

News from Bree

MEPBM Newsletter: Issue 22, May '03

"Strange as News
from Bree..."

The Lord of the Rings, chapter 9

4th Age Hints for Beginners

by Joe Hayre

Talk at the Prancing Pony...

page 1

"Fourth Age Hints for
Beginners"

page 2 - 3

New Games

Stand-by Positions &
Grudge Games

Flagship News

page 4

Tolkien News

page 5 - 6

Hall of Fame

Elves Leaving for Helms
Deep?

Contacting the MEPBM
Office

page 7

"The Future of MEPBM?"

page 8 - 9

"Lord of the Rings
Roleplaying Game"

News from MEPBM

Study Tolkien!

page 10

Runestone's Guide to
Magic Words

This article is an attempt at helping players new to the 4th age format get acclimated as quickly as possible to the fast paced 4th age environment.

I have now played a number of 4th age games as both dark servant nations and free peoples. I have played with nations beginning far to the North and nations beginning in the SW corners of Middle Earth, as well as a number of nations in between. I have seen hundreds of starting positions get eliminated, including my own. I have seen certain positions amass great wealth and power from the most humble of beginnings. My suggestions below are meant to minimize your chances of getting crushed and maximizing your chances at being a 4th age middle earth mover and shaker. So let's begin with your startup.

4th age @1000, like all other Middle Earth modules, is a game of resources and characters. So to maximize your beginning resources and characters, you need to carefully review and choose your Special Nation abilities. These choices are some of the most important choices you make in this game and will directly impact your nation both short and long-term. I have organized the Special Nation Abilities (SNA's) into 3 groups—most important, moderately useful, and least useful. Each SNA will have with it an explanation of why I have placed it within its respective category:

Most Important SNAs

Your nation should really start with at least one of these SNA's, if not more. You be the judge:

1. SNA1—Scout/recon at double normal skill rank. As characters are the name of the game in Middle earth, the ability to find and kill your opponents characters is very important. This SNA is one of the most useful skills in the finding and killing character arena, and is therefore a most useful SNA

2. SNA8—Buy-sell orders receive a 20% market adjustment. This SNA is also a very useful ability long-term, and short-term is very helpful at increasing resources available to your nation. Remember, this is a game of resources and characters, and this SNA increases your resources by 20%.

3. SNA 9, 10, 11, 12—New emissarys, mages, agents, and commanders (respectively) start at rank 40. I think any of these beginning character traits are particularly important for a number of reasons. To begin with, new characters cost either 5000 gold or 10,000 gold, basically depending on your choice of a multi-class character or a character with a single class. Once created, these characters incur a cost against your treasury each turn, until they are trained up to a useful level.

For instance, an emissary rank 30 will take 3 turns, approximately, to reach a 40 skill level. This means that you incur an initial cost of 5000 gold to create this emissary, plus another 2100 or so in maintenance costs and three turns of down time until you can begin to use this emissary for useful tasks—improving population centers or creating camps. Once you can begin improving population centers and placing camps, the cost of this character is offset by the increased revenues you generate, until the character creates more wealth than he expends. But the three turns wasted improving this character to a useful level are three turns and 2100 in gold that many 4th age nations cannot afford. In addition, in an actively contested 4th age game, the population center limit may be reached by turn 6, 7, or 8. Therefore, the creation of a 30 rank emissary puts your nation seriously behind the camp creation curve.

With regard to a mage at rank 40, many of the same arguments apply. A rank 30 mage is far from useful, suffering from an inability to cast or learn spells with any consistency. A rank 40 mage has a step up and, in conjunction with any of the conjure spells, is much more proficient at his craft. If you wish to run a mage nation, SNA 10, mages @40, is a must.

For agents, a rank of 45 or so will allow you to steal another nations gold with some consistency. This means your 40 agent, again, will begin his offensive operations 3 turns earlier than a 30 agent, which in turn means he can pay for himself more quickly and begin reducing another nation's wealth almost immediately. Obviously, this is a must have for nations wanting to run a strong agent force.

Finally, we come to SNA 12, commanders @rank 40. This is one of the least expensive SNA's, but in my opinion again well worth it. There are a number of orders that really require a 40+ rank commander for a chance at success. Raising taxes and downgrading national relations are two important ones that come to mind. In addition, as the game progresses you will find you need a larger number of commanders to control the large armies you have roaming the map. For the small expense, this SNA is well worth it.

4. SNA21 Hire armies at no cost. This SNA is particularly useful at the beginning of the game. Again, as this is a game of resources, the ability to recruit a number of troops at a number of population centers without the need to pay 5000 gold per army is very useful. It allows you to play more recklessly with your armies as they can be replaced easily. As the game progresses, this becomes less useful—your enemy nations move further away and you have fewer population centers close to the action. . But for many nations, this SNA can be the difference between early survival and quick defeat.

5. SNA24 Conjure mounts. In my first game I did not

new games

Waiting List: When I get all 25 (or 24 for Gunboat) nations into the game I will allocate you your choice of nation from the list of nations that you have sent me - please send multiple nation choices. Upto 2 nation game: play 1 or 2 Aligned nations, or one Neutral nation.

The following new games are filling up.

FA: 1000

[Game 49]

2 week turnaround

7 positions available. Variant game with upto 2 nations per player. Rules @ www.kendallweb.com/mepbm/3waygrudge.html

TA: 1650

[Game 91]

Two week turnaround

14 positions available

[Game 92]

Gunboat 1650 2wk. 1 player needed (2 nations each player). Limited diplomacy - Sam will be playing.

TA: 2950

[Game 227]

2 week turnaround

21 nations available.

[Game 48]

2 week turnaround

20 nations available 1D 3N and one to decide taken.

BofA

[Game 105]

Two week turnaround

Beginners game: 2 experienced. (Get in touch if experienced for a special deal here - all the game for CHEAP!!!!!!!)

Face to Face Game

June 22 w/end (Fri mid-aft until Sunday) - 7 available (3 if 2 GMs play as is likely) with 8 possibles. (Some players will no doubt double up but we want to keep that to a minimum).

Note please ask for variant games we can try to get you opposition for them if you are interested - mostly Grudge teams though - if I get 10 players for any single type of game then I will put it up for general availability below and push it.

fully appreciate the value of the conjure mounts spell. That was until turn 2, when an 800HC army showed up on my undefended town. Two turns later I was bankrupted by the loss of my town and village. The value of a Conjure mounts spell is that it allows you to field large forces of cavalry, which in turn allows you to cover large areas of map quickly. There is no nation in the game which can afford to buy enough mounts to field a large cavalry force, so nations without conjure mounts are forced to horde their meager horse supply or settle for heavy infantry. In addition to allowing for the fielding of large numbers of cavalry, conjure mounts can be an income producer, by allowing you to sell any mounts you don't wish to use for troop creation. This allows the player to turn mages into income producing characters, as the value of mounts in the early game far outweighs the cost of the mage maintenance.

6. SNA 31—Kidnapping/assassinations at +20. Did you ever dream of playing the Cloud lord and starting the game with agents at rank 60? Well, this SNA allows for just that. Extremely expensive, this option allows for super agents roaming middle earth and killing at random. If you can afford it, and if no one else on your team has it, and you're not playing a LAS game, then go for it.

Moderately Important SNAs

This is a list of SNA's that, although helpful, will not necessarily be a game breaker for your nation. Many of these options are useful and inexpensive, but again, not game breakers:

1. SNA 2-Scout recon at +20 to normal skill rank. Similar to SNA 1 but less expensive, this option allows for the finding and subsequent killing of various players. This option becomes much more useful in a LAS game, where SNA one is not available, but in all events is a useful and inexpensive option.

2. SNA6 and SNA7—Armies lose no morale while force marching or limited morale loss with no food. Morale plays a small role in combat, and these SNA's have a small impact on your army morale. Neither of these options would be my first choices, but if I had a few extra gold coins to spend at the beginning of the game I might choose one of these.

3. SNA 13, 14, and 15—Training levels slightly improved at initial hire time. As morale plays a small role in combat, so too does your troop training level. However, as above, if you have a little extra gold to spend at the beginning of the game then these are not bad choices.

7. SNA20—New armies start at morale 40. I put this option in the moderately important category only for nations also beginning with SNA 21 (free new armies). If you are not playing with SNA21, this SNA should be categorized in the least useful category—because you can't afford building enough armies at 5000 gold each to get the help of better morale.

4. SNA 23, 25, 26, 29—Can learn weakness, conjure food, conjure hordes, summon storms—All spells can be moderately useful at various stages of the game. Weakness spells are useful in the later part of the game. Conjure food spells help with army movement and possible income production, conjure hordes helps

with threat orders and a bit of combat assistance, and summon storms gives you the ability to get a combat bonus from charge vs. standard formations.

Least useful SNAs

This category includes SNA's that have such a minor impact on the game, or don't satisfy a cost/benefit analysis, or just take up a slot better used by another SNA, so that I recommend against choosing them:

1. SNA3-Scout recon at minimum 50. This option costs more than SNA2, and in most cases will do less than that SNA. I therefore see little reason to waste resources on this SNA

2. SNA4-Challenge rank bonus more likely. There is nothing wrong with this option in the abstract. The problem is that so few characters will actually get this bonus. I haven't worked out the odds, but I would guess each character you hire has maybe a 25% chance of getting this bonus. In addition to few characters getting this bonus, you cannot control which character will get the bonus. A mage hunting artifacts with a +15 challenge rank is great. An emissary building camps with a +15 challenge rank doesn't help much. Also, since no one knows which characters have artifacts, most army commanders will choose to refuse personal challenge if there is any chance of a challenge being issued. Therefore, although the cost of this option is small, the benefits are even smaller.

3. SNA5 Stealth rank bonus more likely for starting characters. This SNA is a tough call. Stealth is super useful for agents, and the thought of getting a huge stealth bonus may be very tantalizing. This option is tied for second most expensive, however, and it's not a guarantee. If I had to choose between all my agents beginning at rank 40 and one out of 4 agents beginning at rank 30 with stealth, I would choose the rank 40 agents without stealth. You can also have a problem similar to the increased challenge rank—the wrong characters classes getting stealth. Because of the limited resources in this game, you cannot build huge numbers of agents early on. Therefore, the number of agents getting this bonus are limited, and the value of this SNA, at 7000 gold, marginal.

4. SNA16—New MAA start at training rank 25. I guess if you have mages casting conjure hordes then sure, maybe this option is useful. Maybe. I can't see it having much if any value other than taking up an SNA slot which could be filled with something more useful.

5. SNA 17, 18, 32, 33, 34. Naval crap. Build ships at reduced timber cost, travel open seas without any problem, or navy warship strength increased. Very, very few players can afford warships in 4th age. So the need to have greater warship strength is a moot point. And although it's possible a nation will decide to build ships, the cost is steep in gold and timber. The reduced timber needs for SNA 17 and 18 are nice, but will rarely come into play until maybe the later stages of the game. My recommendation is that if you want a navy you are better off building the ships in your nation design form at 250 gold each rather than spending 2000-3000 gold on these options.

6. SNA19—Build fortifications at 1/2 timber cost. We'll talk about fortifications later in this essay, but for now we can say that this is a relatively expensive SNA, that

stand-by positions

Drop-outs available - don't forget you get a **free turn** for taking these up!

*E [Early] = 0-10 turn,
M [Midgame] = 11-20,
L [Late game] = 21+,
[A = Aligned if a Neutral, N = not aligned if a Neutral]
P = Postal and Email game,*

BoFA None
1000: Neutral Team nation (m)
2950: None
1650: Wood (e), QA (m)
Gunboat: 1x2 (m), 1 (l) (Please note past turns for all these nations are available)

grudge games

Grudge Games we need opposition for:

1000: None
1650: None
2950: None

Check out the front sheet / turn email for all the latest news on positions available!

FLAGSHIP NEWS

Flagship would like to apologise to readers for a delay in publication of issue 103. Unfortunately the editor, Carol Mulholland, fell and broke her wrist. Normal service will be resumed shortly.

Meanwhile Flagship welcomes comments on games from everyone, not just subscribers: all comments received go into a hat and may win the writer a free copy of the magazine! Send your thoughts on Middle Earth to: carol@pbmgames.com

News From Bree

We're looking for strategy articles to publish in these pages. More material on fourth age would also be welcome as there is a Fourth Age Special being planned.

If you feel inspired, please write to ...

bree@timewyrm.co.uk

it may not be particularly useful in the early game, and that only rich nations or pop centers at critical junctures get fortifications. Since the number of fortifications built is relatively small, I would argue that this SNA is not particularly cost effective.

7. SNA22—Uncover secrets at 40. The only time I use this order is when I have nothing else to do. Therefore, to actually pay gold for it seems a bit much to ask. The information may or may not be useful, and may not effect your nation or your alliance. Therefore, I recommend against this option.

8. SNA 27, 28—Learn fearful hearts or fanaticism. These spells have limited usefulness in combat as the effect of morale on combat are small. And unlike certain SNA's (such as a higher training level for new recruits) or other morale boosters, these effects are temporary. Therefore, they are relegated to least important

SNA 30—Learn lost teleport spell. This SNA is expensive, and of course is useful only to mages. This spell is most useful in hunting artifacts, and hunting artifacts is difficult and time consuming in 4th age. Therefore, I recommend against players making artifact hunting a campaign, and without dedication this spell doesn't justify its cost.

Special Skills

Okay, now that you chosen which special skills you'd like your starting nation to begin with, other factors which need to be considered are your choices on starting artifacts, ship, war machines, and hidden pop center.

Artifacts are a tough call. The value of purchasing 2 or more artifacts is of course tied to which artifacts you begin the game with. If, for example, you get a +2250 point combat artifact or a +30 command artifact, then purchasing artifacts is great. On the other hand, if you start the game with 2 +500 artifacts then you have to ask if artifacts were really worth it. I have played with and without artifacts, and I think either choice is good. However, I would recommend beginning with only 2 artifacts (4000 gold) as the marginal cost of artifacts beyond this point is high.

Transports and warships. As noted earlier, transports can be a helpful addition to your starting setup, depending where on the map your nation resides. I personally question the value of warships since few nations will begin the game with any navy at all, and even fewer of these will have warships to threaten. Your naval requirement will be dictated by your starting location, and remember that all ships require regular maintenance.

War machines are a nice addition to your starting set-up. They provide additional combat power while not increasing your nation's expenses. If purchased, you should obtain anywhere from 10-30 of them (10 to take down a tower, 30 to destroy a fort).

Hidden population center—I have never played with any of my population centers hidden. I do, however, consider it all the time and it's a tough call. There are two problems with hidden population centers—The first is that you don't want to hide your capital. Your starting army will give your capital location away, and as the game progresses you won't want to recruit from your capital for the same reason. Therefore, you must choose a smaller pop center to hide. The second problem is cost. It costs 10,000

gold to hide a pop center. That's a huge chunk of your starting money.

On the positive front, a good hidden pop center can provide a safe haven for your characters, it can be improved to a back-up capital, and it can buy you time (since no nation's will start with reveal pop center spells). Again, if you can afford it then more power to you. Hidden pop centers are not bad choices, just expensive.

Army details

As you all know, in addition to beginning with SNA's to your choosing, you can also pick and choose your starting army troops. You may begin with anywhere from 200 Heavy cavalry to 1200 men at army. When your army starts at your capital, it will be given food in relation to the number of starting troops. 100 troops will give you 6000 starting food. 200 troops will give you 3000 starting food, 300 troops will give you 2000 starting food, etc, etc. As you see, the greater number of troops the less food your army begins with. This is the first reason you may wish to consider smaller starting armies.

The second reason for consideration of smaller starting armies is that any gold you don't spend on troops goes right to your treasury. Therefore, if you choose 100 men at arms (cost 1000) as your starting army, you get an additional 11,000 gold to your treasury. If you choose 100 Heavy Cavalry (cost 6000), you get 6000 gold to your treasury. So the question is whether 100 Heavy Cavalry are worth the additional cost. In most cases, I would argue they are not. Here's why:

200 Heavy cavalry have a combat value of 3200 offense and 3200 defense. For this you pay 12,000 gold. Instead, you could choose to spend 1000 gold on 100 men at army with a combat value of 200 offense and 200 defense, leaving you 11,000 gold to play with. Turn 1, you may now choose to hire 400 Heavy Infantry, with a combat value of 4000 offense and 4000 defense. Therefore, by turn one you've surpassed the offensive power of the heavy cavalry (not taking into consideration training, et al) and you have 11,000 gold extra to hire 2 add'l characters. You also have twice the starting food in your army than the heavy cavalry army has. And this is all on turn one. Therefore, to reiterate, I believe most nations will be served by hiring fewer, cheaper starting armies and building up quickly versus spending larger amounts of starting cash on initial armies.

Your population center details

I once worked with a man whose favorite saying was "man is greedy". Oh, so true. In Middle Earth, your nation's financial situation will dictate, or at least play a role in, the orders you issue and the fun you can experience. In addition, as a greedy player you will understand that the more gold your nation creates, the more powerful you become. So how to create gold?

Rule #1 - your starting population centers should begin in hexes that can produce gold. It's as simple as that. In all of the games I've played, mining plays a huge role in early cash build-up. In one game a starting major town produced 3100 gold from mining. That's the equivalent to a 40% tax rate on that population center. Therefore, that pop center created the same wealth for my nation as 2 starting major towns without gold mining. And believe me, you will have plenty to spend that extra cash on. So, don't build your initial pop centers in desert, woods, plains, or shore. Think mountains and hills and rough.

Lord of the Rings: The Musical

The first stage musical adaptation of The Lord of the Rings is to open in London in spring 2005. This coincides with the 50th anniversary of the publication of the complete trilogy.

The £8 million production has book and lyrics by Shaun McKenna and music by Stephen Keeling and Bernd Stromberger. McKenna & Keeling were the team responsible for the critically acclaimed West End musical "Maddie".

Award-winning Matthew Warchus will direct. His recent credits include the London musical "Tell Me On A Sunday". Award-winning Rob Howell will design. His recent West End credits include "Sophie's Choice" at The Royal Opera House.

The musical will be produced by Kevin Wallace and Saul Zaentz. Kevin Wallace was in-house producer at The Really Useful Theatre Company from 1997-2001 when it produced several Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals. The legendary Saul Zaentz was this year awarded the BAFTA 'Academy Fellowship'.

www.thelordoftheringsmusical.com

Your editor will refrain from commenting on this news but would be happy to hear your opinions:

bree@timewyrm.co.uk

Rule #2 - use your capital location offensively to screen out areas of the map. No starting capitals may start within 3 hexes of your starting capital, so plan your capital builds accordingly to make safe pop center havens. For instance, if you place your capital at 0712, no other nation can start in those mountains, rough, or forests anywhere near you. You've essentially sealed off that entire portion of the map for your use alone.

Rule #3 - Fortifications are expensive to maintain and may not provide the protection you need. Build them sparingly and with care as they can quickly produce a gold maintenance drain on your nation. Also, keep in mind that there is a significant difference between a fort and a tower. A town with a tower can be taken out on turn 3 by a motivated enemy with or without war machines. A fort, on the other hand, can prove extremely difficult to destroy or capture at all before turn 5.

Rule #4 - Insurance, while expensive, may well be worth it. You can actually plan your nation design around a location. You may choose, for instance, to have a navy if you're 1st choice is in SW Middle Earth. That navy may be much less valuable, however, if you end up in the Sea of Rhun area. So to not take the risk, insurance may well be worth the cost.

Rule #5 - Don't feel obligated to spend all your pop center cash. You may find that you don't feel the need to build fortifications. Then don't. But definitely spend as much as you can on actual pop centers.

Character details

This is the final section on your set-up, and one that requires less explanation than most. Obviously, the higher the character skills the more valuable a character becomes and the more he can do. In addition, the higher the character skills the more expensive a

character becomes. Keep in mind that building certain characters, like a high level emissary, will effect the starting loyalty of your population centers. Building multi-class characters allows for some freedom of action, and a good time to build multi-class characters is in your initial setup, as you don't pay a huge extra levy for their multi-class skills. Another thought is that you should plan for t-1 character builds based on your initial startup. For instance, if you chose SNA 11 (agents at rank 40), then you should start with at least one 40 rank agent.

Rank 10 character skills are useful only in providing a starting character stealth. For all multi-class characters, a skill rank of 20 should be considered.

Rank 20 skill level is obviously useful in multi-class characters only. It is more expensive on a per point basis than 30 rank, but beginning cost constraints make it a viable alternative.

Rank 30 characters provide the greatest value for the money, but have some limited uses. Therefore, I like to buy 30 rank characters only when I'm obtaining multi-class characters who will have time to improve.

Rank 40 skills and rank 20 skills cost the same per skill point. The nice thing about 40 class characters is that they can do a good chunk of orders with better chances of success than 30 skill point characters. Also, as stated earlier, a 40 class character can build another 40 class character with the appropriate SNA.

Rank 50 characters are extremely expensive, (the same cost as a multi-class 40/30 character). The only uses (in my opinion) for 50 rank characters is as commanders, since they have the ability to raise taxes on turn one or two without much problem. Of course, if you are running a dwarf nation then a 60 commander is the way to go.

Rank 60 class characters are usually built only at a cost of a 50 rank character, as specified by your starting race. Rank 60 characters are quite powerful and allow for all sorts of actions to be completed without problem.

Okay, that's in for this article. I hope you all find this useful and would appreciate any feedback you may have. Good luck, and good gaming.



Elves Leaving for Helm's Deep?

by Richard D'Elf

Remember the scene in the Two Towers film where the elves start leaving Imladris to take ship for the Undying Lands? And then Galadriel has a quiet word with Elrond about it being not very nice to leave the poor men to their fate? And the next thing you know, a regiment of crack elven troops shows up at Helm's Deep.

This is the scene the film didn't show ...

"Orl right you beautiful people, where d'you think you're going?"

"To Mithlond, my lord, to take ship for the Undying Lands."

"Undying Lands my half-elven backside! Do you want to live for ever?" (wrong film but never mind).

"Actually my lord, yes we do."

"Enough of that defeatist talk! Get back here! Buckle on those sword-belts. Pick up those bows. Collect those arrows. Now... faa....aaall in!

Look at you! What a shower! Just down from the trees are you? Don't answer that!

Put that helm on straight!" CLUNK!

"Am I hurting you son?"

"No my lord."

"I should be, I'm standing on your hair. Get it CUT!

"Show me your sword, son. Hmm, very good, sharper than Galadriel's tongue."

"Father, may I have a word?"

"Yes Arwen, your bum does look big in that. Do that hauberk up TIGHT!

Now where's that teleport spell? They'll never get to Helm's Deep in time otherwise!

Me? I'm off to the Undying Lands - but don't tell anyone..."

Richard d'Elf



Hall of Fame

Game 142 (FA: 1000) by Paul Scheel

This game started out as a major uphill battle for the FP as all five neutrals sided with the DS from the first turn. As the Nations of Finarfin, Northern Alliance, Protectorate, and Eldar Survivors struggled to improve their economies in the Polar NE, the Sons of Bombur fought on the west coast to defend itself from the North Kingdom's savage attacks starting on turn two.

Fortunately for the FP the Cathar Horseslords were eliminated very early. As we suspected they had already accepted large sums of money to join the DS and had been moving their armies to help in a joint attack. At the same time the most experienced FP players (Dan Newman, and Clint Oldridge) moved to eliminate the New Kingdom from the SE corner of the map. With these two nations eliminated the FP were still outnumber 13-10, and playing just to survive.

The game started to turn however when the North Kingdom dropped as the DS had been mistreating their possible ally, and the new player decided to join the FP. With both the NK, and the Sons of Bombur now free to attack the center of the map the DS quickly started to lose ground. The Dark Stalkers were eliminated, while the Dark Lands took a huge lose in both pop centers, and characters. The DS made their first major counter blow by eliminating the Warrior Borne, but were unable to press further into Mordor. May the spirit of the Warrior Borne rest easy knowing the rest of the FP avenged them.

This left the game still in the DS advantage 11-10. However they seemed fixated on taking out the Protectorate capitol just north west of the Sea of Rhun. With the bridges having been destroyed this was no easy task. To bait them we built our armies just off their map, and when they came around the sea to the east we let them pass into a large waiting army with several high ranking agents, and then sent waves of troops through their now poorly defended front lines. In short order the Keronians had been eliminated except for their island stronghold, and the Quislings were out of the game.

Now lacking an immediate target, and facing ever increasing military pressure from all sides, the DS surrendered on turn 28. The surrender showed a great deal of class on the part of the DS as they still had some very strong nations including the Inail, and Luiss, in the SW.

THE FREE PEOPLES of MIDDLE EARTH

Mageborne Traitor / Warrior Borne .. Clint Oldridge
Sigur / Sandovar Dan Newman
Eldar Survivors / D'Hara David Konieczny
Protectorate / Sons of Bombur Brad Stephens
Northern Alliance / Sons of Finarfin Paul Scheel

Game 94 (TA: 1650) by Greg Shaffer (Noldo Elves)

The ancient ones are amazed to see the Free Peoples still in control of Middle-Earth! A relatively inexperienced grudge team was outmatched by very solid dark servant opposition. Further, this was a 1650 game where the dark servants apparently have the easier path, as supported by data showing that the dark servants win at least two-thirds of the time

in 1650 games.

Add to this the fact that the Free Peoples started with only one locate artifact (not true!) spell, on Cirdan who was burdened with Rivendell army duties from turn one. This contributed to the Dark Servants recovering every single lost agent and stealth artifact and using them against us for the entire war. This took a heavy toll for the entire game and made it difficult to rally any sustained military assault or even manage the affairs of nations. To add to the difficulties, Southern Gondor did not contribute anywhere near its military potential in the first half of the war until the player (with a great style for a non-military nation) was replaced. This allowed Mordor and Haradwaith to survive and do their business relatively unmolested, a death-warrant for the Free allegiance.

Still further, North Gondor was eliminated in the middle-game by a typo resulting in bankruptcy. The south had already fallen relatively early on despite strong play by the Corsairs. The dark players had pulled an excellent early surprise move when they transferred the Cloud Lord command and combat artifacts to the lowly Haradwaith commanders. The Harad then pulled a key surprise challenge to an important Corsair army commander, disbanding a large army and never allowing us to recover in the south, with DS agents now added to the mix.

Heavy agent strikes lead to very little sustainable military opposition to the dark conquest of Rhun, Rhovanion, and eventually most of Mirkwood. Angmar was never fully conquered by the Free; in part due to agent and curse strikes, and also due to excellent play and use of dragons by Rhudaur and the Witch King even after all the Rhudaur starting populace was removed. The Free efforts at dragon slaying did not proceed as quickly or as successfully as originally hoped, although the elimination of many DS camps in dragon-inhabited areas did help.

Many Free nations withstood colossal character and population losses and unmanageable capitals for many consecutive turns due to imbedded enemy agents. Free characters were hostage or unable to be replaced due to the continuous presence of agents in capitals and agents stealing all available gold each turn before characters could be hired.

Eventually the Free Peoples were able to rally a modicum of agent and curses squads to hit the dark servants at home or to curse DS agents in Free capitals. The dark servants hit earlier, harder and faster with emissary squads, but eventually the Free emissaries rose to the occasion as well.

In the last turn of the war (before a DS drop), the Black Gate of Mordor was smashed with a coordinated mobilization of Free timber stores, and a well-equipped cavalry army recruited from off-map and away from the eyes of prying DS agents. On the same turn, the One Ring was recovered by the Free.

The dark players then claimed that this game had begun with an agreement that there would be no "One Ring Victory." Such an understanding was never discussed on our team, nor was any agreement ever finalized with the other team or with the game moderator. The dark servants then regurgitated an archaic and offhanded email chat between team captains, where there was some very brief informal preliminary idle talk (consisting of one sentence) that was never

contacting the mepBm office

UK: Office A, 340 North Road,
Cardiff, Wales, CF14 3BP
TL: 029 20913359
[dial code 011 44 2920 for US players.
10am-6.30pm UK time (BST - British
Standard Time); 5am-1.30pm (EST)]
FAX: 029 20625532
EM: me@middleearthgames.com

USA: PO Box 280, Medford, OR
97501-0019, USA
Phone & Fax: 541-772-7872 (10-
5pm weekdays) (fax24hrs)

AUSTRALIA:
PBM Enterprises, PO Box 278,
Emerald Victoria, Australia 3782
Phone & Fax: +61 3 5968-5652

WEBSITES
www.middleearthgames.com
www.harlequingames.com

EMAIL LIST
Check out the websites (above) for
more information.



payments

Payments to **Middle Earth PBM Games** not Harlequin. 5% charge for UK Credit card payments & you can pay directly through our website (World Pay [WP] will appear on your statement).

You can also set up a monthly payment with us for a SET amount taken from your credit card at the beginning of each month. Ask for more details if interested.

If your account is low funds there will be an administration charge of £1 for the first turn, and 50p for subsequent turns on Low funds.

Note that CC payments are accepted in the following currencies: UK£, US\$ & AU\$ as well as some other currencies.



news from BREE

My thanks to everyone who has sent articles. I am still looking for more though! Please try to keep your articles to about 900 words (or shorter), otherwise I may have to edit you severely! This issue's featured artist was **Anke-Katrin Eissmann**

Editor: Colin Forbes,
2A Guinea Street, Exeter, Devon
bree@timewyrm.co.uk

finished, discussed, or converted into an agreement. In fact, no-one on our team was ever made aware of even the potential of any possible rule changes (other than the standard changes for a 12 vs. 12 grudge game).

Further, the One Ring was never taken to Mount Doom, and was instead dropped in the open the very next turn (the turn that the DS chose to concede). Therefore there was no "One Ring Victory" and thus no violation even if such an agreement had been made. Picking up an artifact does not constitute a victory, nor a violation of any would-be agreement regarding taking the ring to Mount Doom. The game certainly could have continued, either with an interesting One Ring end-game (never a guarantee for either side), or with some new agreement, in which case we could have done some great research on the One Ring if we had held it. However, the Dark Servants dropped and conceded victory to the Free, to the amazement of the few remaining Free warriors in all of Middle-Earth.

Hail to the long-suffering Free Peoples! Not a single Free nation was allowed to fall (excepting the NG typo), despite enormous hardship and frustration. Courage and great spirit prevail when all the lights of the world seem to have gone out. The Dark Servants, while strong and greatly skilled in the arts of manipulation and deceit, lose heart easily in the face of the steadfast.

Game 234 (TA: 2950) by Garrett Love

A brief history of the end of the third age as recorded by Feamire of Lorien.

Council of the War Moon (Turn 0): The nine are seen abroad and the Gondorian lords speak of hordes gathering in the east. The free peoples bring many tongues to the council table (multi-national team), but dark forces inhibit the magics allowing communication with Elrond and the Beornings of Greenwood (no email!)

Two moons past (4): The Gondorian lords move decisively against the threats of Sauron. The Southern lords destroy Adunaphel's navy while the Northern Lords send forth a large force of cavalry, feinting an incursion into Harondor before scaling the southern Mordor mountains. They prepare to assault the unprotected fortresses of Ji Indur and Akhorakil. The first of the nine has shown weakness - Hoarmurath now sends word of his movements to Lorien.

Three moons past (6): The nation of the Cloud Lord falls along with its capital. Battle rages at Dol Guldur, where the Rohirrim valiantly assist us against the combined forces of the Dragon Lord and Dog Lord. Taurnil slain by Krusnak. Southern Gondor comes north over the mountains to defeat Tonn Varthkur in the plains, and moves against Morannon. The Witch King moves against the Beornings and rumours continue to speak of incredible artifact magics being gathered by the Dark Lieutenants and other dark mages. The Khand Easterlings are friendly, the Rhun notably cold.

Four moons past (8): A nazgul falls - Helkama slays Dendra Dwar on the field outside of Dol Guldur. Krusnak slays Adrahil at Thuringwathost and the assault fails outside Morannon, but a new assault on Barad Perras leaves South Gondor alone on the slopes. The Dark Servants rally in Mordor to retake the Cloud Lord capital, assassinating the Gondorian commanders and working to oust the Gondorian forces that have taken hold in the lands of the Blind

Sorcerer. The Northmen collapse due to unforeseen economic difficulties, and perhaps untold efforts of the Long Rider. Lindal kidnaps Rogrog and the Silvan elves reveal Sarn Gorowing

Six moons past (12): The Witch King, Dark Lieutenants and Quiet Avenger boldly cross the southern bridge to take Pelargir. It is reclaimed by Southern Gondor but dark armies move across the Gondor interior. Reports from the Noldo indicate that they have exerted pressure and eliminated the Blind Sorcerer and hold much of the northern lands, where the Rangers of the North are mounting a major offensive against the strongholds of the Witch King. Northern Gondor continues to battle within the Mordor interior at 3627. A second nazgul (Ren) acts as our agent, falling to the sway of Galadriel and Southern Gondor destroys Barad Perras when the fortifications are sabotaged. Dwarven agent Ragnir assassinates Din Ohtar and secures the Ring of Curufin. The Khand have become active, albeit covert allies to our cause and continue to grow in strength. A change in power among the Rhun has led to friendly envoys, asking for a large payment of food, which we partially oblige.

Seven moons past (14): Our Silvan brethren have captured Sarn Gorowing, Greenwood grows green again. The Gondorian lords retake Osgiliath and gather at Minas Morgul, where dark curses claim Angbor. Three free races converge outside of Morannon - Theoden kills Bulrakur in a challenge. Reports from Hoarmurath indicate further studies of the dark curses and the Dark Lieutenants continue to burn villages in Gondor. The Duns tip their hand with steals against Rohan, the White Wizard is notably silent. The Rangers take 2006 and along with the Dwarves begin movement toward Dunland in anticipation of hostilities. The Corsairs indicate interest in aligning with us, thanks in large part to the diplomacy of the Khand. Tharudan secures E Mere Vardo and our hope to counter the dark mages lives.

Eight moons past (16): Both Easterling nations have lent us their strength and move against the Long Rider! Rohan defeats the Dog Lord at Thuringwathost, the Sinda commander is assassinated and the Dwarves move on Morannon. Minas Morgul falls to combined Gondorian emissaries, resulting in a large gold transfer (meant for the Witch King) to the coffers of Northern Gondor. Rangers and Dwarves encounter the Duns with a dragon at Tharbad. Eomer and Erkenbrand are assassinated at Thuringwathost, the Dwarves are defeated by combined troops at Morannon, but assassinate Krusnak. The Witch King is eliminated when 2305 is taken by the Rangers and Noldo.

Nine moons past (18): The Khand take the Dragon Lord stronghold at 3822, while Sinda forces siege Dol Guldur. Rangers and Dwarves defeat the Duns at Tharbad and seize the Dun capital, Larach Duhnan at 1817. Corsairs declare free and are attacked by the forces of Adunaphel. Edoras is assaulted by the White Wizard, while Dark Lieutenant and Fire King forces move troops toward Rohan. Galadriel slays Hoarmurath and Helkama slays Khathog in a challenge, recovering 7 artifacts (mage +110) and eliminating one curse threat.

Ten moons past (20): The Corsairs secure the future of Rohan with a second capital, but Edoras stands, not attacked by the White Wizard forces - the commander dies to Sinda curses. The Khand overrun Uvatha en route to the Mordor interior and the Rhun lose Kav Makow to assassination but take another Long Rider village. Rangers defeat Dun and White Wizard attempts to liberate 1817, where Silvan agents assassinate key dun characters. Woodmen meet Fire King troops in the

Hall of Fame (cont)

Rohan plains - Mutual challenges of commanders are both won by the woodmen, eliminating the Fire King army. Southern Gondor emissaries take the new Dun capital at 1922, eliminating the former neutral.

Dwarven cavalry amass to assault the White Wizard. Gondor troops clear the way for a large Corsair force to land and assault Minas Morgul. Dark Lieutenant troops are finally eliminated from the Gondor interior.

Tenth moon and new (21): The triumphant yodeling of the Easterlings and Corsairs sounds loudly in the ears of Sauron who once again retreats from Middle Earth.

The Free Peoples were ...
Woodmen - Newlly Velazquez/
Garrett Love
Northmen - John Corson
Rohan - Jonny Lundin
Rangers - Michael Goetzl
Silvan - Tomas Straubinger
Northern Gondor - Jerry Sheldon
Southern Gondor - Darren
Frechette
Dwarves - Wolfgang Geyer
Sinda Elves - Garrett Love
Noldo Elves - Dennis Conway
Corsairs - Ken Watakshi/Sarah
Frechette
Rhun Easterlings - David Murray
Khand Easterlings - Adrian Beattie

This team had a great coordination to communication ratio - armies, agents, emmies were in the right place at the right time in many situations, due mostly to good foresight and excellent individual play. The Khand Easterlings were easily our key diplomatic piece - he was a better emissary for the freep than any of the original nations, methinks! Kudos to the Dark Lieutenants and Fire King for being active and formidable, and to the rest of the DS for a well fought game.

Coming Soon

A Hall of Fame special featuring game reports from the first of the Gunboat games to finish, game 95.

Watch this space!

The Future of MEPBM (maybe) ?

by Mike Barber

2002: the year that Formula One motor-racing died. So many gismos, that all the driving has gone out of being a F1 driver. Meanwhile, MEPBM continues on its technological march... Automagic / Meow, .xml files, software than can extract information from pdf files etc. But where is the march taking us to? Maybe, just maybe...

From: Mike Barber
To: Michael Kamine

Hey Michael. I know you are interested in playing Middleearth again after a 2-3 year break. I want to tell you about how things have changed with the new programme aids. I thought I could write a little about game Z134 - a free for all - where I play IceKing. Here is a little illustration of how it works now:

Its turn 12, and things are going well. We have repulsed the first few FP attacks, and have got the best of the neutrals (Rhudaur, Corsairs and Easterlings). Our agents are starting to hit home - but they have got at least 1 active assassin too. I love this game - anticipation is as high as ever - and turns ran today - hoorah!

Sitting in front of my PC, I load up windows, connect to the internet & check YahooGroups.... yup, everyone has posted their file. I fire up the GameAnalyser software (originally written by Andy Wright to get that extra competitive edge for his Championship team, but now widely pirated & used by all - even Chris Courtier) and I get to work with the super new software.....

Step 1: download all turns (the .xml file, not the pdf of course)

Step 2: hit "load & analyse"

Step 3: hit "show me turn"

Ok, the front end has launched, and all those .xml files have been analysed. Time to use the programme™s analysing engine - its so powerful!

Overall Team Summary first:

Populations centres captured from FP : 1 MT, 2 T, 2 Villages

Your team lost: 1 T, 1 Village

Your team destroyed troops of: approximately 8300HI, 2100LI, 424AR and 424 MA

Troops lost: 4331 HI

Characters assassinated: FP 2 (Tarondor, Veantur): DS (none)

Characters kidnapped: FP None, DS 1 (Dancu)

Character challenges: None accepted, 4 refused (click for more details)

Gold stolen from FP: 25600

Gold stolen from DS: 8200

Total value of DS treasuries: 85000

Total value of DS deficits: 92000

Ok, looks like a good turn. I really like having everything pulled together for me like this much more instantaneous than going into individual turns.

I could go and look at all the other turn data the programme gives (artefact and character

locations, rumour summaries, potential assassination targets etc. etc.) but I am eager to check the map - after all that shows the data too if you double click on it. It is SO handy having the programme extract all the locate artefact and reveal character spell results, character scouts and rumours - then cross reference everything and mapping it too. I can't imagine having to read everyone's turns like you did a few years ago.

OK - my capital looks safe - though Barad Perras shows a red flag. Double click and... hmm pop centre reports Elrothmir in the hex..... last turn he was on a Dark Lts pop centre where gold was stolen - he must be a agent. Well, the turn writer will autoprompt me to guard location and challenge him if I have a decent character there (it will even estimate a % success chance!). The autoprompt is one of the best features of the GameAnalyser - I would make so many mistakes without it. You can even autoprompt a whole turn - SUCH a timesaver.

Back to the map and click on "Military overlay" - now this IS the best bit. Every hex on the map gets shaded different colours for "opportunity", "threat" or "open". For example, 3120 shows "Opportunity", which means that we can more forces there than the FP can, AND can recapture the pop centre. However, 3024 - the FireKingâ™s since T10, shows "Threat": the programme has taken our recon of 2924 showing 5000 troops, and has estimated 3 turns of recruitment at 2927 (based on what our maps / recons have shown us) and so tells us that it thinks 6500 HI could arrive at 3024 next turn. According to the programme we have a choice as how to handle this: the FK could send his 1000 troops (together with Lamthanc) from 3124 to 3024, which would save the pop centre and leave NG 1200HI, or I could also send my 2500 HI also, which the programme says would win us the battle handsomely. It has to be the latter: I click â™Suggest move to allyâ™ to make sure that the FK moves that army the way I want him too. Didnâ™t I tell you that this programme was great?

Well, I could go on and on about how fantastic this programme is.... At game start we set it to play the Oldridge 2002 opening (with Rhudaur bankruptcy option disabled), and the FP countered with a variation of the tradition Mirkwood II attack. Its easy - the GameAnalyser just leads you through it. Everyone knows their orders as soon as we get our turns back. And if you want to change something it can do it all for you (adjusting team mate orders if necessary). No order errors, no wasted orders, perfect economic manipulation - the team captain can even autosubmit for you so no special services anymore either.

So, looking back I really think we wasted alot of time reading turns, analysing things, suggesting plans one by one..... so many wasted emails and telephone conversations. This game aid is the business - the information and order checking really puts everyone on a level playingfield with the absolute minimum of effort. Lets try it soon - I want to set the software to play me through the FP Hood/Lloyd army charge opening (with the refuse challenge option ticked)....

Lord of the Rings: The Roleplaying Game

by Colin Forbes

US Gencon

We're very likely to be turning up and having a stall at US Gen Con (Indianapolis) this year. Myself and Stu should be the people there, but we could really do with a couple of helpers so if you feel that you might be suitable for this get in touch and we can organise a deal for you. :-) Dates are 4 days around the w/end of 20th July.

Has anyone got accommodation in the area that we can use - we're happy to sleep on a cold hard floor but need to save some cash... :-)

Automagic

Don't forget that Automagic (an Excel application created by Mike Mulka for your use) allows you to import the XML data and send us correctly formatted turns. Saves us a lot of effort and cuts down on errors enormously. The XML will be usable with the MEMapMaker programme presently in development.

Web turn submission

We've got a new turn submission service; you can find it at:

www.meturn.com

The website allows you to send us your turn without needing you to open and use your mailing program. Please only use it if you don't get a receipt from us within an hour of sending in orders. Please don't send to both unless you have a problem, we don't want to get swamped with duplicated turns.

Yahoo, Netscape, AOL users are welcome to use this instead of mailing to the usual address me@middleearthgames.com as it will send the attachment as an attachment rather than as text in the main body of the email.

If you do use this service then please make sure that if you send in attached files from AM that you are using 2003b or later - the one with the version numbers please.

Please be aware that if you use 2003a AM please only send one copy (if you send more make sure you are clear as to which is the new one - there's a section for GM comments). If you create your own turn sheets that you attach then make sure that if you send updated versions that it's clear which is which.

(Editor's note: I switched from Netscape to the almost identical Mozilla and have found no difficulties attaching files)

I'll admit to a certain bias when it comes to the Lord of the Rings™ RPG. I'm an unabashed fan of J.R.R. Tolkien and the source material, and that makes me hard to please. Of course, when it comes to Tolkien fans, I'm a lightweight. I loved the movie, and I think Tolkien himself would have loved it, too. I don't hang on every word of The Lord of the Rings religiously; some parts of the thing are just turgid, for crying out loud, and it often leaves the best bits to conjecture. (Supposedly in the film The Two Towers we'll see first-hand the Ents' attack on Isengard -- which is great, because Tolkien himself relegated it to a couple of lines of dialog after the fact.) But I am a fan of Tolkien, and I think any game that puts his name on the cover owes it to the man's legacy and accomplishments to do it right.

Naturally I hated Middle Earth Roleplaying (MERP), Iron Crown Enterprises' long-lived first attempt to capitalize on the Tolkien license in gaming. While often well-researched, MERP set out to fill in the blanks of Tolkien's world with their own home-grown characters and concepts, without ever deigning to let the purists know which was which. The Witch-king's name was Murazor, according to MERP, and one of the other Nazgul was Dwar the Dog-lord, etcetera, without so much as a footnote to say "This part is all us -- if you drop it, you don't have to feel guilty!"

What's more, MERP forced The Lord of the Rings into the Rolemaster game engine, as chart- and dice- and numbers-driven a system as ever a right-brained Tolkien fan was forced to digest. Rolemaster bragged that its vaunted critical hit system evened things up between the mightiest warrior and the lowliest hobbit, but the game was just lousy at emulating Tolkien's stories. The action in play had little in common with what we read in the books -- and if you don't believe me, try having a close call with the Balrog in MERP and see how many of your third-level hobbits manage to escape to the light of day.

Worst of all, the most dramatic settings of Middle-earth were usually reduced to dungeon crawls in MERP. The supplement on the Witch-king's realm might have included a nice essay on the history of Angmar and the kingdoms of the north -- seamlessly combining Tolkien's painstaking material with

whatever the supplement's author pulled off the top of his head, of course -- but the citadels and towns themselves were straight out of 1970s Dungeons and Dragons: numbered rooms with monsters, gold, and countless magic items.

In other words, the first RPG based directly on The Lord of the Rings never looked or played all that much like The Lord of the Rings. It looked and played like D&D, with more confusing rules and a few Rings names tossed in for flavor.

With the release of The Fellowship of the Ring in theatres, the Tolkien gaming license went to Decipher, best known at the time for their collectible card games and active pursuit of high-profile licenses: Decipher

has a number of Star Wars and Star Trek card games, the new Star Trek RPG, and a line of Lord of the Rings card games as well. They put Steven S. Long -- longtime writer for and now apparently bigshot of Hero Games, which bought Iron Crown, which of course lost the Lord of the Rings license to Decipher; sometimes, this industry makes my head hurt -- at the helm of their Lord of the Rings RPG, with a crew of talented writers behind him. Interestingly, Decipher's game has some of the same flaws as Iron Crown's; but it's saved by a crucial difference. Decipher's team set out to make sure the Lord of the Rings RPG would play like The Lord of the Rings.

That distinction is made most clear in a long, excellent chapter on themes and campaign styles, back in the latter third of the book where such stuff usually gets crammed, and in the way magic is handled in the game.

The Lord of the Rings is the quintessential fantasy epic, and the RPG acknowledges that its epic feel is what most players will want to relive. Even if they don't want to actually play Frodo and Strider, they will want to get a sense of the grandeur of the mountains and towers, the grim blight of Sauron's lands, and the terrible consequences that a key decision can have for good or ill. The RPG includes lengthy tips for capturing that tone.

And, like Tolkien himself, the game makes explicit certain assumptions about good and evil. There are no D&D-style alignments, but the influence of evil tells in your character, particularly in "Corruption" points which can influence your interactions with others. It seems quaint these days to quantify a character's moral state, but there's no separating Tolkien's work from



Study Tolkien!

Barnes & Noble is offering another free 4-week online course on LOTR (no, really, they are!)

Description

"This course provides an overview of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien. We'll look first at Tolkien's biography, his writing life, the origins of the stories, and their publication history. We'll continue with lessons on each book, concentrating on Tolkien's construction of a mythological world and its peoples and languages, his characters and their development, and his thematic concerns. Finally, we'll look at Tolkien's lasting influence on 20th-century fantasy literature, as well as on cultural movements such as neo-paganism and environmentalism."

For all the info and sign-up go to: <http://educate.barnesandnobleuniversity.com/educate/bn/home/catalog/overview.jsp>

News from Bree

The editor would like to apologise for the recent lack of new issues - however the intention is to make up for lost time soon. Stand by for another Bree soon :-)

his morality -- one of the things which his most vociferous critics abhor -- and the game would be wrong to ignore it. A character far gone to evil is rarely unsalvageable, but once they are, that's it; like Call of Cthulhu and its Sanity stat, once you rack up too much Corruption, your character is too irredeemable to feature as a hero. Hand the sheet to the gamemaster and start a new one.

In designing the way the game handles magic, the writers started from Tolkien, not from some pre-existing fantasy game's spellcasting system. They openly encourage the gamemaster to use magic the way Tolkien used magic: not sparingly, but subtly. The game encourages you to let the world of Middle-earth itself respond to the actions of its heroes and villains, not just as a plot device but as an active, unseen participant in the narrative. Likewise, the magical powers of elves, wizards, and sorcerers are delineated with insight as to their nature and detailed explanations of the uses to which they are put. I'll admit I rather dislike the notion, suggested in the game without any reference to Tolkien to back it up, that human magicians (or dwarf, or whatever) might join the order of Wizards along with Gandalf and Saruman and their ilk; but the ways in which mortal and immortal magic are handled jibes with the metaphysics of Middle-earth.

Ironically, though, in some ways *The Lord of the Rings* RPG still feels like you're playing glorified D&D. Like *Iron Crown* before it, Decipher insisted on fitting most of the game into its existing rules set, the "Coda" system -- and the Coda system is quite directly based on the D20 rules of the new *Dungeons and Dragons*. There are orders (not classes), advancements (not levels), skills (just skills -- nobody's found a decent synonym for "skills"), and attributes (not abilities); to succeed at an action, you roll 2D6 plus modifiers for your attribute and skill level and compare it to a Target Number, or TN (not Difficulty Class, or DC). Health (not hit points) works a little differently, which is nice -- none of the

trusty invincibility of high-level D&D characters -- and weapons are built to let you emulate the action of *The Lord of the Rings*: knives are not much less dangerous than longswords, so your Legolas clone doesn't have to feel like a chump carrying one around. But in the end, a *Lord of the Rings* character looks suspiciously like a D&D character, and the similarities multiply when the dice start flying. This makes the excellent gamemastering guidelines all the more valuable -- the common-sense, explicit tips on running *Lord of the Rings* games will help players avoid that dungeon-crawling, tomb-looting style of play. (Although, granted, liberating a long-lost treasure from a bandit's or troll's stash is always going to be fun.)

In the interest of keeping up with the Joneses -- in this case Games Workshop, which has the license to *Lord of the Rings* miniatures combat games -- the RPG has a chapter to help you simulate the inevitable epic battles that punctuate any decent epic game. It abstracts things to the level of a few dice rolls, adopting a system -- suspiciously similar to that of an old Mayfair "Role Aids" supplement I once owned -- that allows you to resolve the overall battle only in the most general sense and then roll to see if your character ran into any particular trouble that might kill him or make him a hero.

Speaking of heroes, I have one unadulterated complaint about *The Lord of the Rings* game: Where are the stats for the Fellowship?! Sure, we get stats for the Balrog, for your average orc and warg and werewolf, even for Saruman, and a few second-rate sample characters -- but no stats for Sam Gamgee, or Gimli, or Gandalf? What if we want to play the Fellowship, maybe do a what-if game that starts at the Council of Elrond and heads off in a new direction? We have to wait and buy a supplement? Bad form.

Still, Decipher and Long and company deserve high marks. They accomplished their most important goal: This *Lord of the Rings* game actually feels like *The Lord of the Rings*. For fans like me, that makes it more than worth the purchase.



Runestone's Guide to Magic Words

"What is this?" he said. "There are moon-letters here, beside the plain runes..." On turn reports, the player may receive short narratives of events which occurred. They may describe a battle, the result of an encounter, or the outcome of a personal challenge. Whilst written in a descriptive manner, however, a variety of terms - "magic words" - provide additional clues as to exactly what happened. The following descriptions of such magic words have been taken from the "Mouth of Sauron Digest" and various fan-sites, and verified from the author's own turn sheets.

Magic Words Describing Army Troop Losses

Minor	01 ~ 25%
Some	26 ~ 50%
Severe	51 ~ 75%
Huge	76 ~ 100%

Magic Words Describing Army Formations

A Mob	01 ~ 25%
Ragged Ranks	26 ~ 50%
Solid Ranks	51 ~ 75%
Exemplary	76 ~ 90%
Elite	91 ~ 100%

Magic Words Describing Army Morale Level

<i>Describing the Army</i>	<i>Describing the Commander's Mount</i>	
Demoralised	Stood Cautiously	01 ~ 10%
Demoralised	Rode Cautiously	11 ~ 20%
Rebellious	Moved with Trepidation	21 ~ 35%
Calm	Road Calmly	36 ~ 50%
Highly Energetic	Cantered Anxiously	51 ~ 75%
Loud and Exuberant	Pranced Mightily	76 ~ 90%
Battle Crazy	Strained at his Bit	91 ~ 100%

Magic Words Describing Character Health

From any source of damage

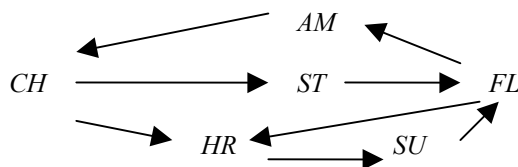
Deadly Wounds	01 ~ 05%
Grievous Wounds	06 ~ 10%
Serious Wounds	11 ~ 25%
Bloody Wounds	26 ~ 50%
Light Wounds	51 ~ 75%
Minor Wounds	76 ~ 99%
No Wounds	100%

[Note Possibly discrepancy: a health of 38% has been reported described as Grievous Wounds.]

Magic Words Describing Pop Centre Loyalties

Rebellious	01 ~ 15%
Marginal	16 ~ 30%
Fair	31 ~ 40%
Normal	41 ~ 75%
Fanatical	91 ~ 100%

Battles



A few hours: 1 round of combat; Short Battle: 2 rounds; Long Battle: 3 rounds; Many Days: 4+