



News From Bree

Middle Earth PBM Newsletter - Issue 9, May '01

"Strange as News
from Bree..."

The Lord of the Rings, chapter 9

Reining Agent Power

An alternative Fourth Age scenario

When the Fourth-Age scenario came out for the Middle-Earth PBM game, it was received with enthusiasm by the MEPBM community. It offered many new dimensions of play, including nation construction and placement, randomization of artifact numbers, the meaning of neutral allegiance, and even how to achieve victory, to name a few. But to many players it soon revealed a frustrating drawback: agents are too powerful. Nations abounded with the Special Nation Ability (SNA) allowing +20 to kidnapping and assassinations, and it was not unusual for evil nations to also begin with four 60-point agents. More than one hapless target of such nations found 3-4 of their characters assassinated on turn 2!

And so, from the swirling depths of the past, from long discussion threads, the Limited Agent Scenario (LAS) was born. The idea is simple. Certain SNA's contribute to making assassinations too easy to accomplish too early in the game. Just don't allow those SNA's in the game. The three SNA's are:

1. Scout/Recon at double normal skill rank
2. Stealth rank bonus more likely for new characters
3. Kidnappings/Assassinations at +20

Nations are permitted all of the other SNA's, including naming 40-pt agents and scout/recon at +20 to normal skill rank. In addition, starting characters are allowed to have stealth ranks.

This scenario has been very successful and gained popularity. It has been used in three regular (small-team) games and at least two grudge games. The presence and impact of assassins is nicely reduced to reasonable levels, and armies are the most important offensive assets -- an army commander is no longer just a walking target.

Still, there are some of us who have for years felt that if assassinations and kidnapping were just plain eliminated from ME, we wouldn't miss them at all. We felt that these resources are too easy to develop and deploy, compared with the complexity of nurturing and managing an economy to support troops, and the tactics involved in military campaigns. So we invented another alternative scenario: No Kidnapping or Assassinations (NKA).

In this scenario, the only forbidden SNA is +20 to kidnap and assassinate. But in addition, the kidnap and assassination orders 620 and 615 are not permitted throughout the entire game.

This was a much more controversial scenario than LAS. I have seen some dire predictions from onlookers. One person was certain that a nation with an inaccessible nation capital (such as 3329 or 4215) will be impossible to defeat without assassins. Another person predicted that the removal of assassins would just bring a different SNA to the primacy, namely Conjure Mounts. Others have said that without

assassins, games will more often to go turn 52. My only expectation is that my characters will be lots more fun, particularly my commanders. That's because fewer of them will get killed.

We did fill two regular (small-team) games that are now underway - games 455 and 40. I'm

very excited about being in both of them. Both games do have nations with inaccessible capitals, but I believe that a capital by itself is not enough to sustain a nation. There do seem to be many nations with Conjure Mounts, but I don't think more so than in other FA games I've played in - it was always a popular SNA. Here are a few effects that NKA does seem to be having:

1. The camp limit was reached on turn 5 in game 455 - quite early in my experience. Game 40 is only on turn 2 as of this writing.
2. More players are taking the Weakness SNA. (I don't regard this as anywhere near as pernicious as assassins - it takes about five 60-rank mages to kill one character!)
3. Some nations don't bother to have any agents! In my next NKA game I want to start with one or two high-ranking agents. I'll bet I can steal right from my enemies' capitals, and sabotage their fortifications at will!

I've enjoyed playing in these alternate scenarios. Right now I'm very taken with NKA and I hope to get enough interest to fill a third game. I definitely like LAS so much better than regular FA that I doubt I will ever go back. Perhaps if LAS gains enough popularity, Harlequin will offer it as one of the signup choices, alongside 1650, 2950 and regular FA.



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Hall of Fame

new games

T.A. 1650

[Game 72]

Nations available: 15, 16, 24

[Game 73]

Nations available: all x10, 23

[Game 118] 3 week turnaround

Nations available: 20 positions available for all.

[Game 119] 1 week turnaround

19 positions available. I'll allocate later - send me a list of nations.

T.A. 2950

[Game 220]

Nations available: 1-9, 11-13, 15, 16, 19, 22, 24, 25.

F.A. 1000

[Game 43]

Need 6DS, 6N or 1F, 7Ds and 4N

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: 1 FP team. 1 Team run by 1 player 3wk 12vs12
2950: 1 Any Alignment (1wk only) 1000: 1 12 player team (any align)



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Going for the Jugular

How to take out the Witch King in 1650

by Jeremy Richman

I have played the Witch-King (WK) 9 times in ME-PBM circa 1650. I have also played Arthedain once, and played other Free nations where from afar I have engineered the downfall of the Witch-King by advising the Arthedain and Cardolan. Like Samson's long hair, there is a secret to the strength of the Witch-King position; remove that, and the rest will follow. This secret is his capital at 1804, and to a lesser degree, his major town at 2006.

This may seem obvious -- duh, take out his major towns. But in actual play they are rarely a primary target, particularly his capital. In my nine Witch-King games I am continually amazed at Arthedain and Cardolan players who:

1. Chip away at the smaller population centers that produce nearly nothing in the severe climate, cost the Witch-King little to lose and gain the attacker little economic benefit.
2. Spend resources chasing after a WK army in their backfield instead of accepting those losses in return for knocking out their opponent.

Each time I have engineered the downfall of the WK it is the same way. Both Arthedain and Cardolan move their major armies directly to the WK capital at 1804. The Arthedain moves his capital army and Cardolan his starting army from his town at 1510. Both armies can arrive at 1804 turn two if both move out on turn one, which is possible if both Free Nations joined together in a small team or in a grudge game or because they both had good instincts and moved out on turn one. It can also be accomplished by turn three if one or both players did not move out right away.

The Arthedain army must be commanded by his top commander who is carrying both of the command artifacts the Arthedain start with, usually totalling +60 command.

Having arrived at the Witch-King capital, the Cardolan army attacks the enemy defending army, usually much smaller because the larger troops have moved out. On the same turn, the Arthedain issue a threat (order 498). Both commander should refuse challenge for fear of the Nazgul himself being present in the enemy army. This has worked both times I have tried it. The loss of his capital so early breaks the back of the Witch-King nation, cutting down his ability to recruit front-line troops, and greatly hurting his economy.

Afterwards, both armies simply make for 2006, via 1804, 1906, and inexorably into 2006. Depending on what WK armies are in the area, the two forces could split up and gobble smaller WK population

centers en route to 2006 -- but the major town must remain the goal.

Can the Arthedain commander, even with so many starting troops and a command rank enhanced by artifacts of about 110, really threaten away a major town/fort, perhaps a city/fort if the WK has improved it? Well, in two tries, so far so good.

To understand why the Witch-King capital is usually

vulnerable to this threat, let's look at the initial WK position. He usually starts with a huge deficit, as large as any in the world, and an equally huge gold reserve. The deficit might be 16,000 gold the reserve about 4.5 times that, say 75,000. Although on turn 1 the Witch-King can usually pay for most of his new characters by selling goods at the initially high prices, thereafter his

production is too poor to be much help in supporting his nation by sales. Furthermore, his costs are usually increased on turn 1 by nearly 5,000 gold due to recruiting 400 Heavy Infantry at each of the three major towns, plus the cost of maintaining the new characters named and skills gained by existing characters, about 2,000 gold. Next turn the deficit would be 23,000 gold against a treasury of perhaps 59,000 gold. In a couple more turns the treasury runs out, but the costs remain!

The Witch-King cannot use his troops fast enough to reduce his deficit, because the the faster he uses them the more he must recruit to replace them. He and his surrounding enemies are in a recruiting race in which he cannot afford to falter even as he nearly cannot afford to pay his troops!

The typical WK solution is to raise taxes, not just to the 60% level that most nations favor, but much higher. His tax base is so great that that each increase of 10% brings him an additional 4,500 gold. So a 60% tax rate increases his income by 9,000 gold, but an increase to 80% brings an extra 9,000 gold after that, for a total of 18,000. Since he knows he will be losing population centers and will not be allowed to long keep whatever he may conquer, the WK usually raises rates to at least 80%; I myself usually go all the way to 90% or 95% -- in for a penny, in for a pound. He has high-ranking commanders who can raise the taxes to any amount, and he can afford to do this because there are fortifications at every starting WK population center, which will protect them against degrading.

Suppose taxes are raised to 80%. The capital loyalty on average drops from 75% to a mere 55%. This is one reason why his capital is vulnerable to threat by the Arthedain commander. Of course, in the games where this plan has worked, I don't know what the WK tax rate or capital loyalty was. But both times the capital



The Black Riders - from the forthcoming Lord of the Rings film

who's who

A look at the major characters in the LOTR: #1 Aragorn

Aliases: Elfstone, Strider, Longshanks, Wingfoot, Elessar, Thorongil, Estel, Telcontar, The Dunedan, the Renewer, Isildur's Heir

Date of Birth: TA 2931

Race: Man of Gondor, of Isildur's Line

Height: Tall

Date of Death: FO 120

Parents: Arathorn, Gilraen

Spouse: Arwen Evenstar

Date of Marriage: TA 3019

Children: Eldarion, and several daughters

Physical description

Ruddy good looks, with a noble appearance. Long black hair, flecked with gray. Described as being quite tall.



Biography

Aragorn led the Fellowship after Gandalf's fall into Moria as far as Parth Galen. Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas then turned toward Isengard in pursuit of the band of orcs that had captured Merry and Pippin. After meeting up with Gandalf again, seeing the destruction of Isengard, and finding Merry and Pippin safe, Aragorn then made for the Paths of the Dead because of what he saw in the Palantir.

Once he emerged from the Paths of the Dead, he arrived in Gondor with a large army of men, and turned the tide of the battle of the Pelennor Fields. Soon after, He was Captain of the Army of the West, which rode forth to challenge Sauron. After the War of the Ring, Aragorn was crowned king of the reunited kingdom, and wed Arwen Evenstar. During his reign, he restored peace to the land, and extended its borders. Aragorn met and instantly fell in love with Arwen when he was twenty years old, but Elrond would not permit a wedding until he had reclaimed his throne.

was left at a major town, and a command rank of 110 is nothing to sneeze at when it comes to threatening; perhaps it would work even if taxes were not raised.

An indirect gain from such a blow to the WK is that Rhudaur, which is probably sitting tight for a few turns to see which way the wind blows, will be much less willing to join the Dark if the Witch-King capital has fallen by turn three or four!

One minor addition. On the turn after threatening 1804, it is usually a good idea for the Arthedain commander to issue the order to remove the fortifications. Like all populations in the mountains, 1804 attracts dragons that lower its loyalty and make it vulnerable to enemy emissaries. You want to ensure that if a Dark Servant regains this major town, that it will be more easily crushed in the future. In fact, the WK may even send one of his armies to try to take it back. Although removing the fortifications may seem

to make it easier for the WK to retake the location, the WK -- like the Arthedain -- has strong commanders and command artifacts and would most likely be able to threaten the population center back. Without its fort, it is much easier to deal with. And if the WK does simply capture, it is now a town with no fortifications and quite easily dealt with.

What are the WK armies doing during this time? Usually on turn one they have launched themselves either at Arthedain or at Cardolan. This can draw either Free nation into the second classic mistake, getting distracted into spending too much effort on defense. By keeping a navy at his secondary major town at 1614, the Cardolan has some insurance against a threat by an invading army. Both players if aggressive can send out blocking armies to defend their capitals, reducing the WK to raiding smaller population centers. These can be retaken after the WK capital is dealt with -- just as all of Samson's works could be undone once he lost his hair.



What's in a Name?

by Richard Devereux

One area of Middle-earth where you can have a lot of fun is in naming your new characters. Many players do not pay enough attention to this. I've seen Elves called Sunbeam, Moonbeam etc. And the number of times I've come across agents called James Bond, Moneypenny etc... Yawn.

There are several ways to name your new characters without being so mindnumbingly boring. The most obvious way is to use authentic names: consult the index or glossary at the back of any of Tolkien's works, or indeed any of the ICE sourcebooks.

If you don't have access to any of these books, you can still stay "in character" by juggling the syllables of your starting characters. Take Elrond, Glorfindel and Gildor; swap them around, and you can get Gilrond, Elfindel, Gilfindel, Gilfindor etc. You want female characters (and who doesn't)? Use -wen or - (r)iel or -(r)odel as a suffix, eg, Gilwen, Eldriel, Gilrodel.

If you play one of the Gondors or Arthedain, there are plenty of Dunedain names in the books mentioned above. Tolkien's other Mannish nations generally use Germanic names. It is easy to find good evocative names in history books. Try Viking/Rus names for Northerners: Erik Bloodaxe, Sweyn Forkbeard, Aud the Deep-Minded, Vladimir or Sviatoslav. Eothraim/Woodmen should be more German than Norse: Siegfried, Brunhilde, Alaric, Ragnhild, Otto etc. Dwarf names can be a lot of fun. Apart from Snow White, Dopey, Sneezy, etc (yes it HAS been done, many times), many of Tolkien's Dwarf names rhyme or alliterate: Dain and Gain (so you could have Pain or even Migraine); Gloin and Groin (yes, Groin is a legitimate name, surely one not to be missed!)

If you play one of the neutrals, your legitimate choice of names is much wider. For example, why nor make the Dunlendings Celts; then you can have Boudicca, Cuchulain and Merlin to name but three!

As Harad, you could have Harun-al-Rashid, Aladdin, and Sinbad. Corsairs (if you want to take a lot of liberties) might include Blackbeard, Long John Silver, Hook, etc.

Easterlings opens up a whole vista of names derived from Russia, the Middle East, India and/or the Orient (you can justify drawing on all these sources because Tolkien did say the Easterlings were a loose confederation of diverse tribes). Amongst your commanders you might have Chingiz Khan and Sun Tzu; your emissaries, Karl Marx and Mao Tse-Tung; your mages, Fu Manchu and Confucius, and your agents... well you don't really want their names known anyway, do you.

It's when you come to the Dark Servants that you can really let your imagination run riot. Generally, any Oribul name will do. You can choose the most Ideous, Orful, de Skusting names and get away with it. I can't resist suggesting a few names for Dog Lord characters: Beau Wow, Lassie, Saliva, Rabies, Pitbull; and the first camps you create MUST be Battersea, Barking and Baskerville!

I've come across quite a few players who name their characters after a particular sci-fi series. I've seen Luke Skywalker, Chewbacca, Blake's Seven and the Star Trek crew, not to mention Zaphod Beeblebrox and Ford Prefect. I assume these guys must be able to travel thru time as well as space!

Finally, when naming your characters, be cunning. If a character called Killer / Chopper / Eviscerator / Terminator shows up on a pop centre, it doesn't take much to work out that he's an assassin. I know one player who went to the other extreme and gave his characters names like Fluffy Cuddles!

So, there really is something to be gained by choosing genuine Tolkien names; if Arwen or Legolas show up on your pop for the first time, you don't know what they can do!

I hope this encourages players to use their imagination when naming characters. However you name them, have fun!

tolkien: a Biography

John Ronald Reul Tolkien, creator of Middle-earth and author of *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and the *Silmarillion* was born in the town of Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State, where his father, Arthur, had moved to take up a senior position with a bank. In early 1895 his mother, Mabel, returned to England with Ronald and his younger brother, Hilary, exhausted by the climate. After Arthur's death from rheumatic fever, the family made their home in Sarehole, near Birmingham. This beautiful rural area made a great impression on the young Ronald, and its effect can be seen in his later writing and his pictures. Mabel died in 1904, leaving the boys to the care of Father Francis Morgan, a priest at the Birmingham Oratory. At King Edward's School, Ronald was taught Classics, Anglo-Saxon and middle English. He had great linguistic talent, and after studying old Welsh and Finnish he started to invent his own 'Elvish' languages.

1914 saw the outbreak of the First World War. Ronald was in his final year at Exeter College, Oxford: he graduated the following year with a first in English Language and Literature and at once took up his commission as a second lieutenant in the Lancashire Fusiliers. Before embarking for France in June 1916, he married his childhood sweetheart Edith Bratt. Tolkien survived the Battle of the Somme, where two of his three closest friends were killed, but later that year he was struck down by trench fever and invalided back to England.

The years after the Great War were devoted to his work as academic: as a Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, where he was soon to prove himself one of the finest philologists in the world. He had already started to write a great cycle of the myths and legends of Middle-earth which was to become *The Silmarillion*. He and Edith had four children and it was to them that he first told the tale of *The Hobbit*, published in 1937 by Sir Stanley Unwin. *The Hobbit* proved to be so successful that Sir Stanley was soon asking for a sequel: but it was not until 1954, when Tolkien was approaching retirement, that the first volume of his masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings*, was published, and its terrific success took him by surprise.

After retirement Ronald and Edith moved to Bournemouth but when Edith died in 1971, Ronald returned to Oxford. He died after a brief illness on 2nd September 1973, leaving his great mythological work, *The Silmarillion*, to be edited for publication by his son Christopher.

An International Challenge!

The story of (US) game 42

by Rob Pegg

It started out as an international challenge match set in the 4th Age, for maximum customisation. The US fielded a team (who boasted very early on that they were more or less unbeatable), Canada another, with the UK left to pick up the third slot. I use UK loosely, as it turned into more of a European affair, with Thor (from Norway) and Guenter Schmidt (Germany) playing leading roles. After the US and Canada both refused to contemplate taking the neutral position we were more or less obliged to do so, but did manage to get some compensation, mostly in regard to initial positioning. A standard fourth age set up ensued, but all teams were limited to the number of nations that could have the - far too useful - '+20 to assassinate/kidnap' Special Nation Ability.

The Free (Canada) centred their activities around the North West and the North Kingdom, the DS (USA) spread through Gondor, Northern Mordor, Mirkwood and into the North East. Our set up concentrated on southern Mordor, Corsair country and the far South East, with one lone player in Mirkwood. Mostly very safe, and left us really only the one enemy to face: the DS.

The initial positioning set the tone for the whole game, and inevitably it was the DS that suffered the most, being caught in the middle. Despite this they fought ferociously well and succeeded in knocking out one of our team, and causing serious damage elsewhere. Eventually however, the strains of a two front war began to tell on them and we began to make some serious inroads. It was at this stage whilst sending agents into the South Kingdom capital that we came across a very large bunch of free emissaries - and no standing South Kingdom army to prevent emissary action. After already hearing rumours of strategic population centres falling, it became instantly obvious that the free were on the brink of a pop centre victory. A quick flurry of correspondence to

the DS confirmed this, and we agreed, after much negotiation, to put our hatred for the DS aside temporarily and co-ordinate our efforts against the free.

The DS were very much the weaker side at this point, and as a condition of our agreement had to surrender a number of captured pop centres and associated swathes of territory. They were willing to oblige, and the juggernaut that was our combined forces began its unstoppable progress into the lands of the free. Aside from a couple of very tense turns at the beginning when the free actually had sufficient strategic pop centres to win the game, but fortunately never all with the same nation, it was all one way from there on in. Our glorious leader (aka Dave Tomley) proposed at this point a pop centre victory for ourselves, and, after a lot of discussion (I, for one, wanted to simply steamroller the free into the sea...), we all agreed. A couple of minor hiccups later (such as people getting so enthusiastic about receiving pop centres that they forgot that their characters had movement limits...) and we had won the game. Sixteen months and 35 turns after the US team had proclaimed victory as a foregone conclusion and we had made them eat their words. Very satisfying it was too.

A special thanks to all my teammates who turned the game into such an enjoyable one. Aside from those mentioned above these were: Gavin Kenny (who played our team assassin to such perfection), Paul Crowhurst, Duncan Harris, Gary (who didn't have e-mail, but played and negotiated through Dave Tomley), and of course Neil Rudd (who was forced to drop half way through). I recommend a 3 way challenge match to just about anyone: it proved to be the most exciting game of Middle Earth I have taken part in to date, and the random element of the 4th Age set up added immeasurably to the game. So much so in fact that I have recently started another, this time through Harlequin...



Diplomatic Language

by Richard Devereux

Having played Middle-earth for several years now, I've come across quite a few expressions which don't necessarily mean what they say. It's called being diplomatic. But here, for your amusement, are some of those expressions, and what they REALLY mean:

- 1) I suggest = do as I say.
- 2) I respectfully suggest = do as I say, you bloody idiot!
- 3) We should = the rest of you should
- 4) In my humble opinion = I know better than any of you
- 5) Can anybody help? = I'm in deep shit.
- 6) We've slipped up here = YOU fouled up you @&***! idiot!
- 7) Consider this = this is my masterplan, do wot I say!
- 8) If you had done as I suggested = it's your fault we're losing
- 9) We need better teamwork = I need more help from you lazy b@\$\$\$&***\$!
- 10) I told you this in a previous email = why the hell don't you read your emails?
- 11) GSI/Harlequin/MoS/Bobbin says = I'm covering my arse.
- 12) My friend = you idiot with whom I have the misfortune to be saddled
- 13) The rulebook is unclear/ambiguous = I'm too thick to understand the rulebook
- 14) GSI/Harlequin fouled up my orders = I fouled up my orders (typo due to tiredness/pissed/drugs/women etc)
- 15) Outrageous bad luck = I gambled and lost
- 16) A bit of well-deserved good luck = I got away with an outrageous gamble
- 17) I'm really pissed off = I'm losing
- 18) I think we can turn this game around = we're losing
- 19) C'mon guys, let's get stuck in = we're losing
- 20) The other team are cheating = we're losing
- 21) I'm considering dropping = we're losing.

Downfall Diplomacy

Play this Diplomacy variant for Free!

The first game of the Downfall Diplomacy variant has started. For reasons of space we will not, after all, be publishing the turns in News from Bree, but will keep you posted as to how each game progresses.

There is already a waiting list for the next game, so if you'd like to play, please get in touch with Colin (address details below). At present there are another five players wanted for Game 2.

"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. Alternatively the rules can be found by going to

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nerwsfrombree/files/>

Note you will need a Yahoo id, or join up if you haven't already got one. alternatively contact Colin at the above address.



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.

Team play wins out

The story of game 35 continues

by Colin Forbes

Way back in the last century a group of PBM-ers set out from London in a Jaguar, travelling to the woolly wilds of Wales (OK Cardiff), where there took place a whole day of face-to-face Middle Earth. As it turned out, we all enjoyed the game so much that we voted to continue with normal postal turns thereafterwards. However it wasn't so much the face-to-face aspect which made Middle Earth game 35 remarkable, rather it was the intense teamwork, both on the day and afterwards by more conventional means. This is the story of that game ...

Opening Gambits

The Harlequin House proved to be a friendly place (replete with coffee), and it wasn't long before we had sorted ourselves out into teams and were studying our initial turns. In the 1650 scenario of Middle Earth, the initial turn is crucial to the success of the team as a whole, so proper planning is called for. Unfortunately we only had about an hour before turns were due in! Fortunately one of our number had gone to the trouble of preparing one of the splendid colour maps you get with the game, marking up all the starting population centres so we could see what was where and plan accordingly. For the benefit of those that know the game, I should say at this point that there were no neutral nations, all neutral starting pop centres (and some armies) being apportioned out between the two teams in a pre-arranged manner.

I was on the Free Peoples team, playing two positions: South Gondor and the Dwarves. As chance had it, I had played both of these positions a couple of times before, so had a good idea what to do - and a few wild ideas that I hadn't tried before! Looking at the situation from the point of view of South Gondor, it was agreed that I would not use the usual move of sending the fleet up-river to the front line against Mordor, but would send it south to attack the enemy holdings in Harad. As the Dwarves, I decided to adopt a rather radical approach, namely to boost the tax rate as high as I possibly could, and use this to fund additional recruitment.

In the mines of the Dwarves ...

To begin with I must admit that I was pretty lucky with my Dwarven position. My best commander started at my capital, giving me a really good chance of trying the planned taxation scam. Better still one of my starting artefacts was better than normal (there is a chance of a small increase or decrease in power with each game set-up).

By turn 3 battle was joined with the enemy, with Dwarven armies turning up on the Dragon Lord holdings in the Misty Mountains, whilst my allies launched a pre-emptive strike against the mighty fortress of Dol Guldor - the idea being not to take the place by storm, but merely to stop the enemy recruiting armies which might end up attracting dragons in a few turns. This tactic continued until turn 6, by which time a grand alliance of Dwarves, Elves, Woodmen and Gondorians had combined to drive the evil from Mirkwood once and for all.

Whilst co-operation on this scale is not unusual in Middle Earth (which is after all, a team game) I

have to say that playing face-to-face made teamwork much easier. That said the stress levels were immense, since on average we have three quarters of an hour between receiving our turns and the next set of orders being due!

War at Sea ...

Whilst the Dwarves were not really doing anything too unusual, the nature of the changed set-up meant that South Gondor would have to tear up the manual as far as tactics were concerned!

In a regular game of the 1650 scenario, South Gondor's neighbours in Harad start the game with no allegiance, i.e. neutral, but in this game their population centres - and some of their armies - had been given to the enemy. Team discussions prior to gamestart agreed that instead of following the usual South Gondorian tactics of charging up to the East gate of Mordor, I should gather my fleets together and send everything into Northern Harad. This was a slightly high risk strategy, in that the enemy had a chance of intercepting my fleet and doing some nasty damage before I could actually land the troops!

I was aided in this endeavor by the Sinda, with whom I was able to work out a complicated movement pattern across the sea - which would have been a total headache to arrange over the phone or discuss via email, but which took a matter of moments with us both poring over a map. As it happened though the enemy seemed strangely immobile and the planning was wasted: but it is always best to assume your enemy is at least as clever as you are, even if he isn't!

As things worked out then, I was able to land the troops and even had the unexpected chance to split off my warships from the main fleet and sail off in search of a fight. It didn't take long to find one, for just off the coast of Southern Harad I tracked the enemy down at last. There followed a huge slice of luck, when I won the battle with a mere one transport remaining. A few extra points of damage and I would have not only lost all my ships, but worse my best commander, an agent and several artefacts!

The end of a long day

As it turned out things went very well for us on the day. Never, in fact, have I been part of a team which has enjoyed such a blinding start to a game of Middle Earth! Much of this success must surely be put down to the fact that my team all knew each other fairly well, whilst the opposition were clearly less organised. By the end of the day's play South Gondor owned much of northern Harad, whilst the Dwarves had some huge armies and were enjoying a great deal of fun and games frustrating the Witch King.

It's a fairly open secret that Middle Earth is my favourite PBM, but even so I have to say I have not enjoyed playing a game (and I include face-to-face board games) as much as this for a very long time. Whilst it was all a bit frantic, not least for the poor Harlequin GMs, I really recommend this as an enjoyable gaming experience. Whilst I appreciate that many games are difficult to run in this way, I really would encourage GMs to consider giving it a try.

Next Issue: The story continues ...

stand-by positions

I have drop-out positions available - don't forget you get a free turn taking these up!

E = 0-10 turn, M = 11-25, L = 26+

1000: 2 Nations (E)

2950: 22 (E)

1650: 24 (M)



sheLOBs web MEPBM on the Net

MEPBM List and Message Boards: These are mailing lists set up by MEPBM Games for the use of players to discuss any aspect of the games they play. You can send proclamations to other players, insults, questions about game mechanics - it's a bit like a newsletter. We're also supporting the MEPBM board, try it out at: www.MiddleEarthGames.com

You can also subscribe directly by going to www.yahogroups.com and following the instructions setting up an account to the "mepbmlist".

Bobbins Site

An excellent player-run website. Kevin's pulled together all the strategy guides he could lay his hands on for every nation in the game. Useful for a beginner (and for anyone playing against the people who wrote the articles!) There's an exhaustive set of Game Date, including lists of starting characters for all nations and all the artifacts. The site has recently been updated to include loads more 2950 data.

www.middleearthpbm.co.uk



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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Hall of Fame

Game winners and losers: what DID happen anyway?

Game 111 (2590)

A win for the Dark Servants - with all 5 Neutrals on their side, the Duns (run by Darren Comeaux), Corsairs 2nd (Allan Champine) and Eric Burdyshaw (Dk Lieu). No losses to the DS... :-)

Game 52 (1650)

This game just finished today, with a win for the Free People on turn 16. The top 3 nations: Eothraim at 1400 VP, Haradwaith at 1375 VP, Corsairs at 1367 VP. Of the neutrals Rhudaur stayed neutral the whole game, but managed to take out Cardolan on his own (Arthedain(me) was busy with the Witch King at the time :). The rest had joined, or was joining, the Free People. Most of them complained about a lack of response from the Dark Servants, and also heard little or nothing from them during the game, which made recruiting them for the Free People easy. Not sure how many we took out, but at least the Witch King and Blind Sorcerer was in the game, the WK being down to 2305 as his MT left, which was under siege by the Dwarves while waiting for enough forces to capture it. So a big thanks to all in this game, and a very big one to Michael Kamine for his excellent play as Eothraim :)

Game 19 (1650)

The game started with early dominance from the Free, who blasted their way into the heart of Mordor with large armies and pretty much had the run of the military game, with the Witch King out of Angmar and the Dragon Lord out of Mirkwood. However, in the far deserts, the three Neutrals and the southern Dark Servants were playing a game of brinkmanship, leading eventually to a realisation that the game would end in a Free victory unless all three neutrals went Dark.

Rhudaur had also joined Sauron and only the Dunlendings went Free. This 4 to 1 imbalance started to overturn the supremacy of the Free, with agent, emissary and curse teams recovering property lost earlier. Eventually the minions of Mordor overwhelmed the resistance and victory went to the Dark Lieutenants played by DS team leader Kevin o'Keefe.

If anyone would like to publish a report on a particular game (winners and losers all welcome) then please feel free to do so. Naturally if you disagree with a report you see published in Hall of Fame, by all means write in and give us your version of events!



From out of the West

Latest News from MEPBM Games!

Good to see Bree out so quickly again. Lots of things to tell you all about: The Message Board is now up and running. With the problems we have been having with the DGE board we have created our own:

www.MiddleEarthGames.com

will get you to it - you need to create an account first, log in and then you can post messages. It's still very basic but as time goes on we'll be adding new bits and pieces and making it look nicer as time goes on. If you get any problems please get in touch and we'll sort them out for you.

Salute 2001

This was an interesting convention. Our first major Wargame convention since "Fiasco" a few years ago now. We got a few new players, but most interesting was chatting to one of the old GAD Games GMs (the UK company that first run Middle Earth). So he's started playing again now. The convention itself was very good and well worth attending. Thanks to all the players who came up and chatted. Stu reckons that Wargamers are the international constant. :-) Pubmeet to be done in Reading in around 4 months time - watch this (or a similar) space. We are still hoping to go to Copenhagen for a weekend there but time is short at present to organise all that.

Stu to Stay!

The best of news for all concerned is that we have an extension on Stu's visa - so he's with us for another 6 months. Thanks to all who provided positive comments there.. :-)

Scenarios

The Last Alliance scenario is now out (a few little things sorted out) and so we're now looking to see how that will all go. Lot of work for all concerned - so especial thanks to Richard Devereux (player) and Ed (GM) for all their hard graft there. Next we'll start work on Kim Andersen's "All v All" 23 nation game - any takers?

A motto ...

That should about cover it all for now - is there anything that you want to see in Bree? More spot colour? Looks very nice at present. I am hoping to get out a questionnaire with next issue so if there is anything that you would particularly like to see in that then please get in touch so that I can consider it. We're trying to work on a motto to use:

"Good gaming" is very much Stu's, "Have fun and Make it fun for others" is a bit Legendsy, "Today's work done tomorrow" :-) (So if you can think of something catchy and better that would be cool!)

Clint

Middle Earth
PBM Games

