



"Strange as News from Bree..."

The Lord of the Rings, chapter 9

News From Bree

Middle Earth PBCD Newsletter - Issue 6, December '99

Middle Earth Questionnaire

...dare you tell the truth?

by Kevin O'Keefe

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One thing I've noticed that's missing in this newsletter, and you see in every other publication from "Fluffy Kitten Monthly" to "Razor Wire Weekly" (two publications I subscribe to and can heartily recommend) is a questionnaire. So, in order to rectify this ridiculous situation, complete the survey below and see just how good a MEPBMer you really are!

1) *The game has just started, it's turn zero. What's the first thing you do?*

a) Send off emails/make calls/post letters to all your teammates wishing them well and offering to help out and give support if needed? Outlining a strategy and agreeing to exchange artefacts, navies, gold and information in a flurry of diplomacy that would make Koffi Annan look reserved?

or

b) Actually, I'm too busy and my time is taken up with my exotic lifestyle and other interests (Dream On!). I just can't be bothered with that sort of thing. Besides, they can write to me if they want something.

or

c) Am I allowed to talk to them then? I didn't know that!

2) *Similarly, there are Neutrals to contact - do you:*

a) Send out a 3x5 card to every neutral on turn 1, telling them that you will provide updates of the war, information of other players and any assistance they require. Hey! Your a team player and you will do anything (including prostitute yourself) to get them on your side?

or

b) Neutrals? What do we need them for? Someone else from my team will talk to them, I'm not very diplomatic anyway. They don't want to hear from me.

or

c) Neutrals? What are they?

3) *One of the Neutrals has been swayed by the dulcet tones of one of your team members. However, to join your side and provide your team with 10,000HI 100,000 Gold and some agents that would put 007 to shame, they have asked for some artefacts (the swines!!). Do you...*

a) Artefacts. Of course they can have some artefacts! We're the team that likes to say yes. You ask we'll give it. Sure, as the Noldo I have great artefact locating mages and if you want me to make a small gesture to convince you to come over to our side then hey, consider it done!

or

b) Artefacts. Are you kidding!!! These neutrals are powerful enough already. What do they want artefacts for? I'll have you know my Noldo mages have had to work bloody hard to get these artefacts! I'm not giving any of mine away. I'll weaken my position, my characters won't be as powerful!! I MIGHT NOT WIN!!!! Let the Gondor's give some of theirs away. I'm keeping mine. Sod you lot!

or

c) What's an artefact???

4) *Imagine you're playing the Noldo or Cloud Lord. Another player has an artefact you could really make use of (Ring of Impersonation? Cloak of Dark Abyss?) Certainly more use than the current owner. Do you: -*

a) Politely suggest that for the good of the team, it would be in their best interests to exchange artefacts. You appreciate that you are coming off better than they are, but you offer to compensate them in whatever way you can, complimenting them on their positive teamwork?

or

b) At game start demand that artefact from your teammate. With the line "It's for the good of the team. Stop being so selfish". Only to start SHOUTING when you don't get your own way?

or

c) Artefacts? Neutrals? What the hell is this!!!!?

5) *The game is now in full swing. Turns are progressing nicely and the first few turns, have been as always, really interesting. Have you?*

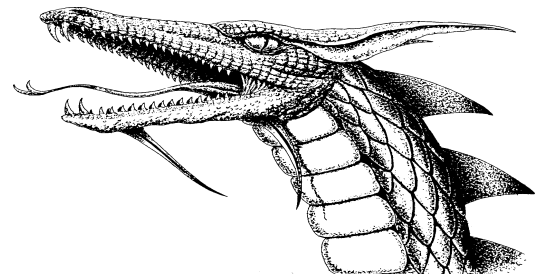
a) Been sending in turn reports to the other players by email/post? Documenting your army positions, your located artefacts and camp locations so that everyone knows your situation and has been kept updated of your progress?

or

b) Turn reports are for wimps! I might answer the phone and have a couple of minutes conversation if someone calls me, but as I said earlier I have a really hectic lifestyle. Anyhow, they can see on their maps what's going on?

or

c) I'm confused!



new games

Standby: Dog Lord, Noldo

2950 (Game 26)

Nations Available:

All except the Cloud Lord.

1650 (Game 32)

Nations Available: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6,
8, 12, 17, 18, 20

1000 (Game 47)

8 positions taken so far

We are looking for a team of
12 to play a 1 week turnaround
game. Anyone interested?
Also a team to play FP's
against the Germans.



pubmeets

READING: Sat 4th December,
1pm at the Flyer 7 Firkin next
to Reading Train Station. We'll
bring some boardgames as
well.



contacting harlequin

Post:
340 North Road, Cardiff,
Wales, CF4 3BP

Tel:
01222-625665

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01222-625532

E-mail:
me@harlequingames.com
(the old address still works
though!)

Web Site
dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/
harlequin.games/

E-mail List
You can subscribe to the ME
mailing list by going to
<http://www.onelist.com>
and following the instructions
setting up an account to the
"mepbmlist".

ME Questionnaire

6) *OK, we're in the mid-game. The Northmen (who haven't been very communicative so far) are getting a beating and declare that they will go bankrupt unless they get some gold from somewhere soon. Do you:*

a) Rally all the other Free nations together and bail the poor Northmen out? He hasn't been the best player certainly, but he's on your team and it's better he stays in the game than is eliminated.

or

b) I never liked the Northmen guy anyway. Never tried to communicate, never told us what he's doing, and he's Welsh. I hate the Welsh!!! Besides, I want to name a new character; the Northmen will just have to do the best he can.

or

c) Northmen...? Is that someone from Newcastle?

7) *It's the end game now. The Dark Servants are going to win the war; there are five nations against the Free Peoples one. (The Noldo dropped when he realized that his own team hated him). As the Cloud Lord you've done a lot to win the war for your team. However the Dark Lts are just ahead of you. Do you:*

a) Accept that the Dark Lts have played a fantastic game, made a real influence and deserve to be where they are by right. Especially when you consider he gave you the Cloak of the Dark Abyss at the beginning. He's been a really good player. Besides winning isn't everything.

or

b) No Way!! I want to win!! My agents could make a real difference if I assassinate some of his characters, then I'll be in the lead (were I belong). The poor sucker deserves it after giving his artefacts away. What a knob!

or

c) I wonder what's on telly?

Results

Mostly A's

You're a good team player, it would be a pleasure to have you on our side. You might not 'win' all the time but you play a good game.

Mostly B's

Didn't you get any affection as a child? Why do you have to push your antisocial behavior onto the rest of us? Go and play Quest where you belong!

Mostly C's

You are reading your neighbors mail. Go next door and give it to that shallow student who lives off beans on toast and pays for a pint at the pub with a cheque. He knows what artefacts, Noldo, Northmen and 'Cloak of the Dark Abyss' means (sadly).

Lies, Damn Lies and...

OK. The serious part. Statistics which show who has won what and how often does NOT tell you who is a good player. Many people play the game because they want fun. They see the victory of the team as more important than the victory of their nation.

The beauty of Middle Earth is that if you're a new player and you TALK and DISCUSS with your teammates, you don't really have any disadvantage over the other experienced players. Knowing all the dragon responses, which artefacts to go after, the best combat tactic mean 'diddlysquatt' really.

If you're prepared to ask a fellow player then chances are he/she can tell you what you need to know. In my opinion, articles which show who has won games are meaningless and do not tell you anything.

Middle Earth Discussions

A look at the Middle Earth Mailing List

Given that the vast majority of Middle Earth PBM players have internet access, it is a source of some surprise to me (and I suspect a source of some despair for Clint) that the Middle Earth mailing list is so woefully populated by, well, you lot! That said I also appreciate that not everyone has internet access (nor indeed wish to) so, here's the first of a regular look at what sort of discussions have been going on over the net. Let's hope more people read this than subscribe to the list!

Agent actions

There has been some debate over whether the program has been changed to make agent actions harder. Clint checked up on this and wrote...

"Chatting to the Americans 'The most recent change did see some changes to agents. It did NOT change their effectiveness, but it did make it easier to guard and easier to spot those pesky agents in your PCs!'"

Special Service Turns

There has been a <cough> lively discussion concerning SS turns. Some people are upset because

these have been stopped, whilst others have made copious suggestions in response to Clint's appeal both for ways in which some form of standing order could be established, and also for some sort of standardised first turn which could be processed if a player missed that critical first turn. For instance Mike Elliot and others suggested..

"For a turn one SS turn, it strikes me that you have a very simple and obvious solution - next time you have a turn one in any game (or one where you have experienced players) keep all the turns on file and ask the players if you can use them as "default turn ones". You could actually keep a selection, so that if a FiK 1650 misses his turn, you go to the appropriate folder and pluck at random a FiK 1650 turn one order sheet. "

Does anyone have any sensible suggestions for first turn moves? Better yet some sample orders which you could send Clint? I know he'd be delighted to see a wider discussion on the subject

You can subscribe to the ME mailing list by going to <http://www.onelist.com> and following the instructions setting up an account to the "mepbmlist".

Ten Rejected Lord Of The Rings Plot Twists

1. Balin emerges from the depths of Moria, claiming he "fell asleep in the tub".
 2. Galadriel discovers Pippin singing the praises of a bath while he takes one in her mirror.
 3. Boromir uses the ring, saves Gondor, destroys Sauron and becomes a wise and benevolent ruler. Book ends 40 chapters sooner.
 4. Orc-slaughter competition between Legolas and Gimli becomes so fierce, they take to killing some of the smaller, uglier men of Gondor.
 5. Farmer Giles of Ham shows up at the Pelennor Fields and saves Gandalf's life.
 6. Pippin hits on Eowyn in a dark corner of the Houses of Healing: "The hands of a Hobbit are the hands of a healer too, you know..."
 7. In the happy days after the defeat of Sauron, Gimli keeps his promise and visits Mirkwood with Legolas -- where they are eaten by giant spiders, whom everyone had forgotten about.
 8. Aragorn discovers that he is not, in fact, Elendil's heir. His older brother Mutt, after having lived with Ghan-Buri-Ghan & Co. for decades, lays claim to the throne after all the "dirty work" is done.
 9. Ents and Elves dispute over title of "first-born". Elrond has Quickbeam made into an armoire; Treebeard grinds Glorfindel into mulch.
 10. The Shire, mobilized by Merry and Pippin and now hungry for vengeance, annexes Bree and slaughters "the big folk".
- Special bonus plot twist...
11. Gollum adapts to molten Mt. Doom environment, and later plays a critical role in Fourth Age crisis.

The following tale was penned by Michael Vermeersch after a "friendly fire" incident in Game 10. Michael is the Long Rider player and Kim Andersen is the Dark Lieutenants. The Free People are on their knees, or lower, holding no population centres outside Eriador, Lorien and Corsair Country. Nonetheless, they do possess one small but nasty agent company which drives Kim to the depths of paranoia by occasionally dropping in to his capital to clean out the characters there.

This has become something of a personal battle between Kim, and Richard Devereux (Noldo). Good allies in other games, here they are vicious adversaries, and have clearly let the role play element get the better of them! Thus Kim argues each turn for huge gangs of my (Cloud Lord) agents to be sitting at his capital to lie in wait for Richard's hated amateurs. Sometimes I refuse, to Kim's extreme (but enjoyable) displeasure. In this instance, after my refusal, he had twisted Michael's arm to leave Lomelinde as one of the agents sitting there.

Richard failed to arrive for his appointment. Michael asked for suggestions as to what to do with his agents. Kim of course, being SURE that Richard would hit the following turn, asked that they stay. And then Lomelinde stole gold...

The effects of a friendly steal on an allied capital were severe. A guard was badly wounded, the economy was pushed to it's limits, and an important gold transfer did not go through. Kim's response was vitriolic, and you need to have been on the receiving end of one of his epistles to know what I mean. There followed a round of argument then discussion, then apology (veiled) and finally laughter, caused by Michael's last words on the subject below.

Laurence G. Tilley

It was a windy but dry day. Lomelinde held out her hands towards the incoming mail pigeon. She was bored; for weeks she had to protect Gothmog's capital for possible intruders. Not a single rat had escaped her notice, but still no sign from the Free People. She hoped Uvatha was sending new orders.

She expertly retrieved the message from the bird and studied it. The message had her lord's seal, apart from that only one word was visible: "Stay".

Uvatha was not known to spend many words and she always wondered if the strange spelling he used, had something to do with becoming a ring wraith. Words like "RfsPers" and "StlGold", in the beginning gave her some trouble but this message, although only containing one word was not what she wished for.

She threw the bird back into the air, cursing it. What to do? She could wander around in the capital's red light district and sharpen her assassination skills. However it was known that the Dark Lieutenant's commanders spend most of their time there. Their abilities were largely lacking in that area, so they needed any stimulus they could get.

Lomelinde could not risk Gothmog's wrath killing one of his commanders. Then she knew. Why not check his security, check his vaults, try to penetrate into his treasury room and empty his coffers, just to see if she could do it. After all they expected her to stay sharp, lean and mean, didn't they?

Stealthily she moved around the keep, moving closer and closer towards where the gold was kept as she was following the signs. Coming to the vault she noticed the doors were open, a single man standing in the passageway.

"Who are you?", she said.

"I am Death Bringer", the man replied with a high pitched voice.

"I see." She looked him up and down. "And what are you doing here then, I don't see ah ... anybody requiring your gift here.", a small smile forming on her lips. Obviously this man was a rookie; too much talk, he should have challenged her or at least have tried to surprise her.

The man had a puzzled look on his face, after a minute of silence he retrieved his smile. He went through his blonde hair and answered, "I was ordered to guard the gold by our lord".

"I see. Are you sure it is still there?"

"Well yes. Of course, I am guarding it."

"This is a quality control check, let me have a peek." She dashed by him and looked into the treasure room.

"But...", the guard started to say. She interrupted him, "Hmmm, what are those bags labelled Dunland doing there?"

"They are gold, my lord has decided to ship to Dunland.", the blonde guard rubbed his nose, looking around nervously.

"Aha, you mean you are guarding other people's gold as well?", she took one of the bags and dumped it on a wheelbarrow which was nearby.

"No of course not, I follow my lord's orders."

"Good, we all know how Gothmog punishes those who don't listen to him."

She continued to charge the cart with the bags labelled Dunland. The big blonde man, who had all the typical features of a man from the North, big, blonde and stupid, continued to watch the bags which were unlabeled.

"There", she finished, "All done. I'll be going now. You want a receipt?"

"Receipt? I did not give you anything."

"Nor took something from you. Quite right. I'll commend you to your leader."

The big guard smiled. She started to move the wheelbarrow out of the room, "On second thoughts, let me give you a small reward already. Close your eyes and bend forward."

Death Bringer did as he was told. Lomelinde, stood on her toes and gently pressed her lips on the man's nose. Fast as she was she got back to the wheelbarrow again. The somewhat slowly reacting northerner, liked what he felt and tried to close his big arms around her. His arms only capturing air, continued their trajectory and touched somebody, a lot bigger than she was. Not only that, but somebody touched him as well. This was no problem for Death Bringer, blind fighting was one of his best skills and as that lovely lady had not told him to open his eyes yet, he would kill the man in front of him, just to show her how good he was.

"Intruder!", he yelled.

"Go for it!", she grinned moving down the corridor. Death Bringer wrestled for a very long time and it appeared that him and his assailant were evenly matched. Finally he had his enemy in a neck grip, but so had he, hands around his neck.

"I bring death", he whispered and continued to choke this thief, trying to get some air himself. Death bringer succeeded and he fell on the floor unconsciously.

Lomelinde shook her head when she heard the single thump. It is so hard to find good staff nowadays. Well at least today was not as boring as the days before!

Every time I go fishing on the web for Tolkien related stuff, I'm amazed at how much there is out there. One this occasion I thought I'd look at two of the better Tolkien-related MUDs. I've chosen two which have contrasting styles...

Elendor

telnet://elendor.sbs.nau.edu:1893

Elendor is the premiere J.R.R. Tolkien based world with 1500+ users and 4800+ rooms and is set between the times of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. On Elendor, players get the chance to role play within Tolkien's world taking on a character from many different races and cultures. As a matter of fact, all major cultures and most minor ones are represented on Elendor. The staff and population are very friendly and helpful, especially to newbies.

The Carrion Fields

telnet://carrionfields.org:9999

Carrion Fields emphasizes role-playing. It is encouraged, and in some cases, almost mandatory. If you want hack-n-slash with no thought, paper thin characters, and other characteristics of a boring mud, you are encouraged to play elsewhere. To help you play a role, they have cabals you can join for protection and power.

They're looking for unique personalities, as they make the game more fun for everyone. Good role-playing is rewarded here so there is an incentive. Don't just be a giant warrior...be Gnarl, the One-Eyed Giant who happens to hate dwarves and gnomes, for example. It makes for a better atmosphere and a better playing environment.

Carrion Fields is a challenging mud, with more than 10,000 rooms and many aggressive mobs. Other players can be aggressive, too, whether you think they are your friends or not. This is a full player-killing world where players are expected to stay in character.

Based on limited data-supply from Harlequin, of course because of the fact that Harlequin has only been running ME for very limited period of time, I have analysed the data I had and have in fact been able to make some interesting points. It has not been possible to obtain the needed data from the previous companies running ME, namely GAD and Allsorts, so real conclusions cannot be made as yet, due to the limited data-source. But as more and more data hopefully becomes available, I will be able to make decisive conclusions (like which nations win the most) and set up various lists and statistics, for example...

Kill-score, most won games, most VP, best challenge characters by game end, best overall mage, agent, commander and emis (inclusive artifacts) by game end. It can even be possible to make up an overall point rating list for all ME players after a given point system that could be 3, 2, 1 points for first, second and third place in each game ended. Such rating of players in fact exists in many other PBM games, and could be interesting to instate in this game as well. If anyone has any other good suggestions how to give points and rate players I'm very interested in hearing those ideas.

As far the most of all existing data, comes from the 1650 scenery, I will only concentrate on that scenery only for now. But in order to make a complete list of all ended 1650 games, and make an overall rating list of players (if anyone is interested in that), I will need to acquire these data from the players having ended all those games, as this is the only last place these data exists. So if you have stored the data from any of your ended games, then please e-mail the needed data to my work address which is: kan@dsb.dk Or better yet copy and send it to my private address, which is:

Kim Andersen
Egedalsvaenge 13,2.mf.
2980 Kokkedal
Denmark

The information I will need will firstly be the top 3 list of the winning side, with information about nation, player, game, VP, what turn the game ended, and any interesting comments you have for that game. Secondly I will need all the information on the last page containing winning data, namely the information about all the highest ranks in all four skill classes (with and without artifacts), most kills, highest challenge rank, most artifacts and most Mithril. This information is important because I intend to make various high score lists as well, based on data from these groups, from ALL ended games.

And last I of course trust people to write the correct data, if presented by e-mail. If two different sets of data are received for the same game, I will either, not use this data at all or use the set with the lowest values. I of course hope that you as well as I are interested in putting up these lists, ratings and other interesting things, which can be made with such data, and it can only be complete, if you help gathering these data.

OK, to start with it could be interesting to see whether the rumour that DS wins the most is true. In 21 ended games I have 12 DS and 9 FP victories. So in this small data-set DS has won in about 60 % and FP in 40 % of the cases.

If we look at which nations wins the most, some interesting facts arrives. If I give 3 points for a victory, 2 points for second place and 1 point for third place, the score then is as followed:

1. Corsairs 14 points (1,1,2,2,3,3,3,3)
Noldo 14 points (1,1,1,1,2)
2. DaL 9 points (1,1,2,3)
3. LR 8 points (1,2,3,3,3)
Easterlings 8 points (1,2,2,3)
Eothraim 8 points (2,2,2,2)
CL 8 points (1,1,2)
4. BS 7 points (1,2,2)
WK 7 points (1,2,3,3)
Cardolan 7 points (1,2,3,3)
5. Harad 6 points (1,2,3)
6. DoL 5 points (1,2)
7. NG 3 points (1)
Rhudaur 3 points (1)
Sinda 3 points (1)
IK 3 points (2,3)
8. Arthedain 2 points (2)
SG 2 point (3,3)
9. QA 1 point (3)
NM 1 point (3)
Duns 1 point (3)

And last we can try and have a brief look on how the player score is now, even though the list only consists of 23 games. As I of course have added all my ended games (which I actually mostly have won), to this list, I will of course lay with a pretty high score. This is why we should gather information from as many games as possible, so the correct picture of the most winning persons will be clear.

I will again for now give 3 points for first place, 2 points for second and 1 point for third place, and to keep the list in a decent size, only persons with at least one first place will be placed. The list goes as followed:

1. Kim Andersen 19 points (1,1,1,1,1,2,2)
2. Mark Dolby 4 points (1,3)
3. Martin Dylewski 3 points (1)
Glenn Reader 3 points (1)
Ian Pedgen 3 points (1)
Søren Krasilnikoff 3 points (1)
Nick Stuart-Smith 3 points (1)
Mike Barber 3 points (1)
Mathias Bergotte 3 points (1)
Paulo Lopes 3 points (1)
Bruce Johnson 3 points (1)
Johan Grankvist 3 points (1)
Mark Satchell 3 points (1)

Well, this was all for now, but if people send in more data, these lists will be much more interesting to analyse.

"Lord of the Rings" Cast Shuffle

Just a couple of days into shooting, the big-budget, big-screen version of J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy is already minus a key cast member.

Stuart Townsend (All About Adam, Wonderland), cast as the hero Aragorn, has left the production, according to New Line Cinema, the studio behind the project. The official line is that Townsend quit over--you guessed it--"creative differences."

While New Line refuses to say what went down, set scuttlebutt has it that either director Peter Jackson and Townsend didn't agree about his portrayal, or Jackson just plain didn't think Townsend had the requisite star power to pull off the role of Aragorn, one of the film's principals. "He just didn't fit into the role," a source close to the New Zealand-based production says.

Cast members have reportedly been supportive of the decision. No reshooting will be necessary, says New Line, because none of Townsend's scenes have been filmed.

According to the Hollywood trades, Viggo Mortensen--whose résumé includes Psycho, G.I. Jane, A Perfect Murder and Portrait of a Lady--is in final negotiations to replace Townsend.

Not surprisingly, the quick cast change is already big news on the alt.fan.tolkien newsgroup. "I think looks-wise [Mortensen]'s better. He has a more rugged look than Townsend, who appeared to look like a young pretty boy," one fan writes. Opines another: "Townsend is an idiot though for getting himself fired. Talk about blowing the opportunity of a lifetime."

Meanwhile, the studio has dispelled rumors that Sean Connery, who was seen in the general vicinity of the shoot, will make any appearances in Rings. No official word on reports that Uma Thurman and Ethan Hawke are up for the roles of Eowyn and Faramir. Confirmed cast members include Elijah Wood, Sean Astin, Cate Blanchett, Ian McKellen and Liv Tyler.

Filming is scheduled to last approximately one year. A release date has not been set for the first installment of the series, but New Line officials say the film will not hit theaters

(Part 1 of this review appeared in the last issue - the full text is available in issue XX of Flagship.)

Golden rules

Is there a "best" way to set-up your nation? The short answer is "no," because there are so many permutations. There are however some golden rules: have one commander at the highest rank you can get (50-60). Firstly, this means your army will have weapons, armour, morale and training of the same high value; secondly, the higher his rank, the better chance your commander has of pushing through those vital capital orders "Increase taxes" and "Downgrade relations" at the first attempt. There's nothing more frustrating than watching your weedy commander struggle, turn after turn, to raise taxes!

Equally important are at least two high or medium-rank emissaries. You need these guys to name yet more emissaries before going out and creating camps. Because the number of potential population centres in this scenario is so small, you need to create as many new camps as you can, as fast as possible. If you don't, your puny starting economy will fall behind your rivals; and if your economy falls behind, you are on the slippery slope to elimination. If you get into this position, it's almost impossible to recover. So name those emissaries and get those camps built!

Amongst your other starting characters, you will need at least one backup commander, and at least one agent. It's wise to beef the agent up as much as possible; you can be certain that at least one of your rivals will have a rank 60 agent with +20 to assassination attempts as his special ability!

Mages and artifacts

Mages are the least important characters in this scenario. In 1650 there is a mad scramble to locate and grab all the top artifacts. In MEFAS nobody knows which are the top artifacts, so you can spend half the game searching for them, trading information with other players, and still not find the Ring of Wind or Tinculin. I did actually find Tinculin in one game, but did it give access to Spirit Mastery (like in 1650)? Did it hell. Gnash, grind... in fact, despite trading info about more than half the artifacts in the game, we didn't find a single one with access to Spirit Mastery.

The few artifacts which did have secondary powers gave access only to single spells, instead of to whole groups of spells. This makes it all but impossible for mages ever to learn the top Lost List spells, so you can forget about forming Curse squads which are such a feature of the earlier scenarios.

What a site

Give some thought to where on the map you want to locate your nation. You need good production for economic reasons, so avoid the far north and the southern desert. Don't put your capital on one of the western peninsulas unless you want your map to show 50% empty sea. It's unwise to pick a site too close to either of the Kingdoms; the ruler might just decide to march out with his vastly superior army and squash you. Why? Because he can!

Mountain hexes make good defensive sites for your capital if your race permits. Island hexes are even better, but as there are only 3, there will be fierce competition for these. If you are going to locate artifacts, choose a position close to the centre of the map, to give you the best chance to reach those that you find.

Strategically, the far east side of the map offers plenty of sites with good production far away from the two Kingdoms, and gives you at least one secure frontier. The worst that can happen is that another nation will be situated just to the west of you, boxing you in. In that case, come to an arrangement with your neighbour ASAP. If you start a fight from turn 1 it will probably be ruinous for both of you!

Communication, communication, communication

As in all Middle-earth scenarios, the key to victory is communication. Yes, you can play a lone hand and not talk to the other players. But this is not only to miss out on the exchange of valuable information and the opportunity to make new friends, the chances are that players who ARE talking to each other will gang up on you and knock you out. You have been warned!

Differences: the good, the bad and the indifferent

The main difference between MEFAS and the other ME scenarios is that players get to design their own nations. Neutrals now have a chance to win, so it is a three-cornered fight instead of straightforward Good v Evil. Moreover, you can fight nations of the same allegiance, which you couldn't before. The artifact list is randomised, there are new encounters, new riddles and even four new rules! So far so good.

The downside is that all Tolkien's wonderfully evocative characters - Gandalf, Sauron, Galadriel, Elrond, the Witch-king et al - have passed on. That can't be helped, but even dragons seem to have disappeared! What's a fantasy game without dragons? The replacement encounters which I have seen have, frankly, been pretty feeble. Alatar the Blue teleports your character to a random location. Volcanoes randomly affect loyalty. Giant eagles range far more widely than in the other scenarios, attacking both evil and neutral forces. GSI really should have done better than just chuck

games ended

Game 2 (1650)

A whitewash for the Evils as their early advantage was quickly improved to get an early win (turn 30) - Long Rider winner (Brian Engsig) a relative newcomer to the game.

Game 7 (1650)

Ended recently with the FPs surrendering on turn 31 and a win for the Neutrals (DS). With Mike Elliott on 2200vps, and Steve Marlow (Cor-sairs) on 2100. Close but no cigar - out of interest Elrond finished on a nice 267 challenge rank - not someone to anger...

Game 10 (1650)

This saw the FP nobly surrendering (and passing on their congratulations for a game well played) to the might of the DS. A team win with Mike Barber, Mike Sankey, Flemming Andersen, Laurence Tilley, Michael Vermeersch and Kim Andersen.

Game 42 (Fourth Age)

A close run game with the Free Peoples grabbing the win early again on turn 27, and individual winner Darren Farman - an old hat at the game recently returned to the fold.

Game 74 (1650)

This one sees Michael Kamine getting his first victory after years of play as the valiant Eothrim fought onto the end (Thanks to David Helsby there) - a win for the Dragon Lord. This old lady can be laid to rest on turn 87.

Game 9 (2950)

Gavin Wynford-Jones wins with the Cardolan (not a regular winner this nation) - another old game here on turn 75.

Game 98 (1650)

With three players left - the rest destroyed - Martin Kane gets a nice victory for the Blind Sorcerer - normally seen as a beginners nation.



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!

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in a few extra random factors. Where are the new challenges for the players?

The most interesting encounters in the earlier scenarios were those asking characters to interact with NPCs using a choice of responses. To get something out of these (or sometimes even just to stay alive!) required some combination of luck/research/knowledge and/or common sense. Alatar could have been the subject of one of these, Pallando another (see Tolkien's "Unfinished Tales"). Instead the character gets teleported to a random location. Where is the luck or skill factor?

It's a kinda magic...

GSI appear to have reduced the number of artifacts possessing secondary powers, and restricted even those few to a single spell rather than a group of spells. This makes it all but impossible to access average Lost List spells, let alone hard ones. I presume this is meant to reflect Tolkien's hint that 4th Age was the Age of Man, when all the godlike non-human mages have departed, taking their artifacts with them. Whilst this may be "historically" correct, the 4th Age GAME badly needs something to compensate for the loss. When you take away demigods and dragons, then minimise the power of magic, you are left with little more than a wargame!

Why not introduce some new, if less powerful, magic spells? Magic should be subtle, not just a glowing blade or the equivalent of heavy artillery on the battlefield. Where is the "Mist of Galadriel" which hid the Ride of Eorl the Young? Where are the Warding spells which stopped Sam entering the tower of Cirith Ungol, and gave the alarm when he finally did get through with the aid of the Phial of Galadriel? The Flood with which Elrond dispersed the Nazgul?

From out of the West

Players from over there doing rather well over here!

We have recently had a massive influx of new players from America - claiming that we are the best they have ever had and trying to get all their mates to join. (Blush). With that in mind the World Cup is going well with early set-backs for the Americans by the Brits being righted this turn, and a long slog for the Scandinavians vs the Germans. The other games are ticking along nicely with us investigating various programming changes to help team games. Our own game of Fourth Age where the (cough) might of Harlequin (less one GM) fight the rest of the world is confusing us all as we seem to be doing quite well. No doubt fate will deal us a few unlucky cards in the near future. :(

We are considering what to do for the hols as well as there are only 2 postal delivery days

MEFAS introduces some new artifacts, but they are the same old add-ons: add 500-1000 to combat, add 10-20 to command or agent skill or stealth etc., yawn. If we're going to have new artifacts, why can't we have some with DIFFERENT powers? Eg, Reveal Hidden population centre; Reveal Secret Passage (enabling an army to bypass fortifications, or to pass through a mountain hex without the movement penalty); Boots of Bridgebuilding? And if artifacts MUST be add-ons, why can't mages create their own? That WOULD be an interesting spell!

Conclusion

You may have got the impression that I don't like MEFAS. Wrong! It's just that a few more subtle changes would make the game even more interesting. I know I'm not the only player who has a wish-list of spells and/or artifacts they would like GSI to incorporate! If like me, you are a regular ME player, the prospect of designing your own nation to compete under familiar rules on a familiar map is not to be missed. Giving the Neutral allegiance the chance to win, as well as the Good or Evil teams, gives the game a whole new dimension. I cannot repeat too often, that if you want to play any of the ME scenarios, you need to talk to other players and be prepared to play as part of a team.

With that proviso, I would happily recommend MEFAS to a PBM newcomer. All nations except the Kingdoms start with exactly the same resources, and there are no master lists which give experienced players such an advantage in the 1650 and 2950 scenarios, so you start with a level playing field. Games 45 and 46 are now recruiting, so to borrow a phrase from the football terraces:

C'mon if you think you're 'ard enough!

from 24th Dec to 3rd Jan. For mostly email games I would like to take a week from processing, for the more postal games to take 2 weeks off - opinions welcome please. Also we might be running an all day session of ME gaming in Cardiff - players welcome to stay over - and do most of a game in a day.... ouch... :-). The other option is to play 1 day turnaround by email for the hols?

Finally a reminder about payments. Please ensure you make out Payments to "Middle Earth PBM Games" as per usual *not* Harlequin Games

Clint

**HARLEQUIN
GAMES**



Middle Earth House Rules & Procedures

or

How to get the most out of your journeys through Middle Earth

Contents

- *Behind the Scenes*
- *Turn Writing - What to do, and what not to do*
- *Sample email turn format*



Behind the Scenes

Processing times.

Games are generally processed at 1pm on the day after the due date. Please then ensure that your turns reach us by that time *at the very latest*. Faxes can be sent up until 1pm, but emails are taken from the computer at 11am, so any turns sent to us via email after this time will not make the deadline.

Email

Those of you who have opted to receive turns via email will receive them from Allsorts' old email address (allsorts@compuserve.com). Turns sent to the Allsorts address may still reach us, but we cannot guarantee that they will not take several days to do so, and so run the risk of missing the deadline.

Hidden Costs

Re-prints of turns cost £2.00. Of course, if the reprint is due to an error on our part, this charge is waived.

If your account is low funds - that is to say, in negative - then there is an administration charge of £1. for the first turn, and £.50 for turns after that whilst you remain low funds.

If for any reason you need to phone in your turn to us, this is possible, but will cost an extra £2.

Paying for your Turns

When calculating your account, please allow for the fact that you need enough money to pay for the whole of your next turn. Also, please note that the correct balance is the one on the front sheet *not the one on the turn sheet*.

Cheques are to be made out to "Middle Earth PBM Games" *not* "Harlequin Games."

Credit card payments made within the UK incur a 5% charge. Also, please note that we process our credit card payments through Flagship, so their name and not ours will appear on your bank statements.

If you pay by credit card, you may choose to make regular monthly payments which will automatically be made at the start of every month. Alternatively, you can set up a standing order to recharge your account whenever it reaches a certain level.

Playing more than one position

At the start of a new game, no player can play more than one position. However, if a player drops out, then we will often consider allowing an existing player on that team taking over the position, so that the game will not become unbalanced. However, as this system is clearly open to abuse, we reserve the right to judge each case on an individual basis.

We work ceaselessly on your behalf

Whilst the post office does not work on bank holidays, we do, so please take this into account when sending in turns, else you may miss the deadline.

But Mistakes will happen

In a perfect world, errors would not be made. But we are only human, and acknowledge that on occasion, mistakes will be made. If you think that there has been an error in your turn, please do not panic, as we can sort out nearly any problem or mistake that may have occurred. Simply contact us *as quickly as possible*, giving all the relevant information, and we will do our best to resolve the matter.

So Please keep calm

Nearly any problem you may have can be resolved. However, this is made greatly easier by all concerned keeping calm. We recognise that when something goes wrong it is understandable that you may be annoyed, but by remaining calm, we can best identify the problem and deal with it efficiently. Also, please be aware that a word spoken in anger is easily forgotten, but by putting it into words - either by letter or email - gives it more weight than might have been intended.

How to contact us

If you have any questions or problems, please do not hesitate to contact us through any of the following means:

By post... 340 North Road, Cardiff, CF14 3BP.

By telephone... 02920 625665 weekdays from mid-day to 6.30pm

By fax... 02920 625532 at any time

By email... me@harlequingames.com

(though our old address, harlequin.games@dial.pipex.com is still active.)

mepbm list... To talk with other players, subscribe to our email list at <http://www.onelist.com>

& website... for more information on all our games, take a look at www.harlequingames.com



Turn Writing - What to do, and what not to do

Salient Points to Note

- When you do not get any orders in for a deadline, you will receive a special service turn, which contains basic orders for your characters, such as refuse challenge. In the past, it was possible to opt not to have a special service turn and instead not receive a turn at all. However, for reasons of game mechanics this is no longer an option, and so if you do not get any orders in, you will find yourself getting a special service turn.
- When playing by email, please order your characters in alphabetical order. This makes turn inputting much easier for us, and minimises the chance of errors occurring.
- 948 orders are often mixed up. To clarify: order 947 collects a percentage of goods from all your population centres and deposits this into one population centre. The order 948 moves a specific amount of a store type from one population centre to another, including centres

belonging to other friendly nations. This also works for gold, but since gold can only be kept at a capital, the order can only be used to move gold from one capital to another.

- 4th Age start-ups require players to give three possible locations for their capitals, which must each be ten hexes away from the others. If they are closer together, we are forced to choose which locations to leave out, which can lead to disappointment.
- If a character attempts to 705 orders (research spell) for different spells, the computer randomly selects which goes first. If then you attempt to research two spells, one of which is the prerequisite for the other, there is a 50% chance that they will be researched the wrong way around, so that you do not have the appropriate prerequisite for the higher level spell.
- Order 725 (create character) gives a maximum of 30 points to spend on a character's skills. Orders 728, 731, 734 and 737 allocate 30 points to the appropriate skill (which can rise to a maximum of 40 if the nation has an appropriate special ability).
- The rulebook states that you can give either number codes *or* letter codes for orders. However, as a rule we work from the numbers, checking them against the letter codes if there appears to be a discrepancy. If possible then we appreciate it if you use numbers codes, and would recommend that you use both to minimise errors (if you do not use both, that means we have no way of checking your orders). All things being equal, if there is a discrepancy we will use the number code. If we notice that one appears to make more sense than the other, we will of course use it, but generally, the number code will take precedence.

A Comedy of Errors

This article appeared in News from Bree, the in-game Middle Earth newsletter, and highlights many of the more commonly made errors in turn-writing, which the wise player might do well to avoid...

It has been oft-claimed, sometimes with justification, that we make errors when inputting turns. And yes, we freely admit that this is the case. However, what is less frequently admitted is the fact that we are not the only ones to do this. As such, then, we took time out from our arduous task of running Middle Earth to examine the turns received for one turn one game. And found the following errors...

- No security code and/or turn number and/or game number. Probably around a third of turns received are missing at least one of these things.
- The wrong security code and/or turn number and/or game number. More awkward than the last version, as it leaves us wondering whether it is the character names or the turn/game numbers that are wrong, or in the case of the security code, whether it is a very late or a very early turn.
- Wrong/missing/extra character names/i.d.s. Another awkward one, as the question is raised as to what characters the orders are actually intended for.
- Orders given for captured characters. This doesn't work!
- 430 orders given with no troop type. Another common one this, and contrary to popular opinion giving no troop type isn't the same as saying HI, though we generally translate it this way.
- A 780 order with extra information such as a hex number or troop type. Strange but true.
- 3 and 5 digit hex numbers given for move orders. 3 is understandable, perhaps, but 5 is pretty bizarre.
- 870 orders given with no character i.d. A very common one this; not vital, as the character will still move, but character i.d.s are not something we can just guess at.
- 850 orders with no directions. And, more annoying for us, 850 orders with a hex number instead of directions. Not only does this take us time to work out, but we have to guess at which route you wish taken. Which also applies to 830 orders.
- 610 orders with no character i.d. Commonly altered to 605 orders, but this isn't much consolation to the commander lying dead in a pool of his own blood.

- 810 orders with no hex number, 810 orders with directions instead of a hex number, and 810 orders with hex numbers that are off the map. This can also apply to 820 orders, though none were found in this game.
- 2 skill orders given for the same skill field. Only one is allowed, so the other will fail, which leaves us with the conundrum of which you want to attempt. Sometimes easy to deduce, but not always so. We will do our best, but cannot guarantee to pick the one you most wanted to work.
- 360 orders with no character i.d. given, and the same for 355s and 780s.
- 948 orders with only one hex number given, and 847 orders with two. These tend to be important orders, especially the 948 ones, so getting them wrong is not advised.
- 949s with no character i.d. Guaranteed to annoy your erstwhile ally.



Sample Email Order Format

The clearer your orders are, the easier they will be for us to enter, and so the chance of inputting errors occurring will be minimised. Below is an example of what for us is the ideal email turn format. We would ask, then, if you could do your best to emulate this as closely as possible.

Game: 65, Nation: 3, Security Code: 5129, Marcus Black, 109999			
<i>Elfhelm @1212</i>			
430	TrpsMan	520	InfYour
HI			
<i>Elfhild @1313</i>			
705	RsrchSp	710	PrenMgy
412			
<i>Eomer @1414</i>			
770	HrArmy	325	NatSell
400		FO	
HI		100%	
-			
-			
10 food			
<i>Fahmal @1515</i>			
947	NatTran	948	TranCar
3221		3221	
FO		2715	
100%		FO	
		16028	

And so on. Basically, please do your best to set out your orders as clearly as possible, with characters in alphabetical order, and without the orders either too close together, or too spread out.