are subject to change).

Improve: Major Town to City (8,000)/Town to Major Town (7,000)/ Village to Town (5,000)

Camp to Village (4,000). Open hex to Camp (3,000)

Is anybody there? Does anybody care!?

This is the strangest party I ever did see Momma told me not to come!!!

### GAME 59

Thranduil surveyed his realm. The muster of the Nandor was complete, yet his mood was melancholy. He remembered a battle two ages removed, and as if reading his sovereign's mind, a woodland bard struck the haunting opening chords: 'Denethor's Fall'.

### GAME 60

The greatest of the order considered his options. He had power now, as if it could ever truly be denied him, yet the ache in his innards intensified. He retreated to his great tower where he fought another nameless battle.

Fortify: Castle (8,000)/ Fort (3,000)/Tower (1,000)

Add: Port (2,000)/Harbor (free)/Insurance (3,000)

Improving your Major Town to a City will require the entire amount of your initial gold. It will add 1000 gold to your revenue each turn at a 40% tax rate; however, it would take several turns for you to recoup your investment. Cities are able to resist invasion much better than Major Towns in that they require about 2000 Heavy Infantry to successfully take them. However, if you lose the City, you will likely be unable to continue. If you absolutely feel you must have a City, then you might consider choosing the hidden Population Center option. Hiding your City makes this choice more acceptable, but is still perhaps not your best option.

Another option is to improve your Town into a Major Town. This will cost 7,000 gold, leaving you with 1,000. About the only thing you can do with the 1,000 is put a Tower at your Capital. The Tower is going to cost you 500 gold a turn and hence your total economic benefit for this choice is 500 gold a turn.

During the game, you could upgrade the Town to a Major Town for a cost of 8,000 and so you save only 1,000 if you do it to start the game. At least with the City improvement you are saving 2,000 (it costs 10,000 to carry this out during the game). Again with this choice it would be better to hide your capital and place the Tower at the just created Major Town. Some players will like the idea that they have a "back up" capital right away (in case of an emergency), but this "benefit" is no real benefit at all. If you lose your capital within the first few turns and have to go to the back up, you're done for the day. If you don't lose your capital in the first few turns, then you should have a back up capital through Emissary action anyway.

With the third option you now give yourself access to a Port or location "insurance". Improving your Village to a Town requires 5,000 gold. Remaining is 3,000 which can be used to place an additional Camp, build a Port, add a Fort or request location insurance. Generally, I do not see the need for location insurance. It is my feeling that there are several excellent locations on the map to start off in and hopefully your second and third choices will be just as good as your first. If you are adamant that you must be at a specific location (you have role playing needs or have a strategy you want to try) then go ahead and take the insurance option. But be aware that even with this option there is no absolute guarantee that you will get the spot you want. It could be a waste of 3,000 gold. Upgrading your Village to a Town will give you a Major Town and two Towns. This combination is an average choice if you want to hire a large army quickly (1000 per turn if on all three PCs) or you are going to be in a very isolated area of the map; otherwise, naked (no fortifications) Towns are too vulnerable. And this choice should be skipped over.

The next choice is possibly the optimum choice. Improving your Camp to a Village is a 4,000 gold investment. This leaves 3,000 for new camp/Fort/insurance (if you REALLY must have it) and another 1,000 for a Tower. Villages are the most economically efficient PC in the game and you will have two of them. Put the Tower at your capital, or hide your capital and put the Tower on your Town.

For nations that expect to be in the thick of battle, they can erect a Fort at their capital and a Tower at the Town OR place a Tower at each of their starting PCs (then you would be very ready to punch it out with some upstart in your way).

For nations that want to be a naval power this is also a good combination. If you are going to place a Port at your capital you would be wise to fortify it

(having a navy also makes you exposed to them). This choice allows for both the Port and the necessary fortifications.

Another interesting variation of this improvement choice is to hide one of the Villages and put up the new Camp. In this manner you will show to any opponents in the area the exact same Population Center spread that you would have started with. (i.e. your opponents will see a Major Town, a Town, A Village and a Camp). If you hide your capital, your opponents will know that you have done so, simply because you can not disguise the fact. Even though they won't know the location exactly (unless you start with an army - which would be very counter-productive), they will know it is out there somewhere. With this "curveball" no one will have any idea that you have a hidden PC - the true meaning of "hidden".

The next improvement option is to place two new Camps at a cost of 6,000 gold. Logically you would then add a Tower to your capital and your Town (or elsewhere depending on terrain). Alternatively, you could add a Port at your capital, but as discussed this is not recommended without fortifications. This choice is solid and is likely to be very popular. This option works particularly well if you start with a 50 or 60 Emissary. Your Camps will start with a loyalty equal to your highest Emissary, which will allow you to improve them with relative ease to Villages (the most economically efficient PC).

Instead of two Camps you might opt for one Camp and use the 5,000 for other purposes. 5 Towers - one on each PC (interesting but expensive), or a Fort and two Towers, OR a Port and Fort at your capital (excellent combination for naval nations) OR location insurance and two Towers - you get the idea. These variations would only be recommended in specific situations and would not be advisable for mainstream play.

So then, what about no Population Center improvements? This gives you 8,000 gold to put toward secondary choices. It does allow you to start with a Castle! Of course you won't be able to afford your new Castle (do you know how much moats cost to heat and clean these days?), but it will be an edifice of pride! It is my humble opinion that Castles are about 3,000 over priced and so you should let some one else throw up this White Elephant. Hiding your capital would be a far superior choice and would not eat up all your available resources in the Special Nation Ability category of Nation design. Optionally, you could try a Fort and Port at the capital and two Towers. This option has potential for a naval nation only. The two Forts and two Towers option is perhaps not as attractive for inland nations. And remember, naval bases and fortifications cost you maintenance each turn.

Lastly, you have the option of saving all or part of your money. At first, one might think this is unsound, but there are times where this is a good choice. For example, in one playtest game, I started with a Camp that I wanted to place in the forest. At game start the Camp was situated only two hexes away from an opponents capital and his starting army. Although my capital was secure, the Camp was not. Had my opponent turned out to be an unfriendly sort, the Camp would have been lost. Thus, I would have been better off not placing the camp at all and retaining the 3,000 gold cost. I could then see how my tactical map took shape and choose a better (safer) location to place the Camp. Sure, this costs a little initiative, but it could turn out to be a prudent choice. Having said that, I do not suggest you save all your money. Putting down fortifications is much cheaper at game start than during the game; so too are Ports (7500 timber and 4000 gold are needed to improve a Harbor). If you plan to have these additions, then you may as well start with them. In essence, the only money you should

consider saving is money that would have been slated for new Camps (a maximum of 6,000).

In conclusion, if there is a particular combination that was not discussed or at least alluded to, it can be said that it is probably only applicable in very narrow instances. As well, many of the combinations above will be changed in their effectiveness depending on other factors of your nation design. For example, if your nation starts with the Special Nation Ability of 'build fortifications at half timber cost', you may want to put in several Towers, for quick upgrades to Forts, or put in no fortifications at all and add them when you need them. Harbors are a free improvement and putting one in is really a matter of taste. They would be best suited in 'plains' hexes. Otherwise you leave the hex vulnerable to an amphibious assault, where it was not before. Caution is strongly advised before putting a Harbor in a mountain, rough, or forest hex.

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

My question to you concerns character sketches for ME-PBM. It seems that many of the sketches used for my characters are used for other characters in the game. How are the sketches selected for use? And why aren't there more sketches available for use?

Thanks for sharing your thoughts on our ME-PBM character sketches. The sketches were truly an area that required some careful work at our end during the design of ME-PBM. Three issues come to bear here that control our use of such sketches:

1) In order to meet ALL the needs of any given scenario, GSI would need upwards of 750+ sketches. At a cost of \$5-\$15 per sketch (from professional artists), this would represent no small expense to GSI (\$5,000-\$12,000 - an expense that would have to be passed onto our customers in the form of higher turn fees). GSI wanted the sketches, but also wanted to keep costs and turn fees down. So we compromised.

Basically, all starting ME-PBM characters have a unique sketch. The rest of the characters are assigned sketches based on geography, with each nation having a 'pool' of sketches representing characters of that region. Within that you have a separate pool for female and male, as well as some unique sketches for Orcs and Trolls. All in all, this allowed GSI to reduce the number of sketches required to something like 350-400 - more cost effective to purchase and digitize.

2) GSI also wants to maintain a high level of quality in the sketches. This goal is both a Middle-earth contract stipulation with our licensor as well as a corporate goal on our part with regard to our PBM games, in particular with ME-PBM.

For this reason we rely almost exclusively on professional artists (Liz Danforth, Amy James, etc). We do allow players to submit their own sketches (which are primarily for their own enjoyment) but we do not encourage them nor use them for other characters.

Why? - speaking frankly, the quality is generally inferior (not unexpected, actually, since otherwise the player would be a professional artist themselves). We prefer not to "pass judgment" on the quality of submitted artwork, and then have to tell some players their art is good enough, and others that it is not so good. It is easier to simply include the artwork for their own use only.

3) Furthermore, should we decide to use the artwork, then there would need to be contract agreements governing their use (and remuneration?). We have contracts with our professional artists and we do not want to dilute their value by doing anything less with any submitted artwork. This really makes the whole issue more complicated than we want to get into.

We admit that it would be nice to have new artwork for all new characters, but we have had to make some compromises in the interests of cost control - both to GSI and to our customers. This is why we make special efforts to include new sketches with the release of each new scenario (TA 2950 & FA 1000) - it is an ideal time to spend some money to re-enhance a truly visual gaming product.

Thanks again for sharing your thoughts. If you have further comments or questions, please do not hesitate to drop us an line.

Good gaming,  
Stuart Taft

### The Purchase of Characters

by Type

by

Brian Hansen

One of the more confusing and at the same time creative aspects of Middle-earth is which type of character to purchase and why. New players, especially, may have some difficulty with this aspect of the game. There are four single-class characters and ten possible multi-class characters which one may purchase. In addition, the Commander-Emissary-Agent-Mage could, in theory, be a new character by random chance. As no one can specifically purchase such a character, however, I will not discuss it.

In discussing character types, I will, at times, use the abbreviation C for Commander, E for Emissary, A for Agent, and M for Mage. If I speak of CE, this is a multi-class character with Commander and Emissary skill, CAM is a Commander/Agent/Mage, etc . . .

I classify six of the fourteen possible character types as Unequivocally Useful and discuss them under that same heading. The remaining eight of the possible fourteen character types are broken down into three groups. The first group of three I label Trainable, followed by a group of two which I label Colorful, followed by a group of three which I label Also Rans.

#### Unequivocally Useful:

These are the four single class characters and the multi-class characters CA and CE. I will discuss each of them in no particular order.

1. Agent: A pure Agent begins the game immediately useful. Even at the beginning strength of 30 the character is useful on guard operations as agent rank is effectively doubled on defense. Agent ability is highly prized for this reason and because Agent ability helps that character escape if held hostage.

Having the hope of escaping from a hostage situation is very important. A hostage still costs the owner maintenance, and, more importantly, counts against his character limit. It is much more preferable to have your character assassinated than held hostage indefinitely.

2. Commander/Agent: While the naming of multi-class characters always costs 10,000 gold, this is often not a problem for the generally richer Free Peoples and is often done by the Dark Servants anyway. Agent and Command skills are the two most useful skills in a multi-class character. Obviously, then, combining the two in a CA is just the logical thing to do. The CA is the single most useful multi-class character type. The combination is a natural. The Command ability allows the CA to travel with an army and act as a backup army Commander. (A skill 10 Army Commander is not that harmful in terms of combat results, so even a 10 Command skill is immediately useful.) If the Army Commander performs a Train Army order, plus, on the same turn, the character trains troops and performs an agent order, this is two Command and one Agent skill increases each turn! It is not very difficult to see improvements in both skills each and every turn. One can argue that the majority of characters most nations recruit should be CA's--gold permitting.

3. Commander: A pure Commander is vulnerable to being kidnapped and held hostage. But the plethora of CA hires helps disguise this fact. So, an enemy Agent given the choice of Kidnap or Assassinate will often choose Assassinate rather than chance that your character is a CA and will use Agent ability to escape. That said, a few pure Commanders are always a good buy! Command is perhaps the quickest skill to increase, even in peacetime. Having the character "Train Troops" while the army Commander issues a "Train Army" allows this character type to get a double dose of training and still have an order left over for other tasks each turn. A quick perusal of the rules will convince the reader that Command ability is one of the most versatile abilities. Leading companies, leading armies, and changing diplomatic/tax rates tops the list. It is mainly in changing diplomatic relations, changing tax rates, and threatening population centers that high Command skill is essential.

4. Mage: A pure mage is a very logical choice for a character type. Between casting spells, researching spells, and "Prentice Magery," there is no time for developing other skills. There can be exceptions but mages should generally be totally developed to their trade (i.e. a single-class character) and either stays out of harm's way (perhaps in some obscure camp) or rely on other characters such as agents for protection.

5. Emissaries: Although pure emissaries are generally not as vulnerable to being kidnapped or assassinated as Army Commanders, they do tend to make visits to hostile population centers and are vulnerable to agent or otherwise aggressive actions. It is a weakness. But the benefits of a pure Emissary are also important. Remember, Agents have their strength effectively doubled when on guard missions and Commanders are both easy to train and can be useful even at strength 10. In contrast, an Emissary only becomes useful when it reaches a strength of nearly 40. So, a pure Emissary begins performing useful actions a significant number of turns earlier. In the race to place camps in the beginning of the game, this can be very significant. Pure Emissaries have their place in a well-rounded character roster.

6. Commander/Emissary: Pay careful note here. While I categorize the CE as being unequivocally useful, I do not recommend the CE in great numbers. The CE is perfect for that out-of-the-way garrison army--train army and improve loyalty each turn. Or "Build Fortifications" and "Improve Pop Center," etc. The point here is that often your characters are so spread out that you can only

afford one character to run a garrison army, or whatever. A CE character is very versatile. With some forethought, both abilities can be improved in a turn. And if positioned on the map well, can do quite a variety of tasks in a key population center (as well as lead emissary companies, etc.) But, large numbers of these characters just could not be efficiently utilized or trained.

#### The Trainable:

The following three characters can be made very useful with the proper training and the passage of game turns. The key here is that you are probably involved in a war, so how many characters of this type can you really afford to be training? Perhaps one or two of these characters could be justified. That is, one or two total, not one or two of each type.

7. Emissary/Agent: This character has as its eventual goal to be used as a very potent tool versus enemy population centers and characters. For example, as part of a Emissary or Agent company, it can steal gold, influence the enemy population center, and leave in one turn. Similarly, if enemy characters are sighted it can either create a double agent or perform an agent action, or both! To double-agent someone as you assassinate them is a very potent one-two punch that is hard to counter. This character is also very trainable. It can sit in your capital and guard/influence each turn. As skills later increase, it can visit enemy population centers alone or with a CA as a company leader, and do two actions in one turn. All characters, however, have some weaknesses. Aside from the extra training needed to overcome the lower starting values for a multi-class character, this multi-class character will never have a truly awesome challenge rank. Both Emissary and Agent abilities are penalized for challenge rank calculations, plus the available agent or emissary artifacts do not raise the challenge ranks significantly.

8. Commander/Emissary/Agent: This is a variation of the EA character above. It is a viable character type as all three skills can be increased every turn. Park the character in a garrison army. As the Army Commander trains the army the character practices the other two skills. The command ability can help the challenge rank somewhat, but it is never likely to be so high as to help significantly. It is possible that the addition of the Command skill will only tempt the player to do Command orders rather than do the Emissary-Mage training. Nevertheless, I view this as the most viable triple-class character available because it retains the double-punch potential of the EA character described above.

9. Commander/Mage: The CM is the exception to many rules. Generally, I frown on combining mage skill with any other skills--so I am breaking that rule. Generally, I am not in favor of placing mages in armies--this character breaks that rule as well. Generally, I do not favor Mages casting combat spells--this character bends this rule. Pretty exceptional sort of character! The key to the strategy behind this character is challenge rank. Generally, a Commander can load up on one weapon and just might get his hands on a command artifact. There are about six command artifacts over strength 25. There are about fifteen mage artifacts over strength 25! So, follow the logic. Command is relatively easy to build up. Forget learning all but one or two spells and mainly Prentice Magery with this character. Can you see where we are going? Just 100 strength Command and Mage gets you to 125 challenge rank--add a 2250 artifact to get to 170. Finally, high-strength mage artifacts are 2.5 times more prevalent than command artifacts, so let's multiply by 2.5 just to get a relative value, 63. That adds up to 233. Okay, okay, so both 100 strength Command and Mage may not happen soon, you may want your mage artifacts with your mages . . . but you get

the point, right? Now in the meantime, since this character will be pretty handy to have in an army now and then to challenge out enemy commanders (dragons?) in key battles, it is probably worthwhile to have a couple of combat related spells since you are there anyway. Certain protection spells and other spells can be very useful in, say, taking out camps with a small army . . . I'll let you think up some more ideas. In brief, the CM is not really so much a Mage as a Personal Challenge aficionado and Army Commander backup. This character should not even be considered by many positions or playing styles. But it is there for those who wish it. And even they should limit themselves to perhaps one.

#### The Colorful:

The following two character types are not terribly practical to buy and try to build up, the Mage rating is particularly difficult to utilize well. But these character types do have four saving graces:

A. As they have Command skill, you can train all three skills each turn by joining them to an army and letting the army Commander "Train Army" to improve the command skill while they improve the other two.

B. Even though I say they are not terribly practical, this is where "colorful" comes into play. If your position has lost all its triple-classed characters, everyone can find the time to build up just one multi-class character--for fun if nothing else.

C. As the character has three skills, it can use artifacts from three separate skill categories--adding artifacts can overcome some of the difficulties in training up a 10-10-10 skilled character into something useful.

D. Many positions begin with one or more of these characters already trained above the 10-10-10 starting value of a newly purchased triple-class character. A partially-trained triple-class character is an entirely different animal than a new purchase.

10. Commander/Agent/Mage: Part of the allure of triple-class characters is that one can mold them to suit many different sorts of uses. I will simply speculate on one use for this and the CEM character and leave it at that. Utilization of this character as an Army Backup Commander with high Agent skill and just one or two combat spells, might be interesting.

11. Commander/Emissary/Mage: One imaginative use for this character is as mainly a CE. But learn a heal spell, add a good mage artifact, and have wounded characters visit this out-of-the-way CE to be healed.

#### The Also-Rans:

I would not purchase a character of the below type, and just might retire them if they began as starting characters. Nevertheless, I will say something positive about each, but just because I will find something positive, do not mistake this for an endorsement. The one common thread you will see below is that each of these character types contains Mage skill. I believe I have already established the reasons why I dislike combining Mage skill with other skills.

12. Agent/Mage: Agent ability is always useful. It is double strength on guard actions and helps if your character is kidnapped. I tend to feel that one Mage and one Agent is better than an Agent/Mage, but a disciplined training regimen and the addition of artifacts could make me eat my words.

13. Agent/Emissary/Mage: It is impossible to regularly improve all three skill levels. I keep asking myself, what could an AEM accomplish that no other character type could? I can't come up with much. Here are the positive

comments I promised: Agent ability is always useful and the ability to add artifacts to any of three skill categories is an undeniable plus.

14. Emissary/Mage: It is reputed to be fact that some Emissary ability helps a Mage to handle the One Ring. Beyond this, we are left with the fact that these skills are hard to mix: both skills need to be fairly high to be useful and Magery is so demanding!

## 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. It states on the Fourth Age Nation Design Sheet that the three capital hexes should be AT LEAST 10 hexes apart. What happens if they are not? Does GSI reject the design?

A. If something like this happens the nation design will not necessarily be rejected, although this could prevent a nation (and a team, if they are a member of such) from being assigned to a particular game and end up delayed until another game starts. Regardless, during the initialization of the setup of the game whenever a random factor is called for for that nation, the computer will invariably generate a lower value than would normally be assigned. This could affect the level of the artifacts received by that nation, or the starting hex production for that nation's population centers, etc.

Q. Do the same races get [likely] stealth bonuses for new characters in the Fourth Age scenario that got them in the [1650,2950] Third Age scenarios?

A. No. Since 'Stealth rank bonus' is a Special Nation Ability (SNA #5) in the 4th Age 1000 scenario, it must be selected in order to receive this benefit. Thus, players that select Elves/Non-human races should NOT expect new characters to commonly be 'stealthy' unless they have chosen this SNA.

Q. When an off shore navy threatens a pop center, how are the calculations done? A town requires 1000 troops to threaten on land. Does a threatening navy off shore work like other naval encounters and you divide all factors by 100--the thousand thus becoming a 10? Do war machines in the hull of the ships count as well?

A. In simplest terms, a navy is an army with ships attached to it. No modifications are made when a navy threatens a pop center--all of the factors used when an army threatens are used when the navy threatens. Thus, it is the number of troops, the command rank of the army commander and any war machines. Please note, however, that ships DO NOT count as war machines--only war machines count as war machines. You can carry war machines with a navy, but ships are NEVER counted as war machines.

Q. Why do hostages get a chance to escape before the character holding them hostage can execute or imprison them? Wouldn't it make more sense for the

execute order to be placed after the hostage holder has a chance to dispose of the hostage?

**A. This is a logical view and one which we considered when designing the game. However, GSI chose to look at it from the perspective of the target character. GSI felt that, since the order to execute is a permanent state, the hostage should be allowed one final attempt to hold onto his/her life. We weighed both of these viewpoints during the initial game design and felt that giving the character one last chance to escape was both logical and fair.**

**Q. If a character with emissary skills is traveling with a navy and is off shore of a hex without a pop center, can the emissary issue order 555 Create Camp? What if the navy is moving up a river and the hex is not shore hex. Could he still issue 555?**

**A. The answer to both of these questions is yes. Characters have greater latitude than armies/navies with regard to terrain restrictions, so as long as they are "in" the hex, they can perform the 555 order.**

**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.**

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and/or game setups. Just send in the amount you want to give as a gift and tell us who you wish to give the certificate to, and we'll take care of the rest. What with the release of the new Fourth Age scenario, can there be any better gift to give to those dear friends who conspire to dominate the world? We didn't think so. Don't forget as well that GSI also has Middle-earth: The Wizards and Middle-earth: The Dragons starter decks and booster packs--another great Christmas gift!

Well, the Fourth Age is well on its way now. We have started 5 games already and have several more waiting for nation design sheets before they can be started. GSI is very excited with the response we have been getting with the new game and we hope that John Q. Player is just as excited. For those of you who have not yet heard of the new Fourth Age scenario--where have you been? Truly, if you want more information simply contact our office and we will be happy to send you information.

It's now time for game needs! In the 1650 scenario, we currently need Free People and Neutral teams and one Dark Servant Grudge team. We are also looking for a one week all email Free People team. In the Fourth Age 1000 scenario, we are currently looking for two two week Grudge teams--one a 7,8 or 9 player team and the other a 13 player team. We are also looking for Dark Servant and Neutral teams as well as Dark Servants and a South Kingdom for a single player game. Those of you who are interested should contact our office for assistance.

That's about it for this month. Before I go, I want to wish all of you a very merry and safe holiday from all of us here at GSI. Thanks for supporting us for so long! We'll see you in thirty!

*Stuart*

## The Hall Of Heroes

ME-PBM Circa 1650

Game #221 - The Dark Servants: #22, #25 & #14

The autumn sun shone down warmly on the walled city of Mithlond-West. The seasonal change had begun, and the trees were a cascade of oranges, reds, and browns. A light breeze wafted across the city from the sea, carrying the stench of decay down from the gray stone walls. Nearly two dozen corpses hung from the city walls, the last of Middle-earth's defenders. Círdan himself hung over the city's main gate as a warning to those who would dare to openly oppose the unequalled might of Sauron. The streets were crammed with the city's populace, turned out to hear their new ruler speak.

A tall, dusky-skinned human appeared on the tower's parapet, resplendent in newly-plundered finery and surrounded by armed guards. The wraith known as Jí Indûr was barely visible in the shadows of the curtain behind him.

"People of Mithlond-West," Haruth Ramam began in his strangely-accented baritone. "Give up all hope . . ."

Final standings are as follows:

#22 Haradwaith - 1950: Richard R. Beringer

#25 Easterlings - 1800: Stephen G. White

#14 Cloud Lord - 1566: Michael Thomas

Top Free People: #10 Noldo Elves - 1425

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Círdan/Noldo Elves: 206

Highest Net Commander Rank - Araudagûl/Cloud Lord: 126

Highest Net Agent Rank - Lomblindë/Long Rider: 136

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Angóllion/Witch-king: 115

Highest Net Mage Rank - Círdan/Noldo Elves: 157

Most Mithril - Dwarves: 1193

Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 20

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 17

Final Turn - 23

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

Game #225 - The Dark Servants: #21, #17 & #14

A dark cloud has issued forth from the heart of Mordor and spread over Middle-earth. Despite the best efforts of the valiant Free Peoples to contain this vile plague, the servants of Sauron have won. Evil reigns triumphant . . .

Final standings are as follows:

#21 Corsairs - 2000: William R. Schofield

#17 Quiet Avenger - 1817: Edward Vonk

#14 Cloud Lord - 1717: Mike Wild

Top Free People: #8 Dwarves - 733

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Úrzahil/Dark Lieutenants: 233

Highest Net Commander Rank - Bulrakur/Dog Lord: 134

Highest Net Agent Rank - Dín Ohtar/Long Rider: 128

Highest Net Emissary Rank - Angóllion/Witch-king: 118

Highest Net Mage Rank - Úrzahil/Dark Lieutenants: 218

Most Mithril - Cloud Lord: 1051

Most Artifacts - Cloud Lord: 14

Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 27

Final Turn - 21

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

## The Hall Of Heroes

Game #234 - The Dark Servants: #16, #22 & #18

Perpetual winter reigns over Middle-earth. Icicles hang from the trees of Mirkwood year-round, the Free are vanquished, and Sauron reigns supreme. As his chief retainer, Hoarmûrath has seen to the complete subjugation of the last remaining Free Peoples of Middle-earth. They say revenge is a dish best served cold . . .

Final standings are as follows:

#16 Ice King - 2125: David Rosenberg  
#22 Haradwaith - 1967: Valerie Neufeld  
#18 Fire King - 1866: John Lamulle

Top Free People: #25 Easterlings - 500

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Báin I/Dwarves: 173  
Highest Net Commander Rank - Báin I/Dwarves: 149  
Highest Net Agent Rank - Hoarmûrath/Ice King: 155  
Highest Net Emissary Rank - Mari-Chan/Dark Lieutenants: 103  
Highest Net Mage Rank - Erifhen/Dunlendings: 140  
Most Mithril - Dwarves: 2917  
Most Artifacts - Ice King: 19  
Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 18  
Final Turn - 34

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

Game #237 - The Free Peoples: #10, #22 & #4

The incompetence of the Dark Lackeys has proven to be their downfall. The Nazgûl are now truly fulfilling their role as Dark Servants in the Forest Fortresses of the mighty Noldo Elves as Elrond's personal pointy-toed shoeshiners.

Final standings are as follows:

#10 Noldo Elves - 1683: James L. Burton  
#22 Haradwaith - 1450: David E. Smith  
#4 Arthedain - 1117: Aaron Stein

Top Dark Servant: #21 Corsairs - 925

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Mûrazôr/Dunlendings: 166  
Highest Net Commander Rank - Meneldir/Arthedain: 127  
Highest Net Agent Rank - Jack the Ripper/Southern Gondor: 88  
Highest Net Emissary Rank - Elrond/Noldo Elves: 85  
Highest Net Mage Rank - Mûrazôr/Dunlendings: 134  
Most Mithril - Dwarves: 1738  
Most Artifacts - Noldo Elves: 20  
Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 7  
Final Turn - 14

Congratulations to the Free Peoples!

ME-PBM Circa 2950

Game #46 - The Dark Servants: #12, #11 & #13

Moonlight bathed the ancient willow grove in a silvery radiance, casting deep shadows beneath the boughs of some of the most ancient trees of the land. No mortal had trod this land in untold eons. In the center of the grove, beneath the hugest of the willows, rested an ornate granite tombstone etched with flowing symbols of despair, death, and hate. Though time had eroded the epithet from its face, a tangible aura of unholy power surrounded it. The animals of the forest were eerily absent from the grove itself, though they could be heard in the forest beyond. And then a strange thing happened; the sounds of the forest ceased altogether. No twigs snapped, no branches rustled. Even the wind ceased, as if nature were holding her breath.

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## The Hall Of Heroes

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The cause of the deathly silence then made itself visible. A figure robed and cowl'd in black drifted from the shadows toward the grave. Though the figure's feet drifted several inches above the ground, the grass wilted and died at its passage. Reaching the grave, the mysterious wizard raised a gloved fist to release a bouquet of dessicated roses. A hollow voice emanated from its cowl as Akhórahil the Unholy spoke. "The Free are vanquished, their struggles for naught. When your commanders informed me of your ultimate demise and asked me to lead the nation of the great Dragon Lord to victory, I accepted the honor. Sauron has his victory. . ."

Final standings are, as follows:

#12 Dragon Lord - 1833: Thomas Higgins  
#11 Witch-king - 1734: Eric J. Gallant  
#13 Dog Lord - 1733: Benjamin H. Diebold

Top Free People: #10 Noldo Elves - 675

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Galadriel/Sinda Elves: 217  
Highest Net Commander Rank - Tónn Varthkûr/Dog Lord: 89  
Highest Net Agent Rank - Jí Indûr/Cloud Lord: 141  
Highest Net Emissary Rank - Haurfile/Witch-king: 88  
Highest Net Mage Rank - Galadriel/Sinda Elves: 165  
Most Mithril - Dragon Lord: 303  
Most Artifacts - Witch-king: 15  
Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 11  
Final Turn - 22

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!

Game #52 - The Dark Servants: #25, #13 & #17

It is a dark time indeed for Middle-earth, where armies march unhindered across the countryside and death rides on horseback. Things look very bleak. Perhaps there will come a time for new heroes to take up the mantle of defenders of Middle earth, ushering in a new age of peace. A Fourth Age . . .

Final standings are as follows:

#25 Khand Easterlings - 1883: Kevin Cabai  
#13 Dog Lord - 1800: Mark Graham  
#17 Quiet Avenger - 1600: Sarah E. Myers

Top Free People: #6 Northern Gondor - 975

Interesting Notes:

Highest Challenge Rank - Mûrazôr/Witch-king: 182  
Highest Net Commander Rank - Aragorn II/Dúndan Rnagers: 124  
Highest Net Agent Rank - Zarran/Dog Lord: 115  
Highest Net Emissary Rank - Marissa/Dragon Lord: 89  
Highest Net Mage Rank - Mûrazôr/Witch-king: 163  
Most Mithril - Khand Easterlings: 450  
Most Artifacts - Witch-king: 17  
Most Kills - Cloud Lord: 19  
Final Turn - 16

Congratulations to the Dark Servants!