

News From Bree

Middle Earth DBCD Newsletter - Issue 8, March '01

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from Bree..."

The Lord of the Rings, chapter 9

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Film News

The Last Alliance!

by Richard Devereux

The Last Alliance is a Middle-earth variant, based on the campaign of that name, which ended the Second Age and was the 'prequel' to the events described in The Hobbit and Lord of the Rings.

Very briefly, Gil-galad, High King of all the Elves, and Elendil the Tall, High King of Gondor and Arnor, led the 'Last Alliance' of Free Peoples against Mordor. This was the greatest and most splendid army seen in Middle-earth since the Host of Valinor in the First Age. At the Battle of Dagorlad just north of Mordor, the Free army met the Dark hosts in a titanic battle. "All living things were divided on that day, and some of every kind, even beasts and birds, were found in either host, save the Elves only. They alone were undivided and followed Gil-galad."

Gil-galad and Elendil were victorious. They pursued the Dark forces into Mordor, and laid siege to Barad-dur, the mighty fortress where Sauron had taken refuge with what remained of his army. For years, Sauron sent forth sortie after sortie in a vain effort to break the Free stranglehold. When all else had failed, Sauron himself came forth. He slew both Gil-galad and Elendil but was himself cut down by them and his spirit fled.

Isildur, son of Elendil, cut the One Ring from Sauron's finger and took it for his own. Isildur was later killed in an ambush, and the One Ring lost in the River Anduin, where it remained until it was discovered as described in Lord of the Rings.

The bare bones of the Last Alliance are given in Appendix B to Lord of the Rings; the story is told briefly in the chapter 'Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age' in the Silmarillion; and further snippets can be found in the chapters 'The History of Galadriel and Celeborn' and 'The Disaster of the Gladden Fields' in Unfinished Tales, all by JRR Tolkien. These are the primary sources I have used in designing the LA variant game.

The LA game gives players the chance to see if they can emulate, or do better, than the Free leaders in the story; or to see if, as Sauron or one of his

minions, they can change the course of history. It can also be played simply as a change from the standard 1650/2950 games.

The most important change is that in LA Sauron is a player's character, not a NPC. Sauron is considered to be wearing the One Ring at all times unless/until he is slain. Victory conditions are very simple: for the FP to win, they must either slay Sauron OR destroy Barad-dur, the other source of his power. If the FP fail to do this by turn 52, the DS win.

The LA game uses the Fourth Age base, as many of the changes needed for LA are by happy chance provided in FA. However, in order to recreate the large forces involved in LA, the pops and armies have been increased to 1650 scale.

There are several changes to the nations from 1650. At the time of LA, there were no Arthedain, Cardolan, Gondors, Rhudaur or Corsairs. These are replaced by

North and South Kingdoms, Dale, Silvan Elves, Dorwinion and Black Numenoreans. Amongst the DS, the only change is that the Dark Lord replaces Dark Lieutenants.

The neutrals are pre-aligned: Duns and Dorwinion join FP, Easterlings, Harad & Black Numenoreans join DS.

Several nations, familiar from 1650, change their geographical positions. Notably, at the time of LA, the Misty Mts and Mirkwood (rather, at

this time, Greenwood the Great) had not yet been infiltrated by the DS, who held little if any territory outside Mordor. Therefore, Witch-king and Dragon-lord are placed in Mordor with the rest.

The result of these positional changes is that the opposing sides are much more polarised than in 1650. The whole of the north and west is dominated by the FP whilst the DS are concentrated in the south and east. This presents a challenge to both sides: not only how to mobilize the maximum number of troops but how to keep them fed and paid until they die in battle!

I will post more details of LA on the mepbm email list. I hope I have whetted your appetite enough to sign up for this new variant, and that you enjoy playing it.



"The Dark Tower" by John Howe

new games

T.A. 1650

[Game 65]

Nations available: 11, 15, 17, 18
(2 of these are filled but you have the choice of these 4)

[Game 66] 1week turnaround
Nations available: 2 positions - (2 nation game ie you can play 2 ntns if you want)

[Game 69] Grudge Game:
4 Neutrals needed and a FP team

T.A. 2950

[Game 23]

Nations available: 1-2, 12, 15-17, 19, 22, 25

F.A. 1000

[Game 43]

Filling - we have around 14 positions

Grudge Games

Most are 10 player teams, some are 12 player. (Note we almost always need Neutrals for these games - a good way to get to know some of the better teams out there!)

1650: 3 DS Teams

2950: 1 Any Alignment (1wk only)

1000: 1 12 player team (any align)

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Check out the Harlequin website (above) for more information.

A Beginners Guide to MEPBM

Part 1: It's the economy, stupid!

by Rob Gaul

So you've decided to take on your first game of MEPBM, and visit the thrashing on the enemy that they so richly deserve. But hang on, what is that 124 page monstrosity with all too few trendy pictures in it? A Rulebook? Arrrrrgggghhh!!!! Maybe it won't be so easy after all!

No one can decide the hows and whats for you to survive and win your first game, however the following is a treatise on elements of the game that will help you survive that most confusing of openings, the game startup. For this is the moment where you customize your nation to fulfill the goals you have for the length of the game. Get it wrong and you will waste much valuable time and resources in replacing characters etc to fit your purposes (if indeed you can do it at all).

Growing an Economy

What your economy means to you/the turn sequence A little should be said firstly about the operation of your economy. If in any given turn you cannot meet your maintenance bills, AND a computer enforced tax rise of up to 100% can't cover your turn's debts, THEN YOU ARE ELIMINATED (or in less technical terms - your nation is terminated, your allies weep, and your enemies put on a barby and a slab down by the beach).

Each turn in your turn report there is a subsection in the miscellaneous report section that bears your expected revenue for next turn. This is what you need to cover. However if you lose a popn centre to combat (not THREATS or INFLUENCE by enemy emissary), you must budget for the popns lost revenue, this happens before maintenance so must be taken into account by you in your final figures. Changes in the game season also will affect the gold produced in your popns depending on the time of year.

If you haven't met your maintenance bill for the turn, the computer will automatically upgrade your tax rate accordingly, however the loyalty penalty to all of your popns will be greater if the change is enforced as opposed to increased by the ChTaxRt order.

Small economic nations such as most DS nations have very little latitude with enforced changes. IF YOU ARE RELYING ON YOUR ALLIES TO TRANSFER GOLD FOR YOUR MAINTENANCE you must keep a track of your maintenance bills 2 turns ahead of the current turn. The larger freep economies have a lot more latitude with enforced tax rises if necessary due to the size and number of their popns. The turn sequence explains why.

Maintenance comes AFTER:- NatSells (sell your stores to the market), so if you are meeting your own expenses, you can do so from turn to turn. *** Very important note, there are limits on sells of stores to the market. Only so many sales will be accepted before the market refuses further sales of any store type, this has been variously estimated at about 200K. So as a general rule Food sales at 1gp will allow you substantial sales and are always successful in my experience, commodity sales at higher prices are prone to failure, sometimes you need to issue sales of two different stores to ensure your maintenance. This is

important if you are relying on that sale to survive.

Maintenance comes BEFORE:- Threats by armies, Influences by Emissaries, Disbanding of armies, Transfers of gold/stores from your allies, Retiring of Characters.

The turn sequence in this matter has driven more than just a few players insane. So don't try and work it out under any circumstances. In plain terms, everything that appears on your turn results will have to be included in your next turn's maintenance. That includes armies that are about to die (how depressing - life insurance). On the anti social side, you cannot gain the benefit of newly captured popns until the turn after you take them because they are sieged, and same for threatened or influenced popns as they are after maintenance anyway.

Hence, if you are requiring aid to meet your maintenance, then the need for your economic game to be 2 turns ahead of the military one. If you get your results and realise you need to disband your armies in order to survive the coming turn, then you are already dead. Also if you leave your requests for gold from your allies till the turn you need it, it is too late and you will be dead because transfers come after maintenance.

Getting the turn sequence straight in your head is vital. I have recently played in two "Experts?" Games and witnessed several of the players eliminated in exactly this manner. Didn't ask for help until the turn they needed it to be in their accounts (if they asked at all)

An important note - If you are relying on Gold steals to make your ends meet, then you will get eliminated sooner or later once you try at a nation that is broke (a nasty tactic employed by the freep). Therefore treat your gold steals as an extra bonus, not to be counted on as a given.

This is my turn's check list for the turn after the one due, basically (I'm always financially unviable and looking for cash, 2 turns ahead).

- 1 Find the expected Revenue figure on your turn report.
- 2 Subtract the gold value of any popn you expect to lose in the coming turn.
- 3 Add the value of any troops you intend to recruit (you don't pay maintenance on recruited troops till the turn after you've hired them so they will figure next turn)
- 4 Subtract the value of troops you will lose this turn in combat.

This gives you the basic value of your maintenance bill for 2 turns hence. And that is how far you need to be ahead of the game to stave off economic ruin. Gold transfers from your allies basically cater to that second turn's maintenance, ie not the one you are about to hand in.

The turn following your results is far simpler. You just have to realise you still have to pay maintenance on troops even though they will be killed in combat on the turn. Any popn you lose will not supply you with gold. Any popn you gain will likewise not supply you with gold. I cannot remind you of that enough (oh sorry I have) Great setup hey.

tolkien miscellany

Stage version of The Hobbit touring the UK

All the MEPBM staff plus a few taggers on decided that as a nice bit of light relief we'd go and see the "The Hobbit" at the local theatre.

Overall it was an excellent evening of entertainment - I thought that Gollum's riddling of Bilbo was excellent, the dwarves (only 5 for space reasons!) played well and the overall journey was well produced and effective. Gandalf's fireworks (a little more liberal than in the book!) and Bilbo going invisible are something to watch out for. Bard was very good as a hero, and the encounter with the Trolls much fun, the black river in Mirkwood (and the spider[s]).

Bad things - Smaug's actual presence (vocally excellent); elves - well to be polite, they did not quite get this across very well, but Beorn was very intimidating. Gandalf was average, but the light relief of the Elvish guards in the Elven halls, and the Line Dancing Woodmen (we're not ever going to be able to look at the Woodmen nation in the game quite the same way!) Trying to reproduce the battle of the 5 armies was awkward but quite reasonable considering the space restrictions (the duelling was very adequate!)

So as a review this may stink, but as something to go to I would heartily recommend anyone who loves The Hobbit to check it out.

Clint



credit 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.

Your Economy

In most cases startup nations possess only very basic economies, and therefore have to be worked at in order that greater forces may be afforded in both military and character pools. The Emissary is the chief tool in camp placement (commanders can also be used, however they do not receive skill rank rises for successfully placed camps, and the cost is 4000 gold as opposed to 2000 gold for an Emissary, making their camps both more expensive, and lower loyalty/harder to upgrade/vulnerable to attack/threat).

However placing camps with commanders has been used by more than one Freep team to quickly reduce the camp limits so that the DS cannot lay new camps and hence improve their financial position.

Unless your nation has a super economy at startup (eg Gondors, Harad etc) I would suggest 2 x 30 point emissaries as a good start. If your nation doesn't have E30's at game start then it's advisable to pay the 10,000 gold to do order 725 Name Character to get one. Normally the population limit passes on about turns 10-12 after which new populations can be placed ONLY if old ones are destroyed. However for a couple of turns before that the difficulty of placing camps increases so that for the most part only the

m o r e experienced emissaries will succeed. Any more emissaries before turn 6 may leave you vulnerable in other areas. Stronger nations or those in vulnerable positions such as the WK may do better with only one such emissary till turn 6 so they can field extra

commanders to avoid losing

that which they already own. *Popns destroyed over surviving fortifications will not return a credit to the camp limit, as long as there is a fortification a new camp may be placed at any time.

Strategic v's Economic camp placement There are 2 basic types of camps to place, economic and strategic. Strategic camps are camps whose placement are vital to your nation's security interests. Such places where a camp with a tower are useful are areas where the enemy's army movement can be broken up, eg astride roads, in mountain passes etc. The camp is situated in order that it's mere presence can buy you time as any enemy army will be forced to lose a turn's march moving through it (enemy or neutral fortified popns halt your armies immediately on that hex). Strategically placed camps also include those placed in a specific area intended to later be upgraded for use as a recruiting base. eg any BS or DS Easterling player who places their camps near their respective capitals will face many turns march before they get their armies to the front. Instead they can locate their camps further north or west near the fighting and recruit from there. So you also need to consider where you intend to be fighting in the next 10 turns, and where you will be in the next 20 turns etc. Those without a plan will be left behind.

Economic camps are those that are intended to provide stores for use/sale or for upgrading to provide gold. They're usually situated in 'safe' areas. Camps placed in mountains will often produce gold in the form of stores (however the camp will be in a weather category 1 or 2 levels lower than the surrounding countryside so the stores produced will suffer accordingly). Camps in hills/rough also have a reasonable chance of producing gold. Gold producing hexes in other hex types is unlikely.

Tax Rate

Your tax rate starts off at 40%. Changing tax rates will raise or lower the loyalties of all populations owned according to the size of the rate change. eg a rise of 13% will cause loyalty losses of 0-13 loyalty points on all your popns. A rise from the startup 40 to 60% will entail a loss of 0-20 loyalty points on ALL populations and therefore puts your startup camps at risk of loss. I usually go for a 55% tax rate initially, that way you will get a look at the loyalty damage to your camps without risking losing them due to loyalty loss. (note, if any unfortified popn falls below 16 loyalty it can degrade one level per turn until it disappears)

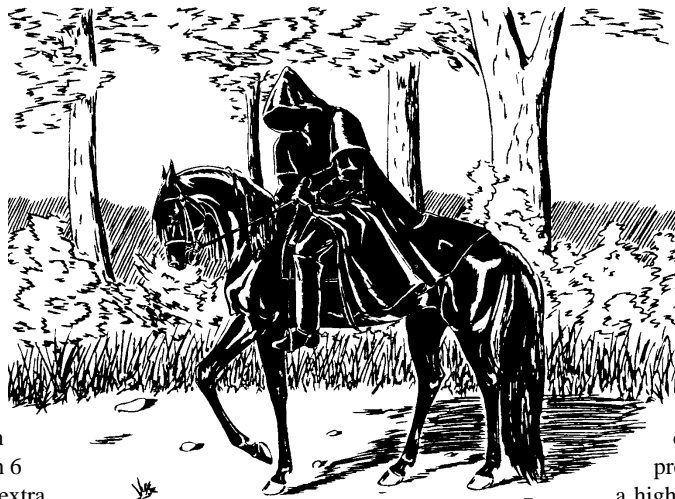
Therefore it is preferable to alter your tax rate to the highest desired rate as soon as possible after game start

in order to minimize loyalty damage to your vulnerable soon to be placed camps. Some players opt for a 79% tax rate on turn 1 before placing camps and subsequently lowering the tax rate to 60% giving all their camps a loyalty rise. I have tried this and was not too successful. Firstly the commander must be pretty good to effect such a high rise. Mine did not do so well, so I was still struggling to get to 79% when the time came to knock the rate back to 60%. As a consequence many of my popns got heavy loyalty penalties and the financial bonuses were not realised. Care would need to be taken to avoid losses of camps due to turn based loyalty penalties, so the tax rate would need to be lowered within a couple turns of placing the first camps.

Tax rates as they effect loyalty. Tax rates can have a positive or negative effect on all your popn loyalties from turn to turn. Here are some rates that have been tried and accepted by the mill. It's best to use the highest rate in the subsection as the loyalty penalty will be the same as lower rates, but you will get more gold, ie 39%, 60% or 79%. 60% is the best rate for healthy economies as you will have a fairly stable loyalty across the board.

39% - Loyalty of all popns increase 0 to 2 points/turn
40 - 60 - Loyalty of all popns changes -1 to +1/turn
79% - Loyalty of all popns decreases -1 to -3/turn

60% seems to be the highest tax rate possible to enjoy neutral loyalty penalties/bonuses, and therefore the most popular for most nations with an economic capability. Many of the DS nations opt for 39% tax as this gives a good loyalty bonus each turn, and having a 100% tax would not really effect their income significantly due to their poor popn base.



free
game!

Following suggestions from a couple of players, there will be a free game of a Middle Earth variant Diplomacy run through the pages of 'News from Bree'. The game will be GM'd by Colin Forbes (Bree editor).

"Downfall" is a Diplomacy variant set in the world of Middle Earth. The standard rules of Diplomacy (c Avalon Hill 1983) apply in all instances, except where noted in the rules - be warned there are some 18 pages of such differences!. Those unfamiliar with the basic rules of Diplomacy should let me know.

As with normal Diplomacy, there are seven players to each game (in this case consisting of: Dwarves, Elves, Gondor, Mordor, Rohan, Saruman and Umbar).

Anyone interested in playing, or who would like a copy of the rules, please contact Colin at: downfall@timewyrm.fsnet.co.uk or write to 9 South View Terrace, Exeter, Devon, EX4 6JF. Please state whether you would like a paper copy of the rules (in which case don't forget to include your address!) or an email copy (in PDF format).

It is hoped that the game will start up in the next issue. turns will probably be run once every two months (co-inciding with issues of Bree, with the results published in these pages). There will be no charge for the game.



shelob's
web

A few key Web resources for MEPBM are listed below. Next time we'll look at some wider Tolkien-related sites.

Bobbins ME site
www.middleearthpbm.co.uk/

Harlequin's dedicated ME site
<http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/harlequin.games/meframe.htm>

The old Deft site has useful things like 4th Age start-up sheets...
www.gamesystem.com

Stormy's site (includes 2950 data)
www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Battlefield/3722/MidEarth2.html

Tricks & Tips

by *Jeremy Richman and Ernest Hakey III*

Whenever you sell food, try to only sell 99% instead of 100% so that there is 1 unit of food in every place you might hire an army. This is particularly true the first time you sell food, because it leaves some food at locations that don't produce any, such as an initial town in the mountains that started with 1500 food in its stores.

There is a correlary trick to this. Suppose you are hiring an army in a place without food. You would like to hire with food so you buy 1 unit of food and hire. But wait! you also wanted to sell your food this turn to finance your nation. If you do that, then the 1 unit of food you buy with order 315 will simply be sold at order 325, leaving no food available for your hired army to start with. So instead, your hiring commander buys 100 units of food, and at your capital you sell only 99% of your nation's food, leaving your commander with 1 food for the hired army to start with.

Whenever you want to move all your goods to one of your population center using order 947, don't put in that you want to move 100%. The caravans take a tenth of whatever you ask them to move; a tenth of 100% is 10%, so that is what you lose, and you end up with 90% of your goods at the location. Instead specify to move 90% of your goods to the location; the caravans then take a tenth of that which is only 9% -- and that is taken on top of the goods you move. So you end up with the same 90% of your goods at the location, but the caravans have taken 1% less. What happens to that 1%? It was just left wherever it was, thought your population centers that produced or stockpiled that type of goods.

Alternatively, you can specify to move 91% of your goods. The caravans take a tenth of that, or 9.1%. The result is that 90.9% of the goods arrive at their destination. (The difference between specifying 90% vs. 91% is that in the former case, you transport less and you give the caravans less; 1% is left behind for you to use on following turns. In the case of 91%, you transport slightly more, namely an extra .9%, but you pay the caravans more, namely an extra .1%.)

Whenever you wish to transfer goods to an ally, you have to use order 947 to gather those goods at one of your population centers, then order 948 to transfer the goods to your ally's population center. In the case of order 947, try to move the goods to your population center that has the largest existing stockpile plus production, because then those goods won't have to be moved -- they are already at the "gathering" place, and therefore the caravans don't get their tithe for them.

You can move a large army full movement for nearly no food! Suppose you have an army of 3000 HI that doesn't have any food, and in the same hex another army that has 100 HI and at last 101 food. Feeding time takes place just before order 400 -- before new recruiting orders but after all orders having to do with transferring troops and goods among and between armies and popcenters. At feeding time the big army loses morale due to hunger and the second one eats 100 of its 101 food. The small army can transfer command to the larger (or vice versa), using order 780. The combined army has 1 unit of food, which is all that is required to give it full movement just as though it was fed! (The check for whether an army gains or loses morale from being fed is different from the check that occurs at movement time for whether it gets full movement. Both depend on whether they army has food, but they are done at different times.)

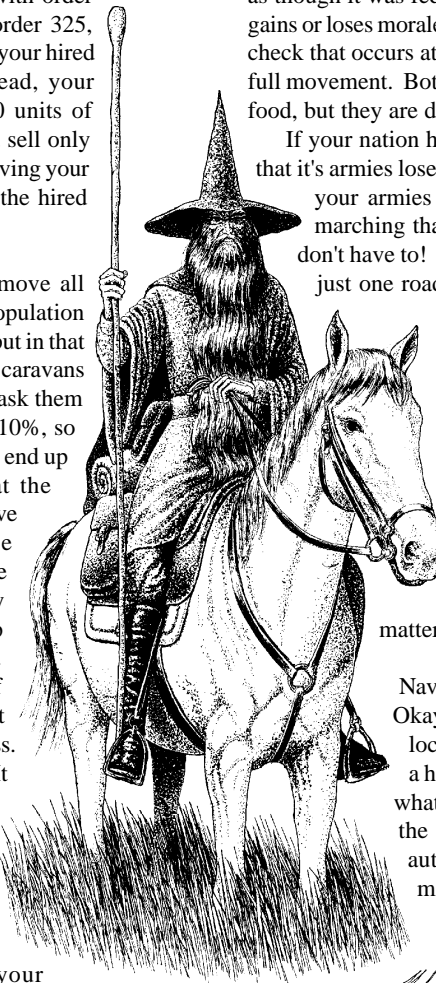
If your nation has the special nation ability (SNA) that it's armies lose no morale for a forced-march, then your armies without food are better off force-marching than marching normally, even if they don't have to! Suppose your army is moving even just one road hex, from 3612 to 3713. If your army has no food, you will lose 1-5 points of morale if you march normally; but if you force-march, then your special nation ability kicks in and you lose no morale! This may seem quite odd but that is the way the SNA works in all three of the scenarios. So if your nation has that SNA, get in the habit of checking whether your army has food and if not, use order 860 no matter how short a distance it is traveling.

Naval invasions are very hard to manage. Okay, your navy has arrived at an enemy location that is either a shore hex or has a harbor or port. If you are unopposed, what are your choices? If you assault the population center, your ships are automatically anchored and you can march inland on the same turn, but leaves your ships behind. If an enemy navy can sail in it can capture/destroy your ships using order 270. More commonly, the

hardship (ho ho) is that you can't follow up that invasion with another without getting the ships back.

What I do is sail in with two navies. One has 1 transport and just a few warships, and lots and lots of food, say 1001, enough for 10 turns of movement. The other is the big invasion force with lots of transports and warships. The invasion force captures and marches inland. The small navy commander issues orders to pickup all the anchored ships and sails home. Next turn he can transfer all the ships he just picked up to the commander of the next wave armada.

This plan requires extra preparation; sometime before your first invasion, split off 100 troops (preferably cheap troops like men-at-arms) to a commander. Next turn that commander buys or picks up 1001 food, and also picks up a transport and a handful of warships; after that he is ready to go. I do this very early on when I'm a naval nation, because then I can sail out an armada anytime I want, without further preparation.



Lessons to Be Learnt

by M. Peters

- 1) Moving after killing someone is a good for your safety.
- 2) All people are not created equal.
- 3) Friends one week can become enemies next week (when another game starts).
- 4) But people I make my enemies, are enemies forever.
- 5) How you play reflects on the type of person you are.
- 6) So the person who plays nations run by females are sick.
- 7) Don't ask to visit your friend's home, a refusal might hurt your relationship.
- 8) Token women are just as good as the most experienced male.
- 9) A free lunch, like a free turn, is just there to sucker you in
- 10) A wooden weapon can kill someone as well as any steel weapon
- 11) Someone has to lose for someone else to win, and
- 12) Sometimes its not your fault if you lose
- 13) Don't trust people whose emails ends with yahoo.com
- 14) A wife gets jealous for the silliest reasons
- 15) Anniversies to remember are birthdays and wedding days, not years since a game started
- 16) Cats should be declawed before strangers drop by to say hi
- 17) Or companies should make more money so I can get more than 1 free turn and a bandage
- 18) Plan you assaults carefully, people rarely agree to let themselves get knifed and killed
- 19) No one likes living in the snow in winter
- 20) The result you get at the end don't always reflect the way you lived and played
- 21) Walking away is a valid way to handle difficult situations
- 22) There really are strange people in the world that your mom warned you about
- 23) Some people think you are the strange person their mom warned them about
- 24) When threatening someone, always pretend its game related, and
- 25) Violence is the best way to solve problems with my neighbours.

Transferring gold. Have you ever had a Nation Message about gold being transferred among your enemies? The message might be a rumor about the destination of the gold or its origin, either the hex location or the name of the population center. Either way, if an enemy capital is involved, you can now make a guess about which of your nations is hard-pressed and vulnerable, or which has surplus gold that your agents should see go to your coffers instead.

But now it is your turn to receive or ship gold -- how can you safeguard the knowledge from your enemies? Simple -- when you ship gold, you do not have to specify the origin and destination as capital locations. You can specify one of your camps and one of the recipient's camps, for example. The rules specify that even if you do this, the gold is always taken from your national coffers and put into the recipient's coffers. (The rules may appear to say that you must specify capitals as origin and destination locations but that is not what they mean -- trust me.)

An enemy who receives a nation message about the gold transfer now gets the name of an innocuous population center they may never have visited and don't know where it is, or of a hex location they will have to visit to determine the owner.

The risk of this method is that if your origin population center is taken from you, by emissary action or by an army that had moved in evasively and was not reported, your gold transfer will not go through. Even worse, if the destination population centers is taken by emissary action or by an evasive army, your gold will be shipped to your enemy! So you must take care in choosing when to use this technique. Select population centers with high loyalties or that you are very sure the enemy is not aware of.

Combat spells: Offense vs. Defense. Suppose your mage has a choice of which one cast, which is better, an offensive or a defensive spell? In addition

to the obvious considerations such as the strength of each spell, and the casting rank with each, there is something else to think of. A defensive spell tries to keep your troops alive, while an offensive spell destroys enemy troops. In a situation where the enemy has overwhelming strength, then the defensive spell may have no value at all!

For example, suppose 1000HI face your 100HI (suppose you have no armor), and your mage with your army has a choice to cast either Deflections for 1000 points of defense, or Call Winds for 400 points of offense. Since the enemy strength is likely to be at least 3000 and your defense is 1000, even adding 500 to your defense will not prevent your army from being destroyed in the first round of combat. You may as well cast the offensive spell and try to chip away at the number of enemy troops.

The converse is also true. If you have an army that has overwhelming strength against an opponent, there is not much point in casting an offensive spell, however powerful or high the casting rank, whereas even a weak defensive spell with a low casting rank has some chance to save some of your troops.

Of course, you may wish your mage to cast "the wrong" spell in all these situations simply to try to improve the casting rank, against a later battle when you will want that spell to work.

Finally, a tip for North Kingdom players in Fouth-Age. You may not realize it, but North Kingdoms can start with a navy. To do that, you have to have a second major town, with a port, on a shore hex. So you put one of your three discretionary population centers on a shore hex with three hexes of your capital at 1108, and use some of your nation build points to improve it so that it starts as a major town with a port. My favorite spot is 1211, but you can also use 0608, 0909, or even 1311, because it is at the end of a major river even though it isn't "on" it.



Input checking & errors in turns

Amendment to the process of receiving turns, checking for errors, and extra input checking.

Contacting Players with Errors

As standard policy we are able to get back in touch with players who have made simple mistakes in their turns.

Eg 325 (Natsell) Fo NO percentage we can contact you if, and only if, you get the turns in the working day before we process the turn if we receive turns by email or have an email contact address, please put your account number with ALL emails to us.

(In most cases this means that this is the due date but as we do not work weekends to get this extra service you will need to get turns in on Friday for us to contact you if turns process on Monday).

We are unable to help with judgement calls such as ID of characters which are incorrect or the like.

Auto-response of emails

Our me@MiddleEarthGames.com email address now has an out of office auto-responder so within a couple of minutes of sending in turns you should get a reply. If you do not then we have not received your turn (it

could be that you sent it to the wrong email address, the most common mistake, or something else.) Note only me@MiddleEarthGames.com offers this and only after our office hours (10am-6.30pm GMT, 5am-1.30pm EST) where we regularly check our email. Don't forget to put your name, your game and nation, and especially your account number with each enquiry sent to us.

Input Checking

We are now able to input-check the turns if we receive them the Working Day before the turns are run (or preferably earlier). This should cut down on errors a great deal - and keep some quantity of hair in the office. Turns left until the day of the process (or late the day before processing) will not be able to be input checked. With around 70 games processing every two weeks we hope that when the occasional error does come your way that you are able to calmly explain to us what has occurred so that we are able to contact you with the correction.

A reminder that three films are being made of The Lord of the Rings, release dates are set for Christmas 2001, 2002, 2003. The films are being directed by New Zealander Peter Jackson, who previously directed The Frighteners and Heavenly Creatures. A mixture of known and unknown actors is being used in all the roles.

The Cast

Aragorn: Viggo Mortensen
 Arwen Evenstar: Liv Tyler
 Bilbo Baggins: Ian Holm
 Boromir: Sean Bean
 Denethor: John Noble
 Elrond: Hugo Weaving
 Eomer: Karl Urban
 Eowyn: Miranda Otto
 Faramir: David Wenham
 Frodo Baggins: Elijah Wood
 Galadriel: Cate Blanchett
 Gamling: Bruce Hopkins
 Gandalf: Sir Ian McKellen
 Gil Galad: Mark Ferguson
 Gimli: John Rhys-Davies
 Gollum: Andy Serkis (voice)
 Gorbag: Stephen Ure
 Haldir: Craig Parker
 Hama: John Leigh
 Isildur: Harry Sinclair
 Legolas: Orlando Bloom
 Lotho Sackville-Baggins: Paul Sutura
 Meriadoc Brandybuck (Merry): Dominic Monaghan
 Morwen: Robyn Malcolm
 Mouth of Sauron: Bruce Spence
 Peregrin Took (Pippin): Billy Boyd
 Rosie Cotton: Sarah McLeod
 Samwise Gamgee: Sean Astin
 Saruman: Christopher Lee
 Ted Sandyman: Brian Sargent
 Theoden: Bernard Hill
 Treebeard: John Rhys-Davies (voice)
 Ugluk: Nathaniel Lees
 Wormtongue: Brad Dourif



**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!

Editor: Colin Forbes,
 9 Southview Terrace, Exeter,
 Devon EX4 6JF
 bree@timewyrm.fsnet.co.uk

From out of the West

Welcome to all DGE players!

Welcome, welcome, welcome.... Well we have managed to survive the first couple of months of pain and now things have more or less calmed down. Server getting hacked, 4 computers breaking down, difficulties with the DGE Message Board, 90 hour weeks, and here we are.

The good news is that we continue to see an increase in players, lots of older DGE/GSI players coming back to the fold as our fame spreads far and wide (well North America anyway).

Plans for this year: Go to Copenhagen and enjoy the hospitality of our Scandanavian players, Salute 2001 (April 21) will be our major event that we'll be at (tent of course will be there - for those that have yet to see it check out our website). Pubmeets of course will be more plentiful.

Two new staff have joined the growing long-haired weirdos at the office (well, one has short hair, so we're trying to encourage him...). Stu all the DGE players would have gotten to know over the years, as he helped run ME-PBM in the States - so hello to the "Patron Saint of Loudness" who has fit right into the office as if he were born to it. Gaz, a fellow PBMer of medium standing, has decided that maybe he'll give us a try whilst trying to get "a proper job". We wish him luck.

New scenario "The Last Alliance" designed by Richard Devereux is coming out soon - not official, but it looks rather nice.

So what can we do to help? Comments and feedback will be very welcome - we're hoping to keep to a more regular Bree now that Colin has been convinced to bring his expertise back to the fold. What can you do to help us?

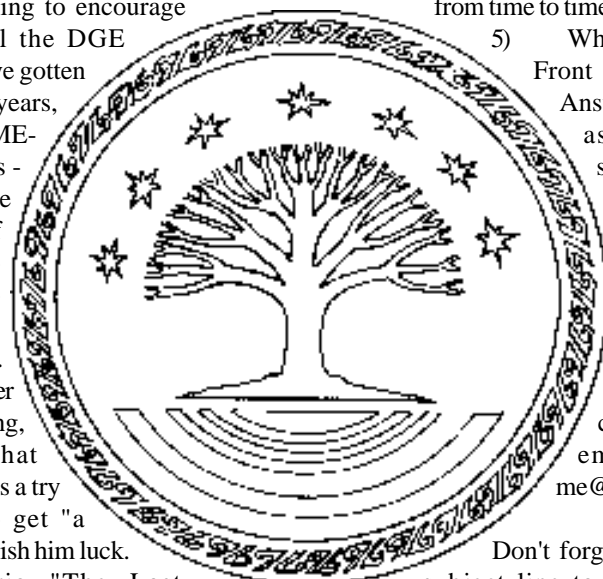
READ THE HOUSE RULES!

... yes it really explains lots of the differences between the way we do things and answers those eternal questions such as:

- 1) What's my account number and where can I find it? Answer: It's the 6 figure number that starts 101234 and you can find it as the name of the file that you get via email as 101234.pdf (where 1234 is replaced with your own account number). Please quote it with ALL

correspondence with us as it helps a lot to speed up administrative chores. This helps us to get turns out quicker, and keep costs down.

- 2) Why does my Turnsheets/Resultsheet show that I am on Low funds when I have paid you 50 billion dollars? Answer: your account details for all games are now shown on your Front Sheet, which comes out separately - titled m101234.pdf (where 1234 is replaced with, you guessed it, your account number.)
- 3) I want to play the Cloud Lord, Noldo, White Wizard... Answer: Sorry, these are already taken in gameXX and we don't hold back positions for the next game, as we find that we can fill all such positions around 7-14 times per game that we actually bring out. We do have the Woodmen, Northmen and Rhun Easterlings available though. J
- 4) Do you actually ever sleep. Answer: Yes. And it is rumoured that I have even seen my wife from time to time.
- 5) Where's my turn - I got my Front Sheet 2 seconds ago... Answer: It'll be along shortly as we send them out separately.
- 6) Where can I send email to you regarding my turn/game/account/question/comment? Answer: Our Middle-earth email address is the best place to send all correspondence. This email address is: me@middleearthgames.com.



Don't forget to include ME in the subject line to get an auto-response. Otherwise, you will never know if the email got to us or not.

So we hope to continue to improve things as time goes on, updating as time allows. If you think there is anything in particular that we could improve then please inform us. (We're hoping to bring out a Questionnaire with the next Bree, so please send us questions that you think might be appropriate there - from game changes that you would like to see, to comments on the colour of Gandalf's staff). (And yes colour is spelt with a "u"... J)

Other than that ...

"Have fun, and help make it fun for others".

Clint

Middle Earth
PBM Games



Middle Earth House Rules & Procedures

or

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

Contents updated 14/3/01

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



Behind the Scenes

Our Contact Details

By Post

Middle Earth Games; Office A, 340 North Road, Cardiff, CF14 3BP, UK

For Postal players in North America:

Ray Technologies, PO Box 280 Medford, OR 97501-0019

Phone & Fax: 541-772-7872 (10-5pm weekdays) (fax24hrs)

(Turns will be sent on to us as soon as Ray Tech receives them, and Ray Tech will forward postal results [sent from us by email] to the players in North America. Note you will need to fax your turns one day early.) *I would advise players who are in a rush to fax direct to us for speed. Better still email us...*

By Phone

Ex-DGE players phone: 011 44 29 2091 3359

UK players phone: 029 2091 3359

011 44 (0)29 20625665 can be used if the other is engaged

(International players please contact your local operator for dialing instructions.)

Phone times: 10am-6:30pm UK time (GMT); 5am-1:30pm (EST)

By Email

Email: me@MiddleEarthGames.com

Website: www.MiddleEarthGames.com

(Most of the interesting articles are on the www.HarlequinGames.com website - this will be slowly shifted to the ME site as time allows).

MEPBMList: via www.MiddleEarthGames.com - if you need help please contact us directly.

Deftgaming Message Board: www.DeftGaming.com

By Fax

Ex-DGE players fax: 011 44 29 2062 5532

UK players fax: 029 2062 5532

Auto-response of emails

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Note only me@MiddleEarthGames.com offers this and only after our office hours (10am-6.30pm GMT, 5am-1.30pm EST) where we regularly check our email. Don't forget to put your name, your game and nation, and especially your account number with each enquiry sent to us.

Processing times (note the New time!).

Games are generally processed at 10am 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 10am, but emails are taken from the computer at 9am, so any turns sent to us via email after this time will not make the deadline. We are very strict with this. Note we are 5 (EST) hours ahead of North America so please allow extra time for this. Every effort will be made to ensure that the turns are posted or emailed on the day that they are processed.

Funding your Account

Please ensure that your account is always in credit. If your account is not in credit, turns may be held back until payment is made (turns are processed if you are Low Funds but held back).

Please note that the correct balance is the one on the Front Sheet *not the one on the turn sheet*. You should **ONLY** use the balance shown on your Front Sheet.

Payments can be made either:

- **By Credit Card** on our secure website - www.MiddleEarthGames.com
- **By Credit Card** through contacting us directly (by phone or email), detailing your game account number, your name, the game that you play in, your credit card account number, expiry date, amount to be deducted, and name of cardholder if different to your own. Please note that all payments made through credit and debit cards within the UK will incur a 5% charge, levied upon us by the bank. We can also set up a monthly payment scheme whereby we credit your account with a **FIXED** amount at the start of each month (as specified by the player). (Note there are around 2 and one eighth turns per month on average for a two week game - therefore please allow a little extra funds for this.)
- **By Cheque**. Europe - Cheques to us as normal; North America - Cheques via Ray Tech. Cheques are to be made payable to MEPBM Games - please put your account number on the back of the cheque.
- **By Cash or Postal Order**, at your own risk.

Whenever a game processes we charge your account £3.90. If you don't have enough money in your account to pay for your turn (thus going "Low Funds") then please be aware that we will contact you with that information, and that the Balance on your Front Sheet will no longer be accurate. We charge a £1.00 fee for the first turn when your account is Low Funds, and £0.50 for each subsequent turn until the account is brought into credit. For your first Low Funds turn, then your account will be £4.90 lower than it appears on your Front Sheet, and for future turns it will be £4.40 lower again. Note: If you are Low Funds we will still process your turn but reserve the right to hold that turn back.

Account numbers

*Please quote account numbers, your name, game number and nation in **all** correspondence.*

For most of our games, each player has an individual player account number. To avoid confusion, please ensure that whenever you contact us you include this number (or, if you telephone us, that you have the number to hand). You'll be given an account number with your first turn you actually received from us.

Address changes

Please inform us of any changes in your address (email and postal).

Since having your turn mailed or emailed to the correct address is crucial, we suggest that you notify MEPBM Games as soon as possible whenever you change, or are about to change, your address. If possible, this should be done separately from any turn that you may be sending, so that the change does not get misplaced amidst other turns.

Ex-DGE players - your Fourth Age (FA) games now have a 4 prefix. Players from DGE game 45 should now refer to it as game 445. It will still appear as game 45 in some places, but to avoid confusion, please try to remember this. The UK FA game numbers will remain the same.

News from Bree

The free in-house ME newsletter is looking for contributions - please help if you can.

Joining New Games

If you wish to join a new game please get in touch, telling us the number of the game you wish to join (if known), scenario (1650, 2950, 1000 or variant of the above - one week, two week and three week), your name and Account number, whether you need the rules/map, your preferred nation (and some back-up nations), any players that you are joining with as a team, and any funds that you want to add (with payment details). If payment is received BEFORE the game is set-up, then £5.00 gives you the position and 2 free turns. After that you are charged at the normal rate of £3.90 per turn. New game information is regularly updated on the Front sheet and sent to the MEPBMList twice a week.

Please do not try to join a new game using the 'start-up' credit card option on our website - this is intended for new players only! Just contact us directly via email.

We accept set-ups for all three scenarios - 1650, 2950, 1000. However, we only fill one game from each scenario at a time. Teams (i.e. up to five aligned players) are allowed in these.

Grudge games (i.e. a full team of 10 or 12) are exceptions to this in that we will try to get opposition for you whilst also filling normal games. We will occasionally advertise variant games as well.

Contact details

You will need to inform us if you would like us to send out your contact details, (address, email, fax, phone) with your request to join a game. If you do not then we will assume that you would like to keep them private. We automatically send out any email address to your team-mates.

Ceasing play

If ceasing play, please let us know as soon as possible.

If for some reason you wish to drop a position in any of our games, please inform us as quickly as possible, so that other players in the game do not suffer. Refunds of any remaining credit are available, but we reserve the right to charge a small administration fee for this. If you are dropping a position, and know of anyone else who may be interested in taking it over, please let us know.

PLEASE inform us and your team-mates if you are going to drop. It only takes a minute and helps those who want to play on have a lot of fun - dropping without warning is one of our greatest bugbears. We will first contact your team-mates for substitute players then offer the position on the Front Sheet, giving the scenario, the nation and approximate turn number (e.g. 1650:Witch King (mid)).

Self-made turnsheets

Please ensure that these are clear and easy to read.

Whenever possible, please reply to turns using the turnsheets provided with the game. However, if this is not possible for some reason, or if you prefer to prepare your turns on computer, please ensure that your turn follows the format of our turnsheets as closely as possible, and includes all relevant information. Also note that whilst we accept turns for most games via email, please still allow 'delivery' time for these, as it can take anything from a minute to a day to reach us, depending on when it is sent. If you want a reply to your email then please put "ME" in your subject line. (We log on around 10 times a day so you will only get a reply when we log on).

Corrections to turns

Again, please ensure that these are clear and easy to read.

If you need to make a correction to a turn that you have sent in, please ensure that you make clear what change needs to be made (telling us that you want your character to go up instead of down is of less use to us, for example, than a character id. followed by the new instructions). Unless the turn is completely different, do not send in all of the turn again. Instead, merely tell us what changes need to be made (this will help avoid confusion), remembering to give us your account number, game number and nation number.

Contacting Players with Errors

As standard policy we are able to get back in touch with players who have made simple mistakes in their turns. Eg 325 (Natsell) Fo NO percentage we can contact you if, and only if, you get the turns in the working day before we process the turn if we receive turns by email or have an email contact address.

In most cases this means that this is the due date but as we do not work weekends to get this extra service you will need to get turns in on Friday for us to contact you if turns process on Monday. We are unable to help with judgement calls such as ID of characters which are incorrect or the like.

Input Checking

We are now able to input check the turns if we receive them the Working Day before the turns are run (or preferably earlier). This should cut down on errors a great deal - and keep some quantity of hair in the office. Turns left until the day of the process (or late the day before processing) will not be able to be input checked. With around 70 games processing every two weeks we hope that when the occasional error does come your way that you are able to calmly explain to us what has occurred so that we are able to contact you with the correction.

Email

Those of you who have opted to receive turns via email will receive them from our Compuserve email address (ClintOldridge@compuserve.com). Turns sent to this 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. We will be closing this account in April - please only send turns and queries to me@MiddleEarthGames.com. You will also receive your Front Sheet (also called the Account Sheet) which has details of your balance, new games available, and team-contacts on it.

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 for any reason you need to phone in your turn to us, this is possible, but will cost an extra £2.00. Variant games invariably take more work to set up so may cost an additional £5.00 set-up fee.

Game Winners Certificates

DGE's Game Winners Certificates will be honoured either at \$25 and either a choice of nation in a new game, or to support your capital placement. This will last until the end of June - after this we will only honour the \$25 payment. I feel this a fair compromise between honouring the DGE GWCs and the impact this has on the UK games where you don't get a GWC. You'll still need to get them to us, though and we cannot accept faxed/emailed versions of them.

Playing more than one position

At the start of a new game, no player can play more than one position (unless otherwise agreed with the GM and players). 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.

Special Service Turns

All games started with us will automatically have Special Service on, and we do not allow the service to be switched off. Note we do not charge for this service.

We work ceaselessly on your behalf

Whilst the post office does not work on bank holidays (except Christmas/Boxing day), we do, so please take this into account when sending in turns, else you may miss the deadline. We regularly take a week off around the Christmas/New Year period. We'll inform players if this changes.

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, including who you think it will impact, and we will do our best to resolve the matter. If it's our error we'll fix it.

So please keep calm

Nearly any problem you may have can be resolved. However, this is made far easier for all concerned by 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. Email is particularly bad at misrepresentation.



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

Salient Points to Note

- 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 (non-hidden) pop centre (and then gets transferred to the friendly player's capital).
- 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 & 870 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 947 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.

Subject line: ME29/24

(replace ME29/24 with your game number and nation number)

Then in the main body of the email (or attached .txt file):

ME 29 Player: 24 Security Code: 1234 Due Date: 15th July 2000

Fred Bloggs A/c: 109999 Turn Number: 15

(replace these details with your details for this game)

Alfred (alfre) @1234 (Com, Age, Emi)

810 MovChar 1235

900 FindArt 86

Beattie (beatt) @ 2345 (Com)

947 NatTran 1234 le 100

948 TranCar 2345 4321 go 10,000

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.