

News From Bree

Middle Earth PBCD Newsletter - Issue 10, July '01

"Strange as News
from Bree..."

The Lord of the Rings, chapter 9

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To Woo a Neutral

by Richard Devereux

Whichever Middle-earth scenario I play, I *always* do my utmost to woo the neutrals, and here are some of my thoughts on the subject.

General or Individual?

Make sure that at least one person on your team communicates with each neutral. Logically, aligned nations should talk to the neutral closest to them. The Easterlings are much more likely to listen to the Northmen than to Noldo, and to Cloud Lord rather than Witch-king. Having said that, most teams contain some players who can't or won't engage in diplomacy. In that case, your team must find others to fill the gaps.

Alternatively, your team could decide that one player handles all the diplomacy with neutrals. This is usually the guy who says, 'I'll do a newsletter and send an edited version to the neutrals.' You may think how lucky your team is to have such a player (especially if you are the masochist doing it!) but, my feeling is that neutrals respond more favourably when given individual attention.

Consider the reaction of an experienced neutral player. He receives a circular from one team, copied to all neutrals. From the other team he receives 1-3 personalised messages. If I were that neutral, I would respond more favourably to the personalised messages than to a circular. Consider also that any neutral player worth his salt will talk to the other neutrals, so he KNOWS if one team is sending out a circular, and the other team individual messages.

How can I help you?

Your first diplo to any neutral should ask, what do you want out of this game? It is not enough to offer open-ended bribes. An experienced neutral player will look to join a well-organised and well-coordinated team where he will be welcomed and valued as a team member, not just as a banker and/or source of armies.

There was a time when diplomatic overtures to neutrals involved little more than bribing with artifacts and/or pops. However it wasn't long before players of the aligned nations woke up to the fact that Corsairs and Harad at least did not need more pops, and were quite powerful enough without giving them artifacts!

When talking to neutrals, you need to put yourself in their shoes. They want to know what your allegiance can give them. They know damn well what they can give to you! Experienced neutral players value good team play and game balance above bribes. There can be conflict here. In a recent game as DS, our diplomacy quickly won two neutrals to our side. A third neutral was predisposed to the FP and the fourth didn't want to talk to anybody so we thought 'stuff 'im' and pencilled him in as an enemy. We concentrated our diplomatic efforts on the fifth, but despite all our efforts at persuasion, and his own

admission that we had communicated better than the FP, he joined the FP in the interests of what he perceived as game balance. Therefore, even superior diplomacy doesn't always win you all the allies you want or deserve!

Do's and Don't's

Do make sure that at least one person on your team corresponds with each neutral unless/until that neutral is inevitably lost to your cause (or even later if you can thereby feed him false info). Don't make unprovoked attacks on neutrals. Not only do you make an enemy of that neutral, you upset all the others who wonder if they might be next! Don't threaten neutrals. It might sometimes work in real life for big nations/alliances to threaten small ones, but Middle-earth is only a game. Nothing is more likely to drive a neutral into the arms of the enemy than saying to him, 'join us or we'll beat you up.' Do individualise your dipo. If you are playing the Witch-king, you *need* Rhudaur and can afford to give him half a dozen artifacts if he will join the DS. But offering arts to Harad/Corsairs who are already hugely powerful is just stupid. Don't ignore any neutral. If you do, chances are he will join the opposition even if they send him just one diplo.

What do Neutrals' want?

Neutrals want a good game above all. Convince them that your team will give them that! Neutrals want a well-balanced game, so if they see 3 neutrals go one way, they will go the other way, to preserve balance. Not much you can do about that except try your hardest for the neutrals you need the most. Neutrals want to be left alone for 5-10 turns so they can build up without being attacked, and weigh up their options. How you react to this depends on individual circumstances; eg Witch-king usually *needs* Rhudaur's help at the earliest possible moment, but few other neutrals should need to be pressurised by either side early on. Neutrals don't want a bundle of artifacts, altho few would say no the odd one or two. Rhudaur is a possible exception, needing all the help he can get whichever side he joins. If a neutral says he wants 10 artifacts because it's a victory condition (as a certain White Wizard did recently) you know he's probably an amateur and not a team player, and deal with him accordingly. If you're desperate, you give him the 10 arts; if not (say you've already won 2-3 other neutrals to your side) you get ready to thump him (sweet-talking him all the time until you are ready to do so!). Neutrals may want a backup capital of the price of joining your allegiance. If it's Rhudaur, Easterlings or Dunlendings, it may be worth your while to pay this price. If it's Harad or Corsairs you know they are taking the mickey!

Of course the above are generalisations and there are exceptions to every rule. If however this article has helped any readers in their dealings with neutrals, or when playing neutrals, it has served its purpose

*new
games*

T.A. 1650

[Game 83]

Nations available (2 week): 2, 6, 16, 25 *Clint playing*

[Game 130]

(1week): Send me a list of nations - when I get to 25 players I will allocate positions.

T.A. 2950

[Game 221]

Nations available: (2 week) Available: 5, 8, 11-13, 15-18, 20 (1 any DS)

F.A. 1000

[Game 46]

Filling LAS or NKA (Limited Assassination - No Kidnap Assassination): We need: 8 players

Grudge Games

1650: 1 twelve player team (looking for FP opposition). 2 World Champ games

2950: 1 Any Alignment (1wk only)

1000: 1 twelve player team (any align)

World Championship

1650: Two World Championship games



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Special Nation Abilities

Fourth Age Options to Avoid

by Jeremy Richman

There are several nation abilities in Fourth-Age Middle-earth that may appear to give a good return for the investment in SNA points but in truth are not worthwhile to take, in terms of their practical value. In this article I will survey these SNA's and attempt to convince you that they are not worth taking.

I. Naval Special Nation Abilities

Consider the SNA's for building ships for 1/2 timber, or for starting with warship strength of 4 or even 5.

All three of these are best replaced by simply putting their cost into starting the game with more ships.

Remember, that for 1000 SNA built-points you can start with 4 ships.

For example, which would you rather have, for the cost of 2000 points: (1) the ability to create ships for 1/2 timber or (2) 8 extra ships at the start of the game? Suppose you choose the SNA. If you use 6000 timber you can build 8 ships; but without the SNA you could build 4 ships, added to the extra 8 you start with still puts you ahead at 12 ships. In fact, in order to make the SNA break even you would have to use 12000 timber to build 16 ships, which would exactly equal the building of 8 ships without the SNA plus the 8 starting ships. Even then, you have not really broken even because without the SNA you would have had the advantage of the 8 extra ships from the start of the game. Further, 12000 timber is more timber than most nations see during the entire game!

Now look at the SNA for having warships with strength 5, which costs 3000 points. For that same 3000, why not start with 12 extra warships! 12 extra warships at the normal strength of 3 means 36 extra points of offense. If you took the SNA for warships at strength 5, you would have to start with 18 warships to get an extra 36 offense from that SNA. And that doesn't even count that the extra 12 warships pads your navy's constitution by 36 points of

defense; more warship strength doesn't do that! (And as long as you are taking 12 extra warships instead, why not make it 10 extra warships and 2 more transports, to enable an even larger armada?).

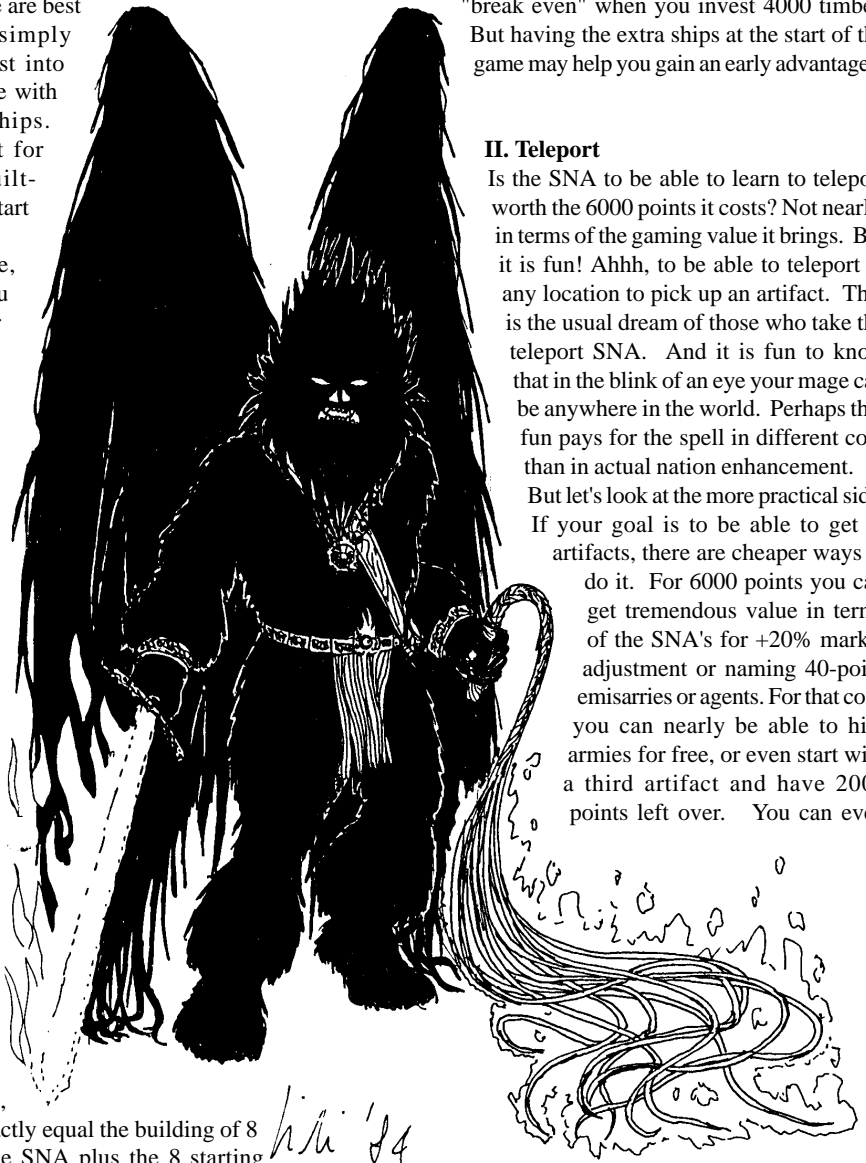
A similar argument applies to taking warships at strength 4 for 2000 points. Only the Elvish ability to create ships for 1/3 timber costing 2000 points might be worthwhile. Then you are trading 8 starting ships for being able to create those 8 ships for 4000 timber, and then many more for 1/3 timber; with this ability you "break even" when you invest 4000 timber. But having the extra ships at the start of the game may help you gain an early advantage...

II. Teleport

Is the SNA to be able to learn to teleport worth the 6000 points it costs? Not nearly, in terms of the gaming value it brings. But it is fun! Ahhh, to be able to teleport to any location to pick up an artifact. That is the usual dream of those who take the teleport SNA. And it is fun to know that in the blink of an eye your mage can be anywhere in the world. Perhaps that fun pays for the spell in different coin than in actual nation enhancement.

But let's look at the more practical side.

If your goal is to be able to get to artifacts, there are cheaper ways to do it. For 6000 points you can get tremendous value in terms of the SNA's for +20% market adjustment or naming 40-point emisaries or agents. For that cost, you can nearly be able to hire armies for free, or even start with a third artifact and have 2000 points left over. You can even



start with 30 war machines and be sure of taking any population center, even with a fort.

And what is the return for teleportation? It lets you get to faraway places more quickly, presumably artifact locations. There are three reasons why this is not so important:

1 Speed is not of the essence. All artifact numbers are randomized, so each side only knows the numbers of those they start with and those that are their victory conditions. The rest they must research laboriously over time. As a general likelihood, if you are a Free People, then the Dark Servants and neutral nations

who's who

A look at the major characters in the LOTR: #2 Frodo

Aliases: The Ringbearer
Date of Birth: Sept 22, 2968 T.A.
Race: Hobbit (Harfoot.Fallohide)
Height: 3-4 feet
Date of Death: Unknown
Parents: Drogo Baggins and Primula Brandybuck
Spouse: None
Date of Marriage: N/A
Children: none

Physical description: As hobbits go, Frodo was of medium height, with thick brown curly hair. He was not as fat as most hobbits. The Fallohide in him made him lighter skinned than a full-blooded Harfoot.



Biography: Frodo was the only son of Drogo Baggins and Primula Brandybuck. His parents both died in the year 2980, so he was adopted by his cousin Bilbo Baggins, the wealthy bachelor. Upon Frodo's coming of age, Bilbo parted from the Shire, and left nearly all of his worldly belongings, including Bag End, to Frodo. In 3018, Frodo travelled to Rivendell under the name Mr. Underhill to escape pursuit of Sauron's forces. Along the way he received a near deadly blow from a Morgul knife dealt by a Nazgul. In Rivendell, he volunteered to destroy the Ring in Mordor. 8 companions were chosen to accompany him on his quest. He had many heroic adventures with and without the Fellowship before he finally reached The Cracks of Doom, where at the moment of truth, he claimed the Ring for himself. Shortly thereafter he was overtaken by Gollum, who during a fight for the Ring, bit off Frodo's finger, and fell himself into the fire. After the War of the Ring, Frodo was, for a while, mayor of Michel Delving, but constantly feeling dejected and unfulfilled, sailed over the sea with Gandalf and Bilbo.

will not be racing you to good-aligned artifacts. So the race is only to neutral artifacts, and even then, only those that they also have the location of and only ones that they learned the location of at the same time that you did; or rather, that you both go after at the same time. How many of those will be out of normal movement range from you, particularly if you have a mage that has Fast Stride or Path Mastery?

2. In most though not all Fourth-Age games, those of your allegiance will become your allies early on. There's a good chance that one of these might can send a character after an artifact nearer them to you; let that ally help out the team by getting the artifact for you -- then give them something in return for that effort and for giving you the artifact.
3. Artifact retrieval is dangerous to the characters involved. There are sometimes spirits guarding artifacts; these spirits can usually be bested by a powerful mage who has a combat or mage artifact. But there are also sometimes wights with the spirits, and then even a character with a high challenge is often killed. As the Dragon Lord in a 1650 scenario, I had Orduclax stacked with artifacts with a 109 challenge rank killed by these wights. They can be very tough to beat. In one of my Fourth-Age games, one of my allies lost two 50-rank mages, carrying artifacts, to these wights. A mage that continually seeks artifacts will sooner or later be killed, and even lose the artifacts they were carrying at the time, which is incredibly painful and demoralizing. That is why it is good practice, once the game is well underway and each character isn't so precious, to visit artifact locations with newly created expendable characters such as a 30-rank commander or agent or emissary. If the character finds an encounter, they investigate it. If they find a riddle, they answer and get the artifact. If they encounter spirits with or without wights, the expendable character is usually killed; but once you know for sure there are only spirits and no wights, you can send in a tougher character. If wights are present, then you leave the place alone unless you have been able to build a really tough character. The other result is that the expendable characters finds nothing to investigate, in which case you then can send in a mage to try a find artifact order. This method of hunting artifacts makes the use of teleport moot, since the expendable character cannot teleport to make the initial investigation.

If you are determined to get the jump on artifacts and gamble your mages, why not place your nation more centrally and start with a mage who has Fast Stride and learns Path Mastery and Capital Return? From most central locations, 95% of the world is two hops away using Path Mastery, and Capital Return is the same as teleport when you are coming home.

Realistically, how many times will you cast teleport where time was of the essence and that artifact was 14 hexes away. Is that worth being able to get 20% extra on every single market transaction? Most players sell one or two commodities every single turn.

III Dark Servant Lost List Spells

Fearful Hearts and Fanaticism must be the most under-used spells in the game, in any scenario.

Compare either of these SNA's, each costing 3000, to the SNA for naming 40-rank commanders, one of

the highest return-on-investment SNA's available. I would sooner take the Challenge Rank bonus SNA for 2000 and use the remaining 1000 for war machines or ships.

Just to be clear here, the effect of the Fearful Hearts is to reduce the enemy offensive strength by 2.5% - 5% for the current turn. If your enemy has 1000 HC, say the offense is perhaps 8000, so your Fearful Hearts spell reduces that by an average of 320 points, which is less than 5%. Compare that to casting a defensive spell of equivalent difficulty such as Blessings which takes off 1250 from the enemy strength! Admittedly the Blessings spell is a one-shot; it only helps in the first round of combat, whereas the Fearful Hearts spell reduces the enemy strength for every round of combat. (The rulebook isn't clear, but the effects of the spell may even persist for the whole turn, so that it's effectiveness would continue even if the enemy army is victorious in battle and in the same turn tries to capture the population center.) However, despite this counter-argument the fact remains that you can have the quite effective Blessing spell without paying 3000 for an SNA.

The Fanaticism spell increases your army offense by 1.25% to almost 4%. Going back to that army of 1000 HC with an offense of about 8000, my casting of Fanaticism will increase my offense by an average of 240. Compare that with an average offensive spell such as Fire Bolts that causes 1000 points of additional damage. Admittedly this too is in the first round only, compared with the effects of Fanaticism which lasts the entire battle and possibly through the popcenter assault if there were one. But this counter-argument hardly carries the day against the difference in offensive value of the two spells plus the SNA cost of being able to cast Fanaticism.

As armies get larger, these lost list spells do become more effective. With really huge armies they can outpace the regular Blessing and Fire Bolts spells whose effectiveness drops away when 3000HC face 5000HI in a titanic 5-round combat. However, by such time as these armies appear in a Fourth-Age game, the mages can have learned hard spells such do more like 1750 points of offense or defense.

IV. Build fortifications at 1/2 timber.

This in my opinion is more debatable than the other SNA's I've reviewed so far. I have seen this SNA used effectively, usually by players who have an unfortified town that they rapidly fortify to a fort or castle and even improve. But most often I have seen the player who chose this SNA make little use of it except perhaps to build a tower or two which is just a minor timber savings. Just how many fortifications do you have to build in order for this to be worth 4000? I've gotten this for free as a Kingdom nation and still rarely used it. FA is just too fast-paced for fortifications. Also, fortifying too much increases your maintenance costs and occupies a commander, and is dangerous as your popcenter can just get emmissaried away from you.

Well there you have it. My advice is to stay away from these deceptively expensive SNA's and stick to the many others that give good value for their costs.



by Michael Peters

Valar forbid. I must have missed this one, but reading Bree 7 has shown me the error of my ways.

My worse moment (that I can remember). In a still running FA game, we moved an agent company to a friend's camp just prior to going into combat. The company had the best agents of 3 nations in it (and in FA, that's a lot of good agents), plus the company commander was from a 4th nation.

The plan was for us to steal from the camp while we did a 930.

But when the turns were to be entered, our friend started getting worried about the amount of money he would lose, so we asked us to sabotage production instead (of which he only have food and some leather). After about a few orders to sabotage production, I felt that the goods would be gone by now (especially as the others were also doing the same order), so I was started thinking about doing something else for my agents.

Being rather lazy, I decided I didn't want to waste the time deciding on what other agent I would do a guard character on, so I did a standard guard location for my best person (that way he was going to go up in skill).

When the turns came out, I had captured the best agent in our side, hurt a lot of others, but DID go up in rank. Doing Guard Loc when my allies are stealing was not a good idea.

I was not a popular person at that moment.



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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It's a Team Game!

The First Principle of ME-PBM

by Brad Brunet

Middle Earth is not represented here as some wonderfully complete fantasy world that you are welcome to explore at your own pace, to your own satisfaction. It is a World War simulator. There are 25 nations at war, each unique and in varying situations at the start. Some are large and powerful, other less developed. Some have bustling economies, others are wealth-poor. Some are led by glorious and powerful characters, others run by the barely competent. But, the strife encompasses all.

Communication and Coordination are absolutely essential to success, and are essential for the duration of the game. Get in touch with your allies. You need them and they need you. Talk with them, share information, plan, and make compromises with them. Get in touch with the neutrals: you need more allies! Talk with them, share information, make compromises, and hopefully, plan with them.

Remember: Both success and failure are shared in this game! As you will quickly learn, your failures bring suffering to those around you. Your victories lead to further victories for your allies. And, vice versa. One nation cannot play off by itself. While

the loner nation is developing and building, the enemy may very well leave it alone, as they feel no threat from it. But the loner's "team" is suffering more than is required as a result, and the loner, when he is ready to emerge from his isolationist stance (if ever) will soon realize that his one powerful nation is no match for the team that he must now face...alone!

Your Account Sheet shows the email addresses of your teammates. Middle Earth Games will send diplomatic messages for you to other nations. There are currently 2 message boards on the internet where you can post messages and find your teammates (or enemies!). Middle Earth Games also moderates an email group that you can join to send messages to the greater ME PBM community. Between all these sources, most teams can find all of their members within hours of their initial set ups arriving! The earlier the better!

Read Rob Gaul's Beginner's Guide to MEPBM, read Middle Earth Games Basic Advice for New Players. Read all the strategy guides, data sheets, internet pages, magazine articles, etc. Read everything you can! (there IS a lot to read...!) But afterwards, even after playing many games, there will be one truly important thing to know: It's a Team Game.



Which Scenario?

by Benjamin Shushan

1650 is the oldest, most-established, most "chess-like" scenario, and tends to be the one "veterans" of the game prefer, based on the "most bang for the buck" theory.

2950 is much "slower starting" (tho' a newbie certainly can get killed off in the early game easily enough ... not paying attention in that damn economics class `_can_` come back to haunt you ...), takes awhile to "get going" (at least, compared to 1650, which is what `_most_` "veteran players" were "weaned on"), and `_some_` people are "less informed" on 2950 startup information (in actuality, there is just as accurate, and detailed, information on 2950 out there to be found ... no harder or easier for the newbie to find ...).

FA is the "random" scenario, and therefore more complicated for the newbie, and either very appealing (new inut!) or unappealing (usually know factors being unknown leads to significantly more "administrative" effort to play "properly;" possible "luck of the draw" relationships that create serious disadvantage, if not outright unplayability) to the veteran. FA also has the disadvantage of being an "agent fest" (in the non-agent-modified scenarios). So, some veterans like it, even more hate it (unmodified - the LAS and NKA variants seem to be attracting the veterans back to FA ... or at least has them considering it again, for the first time in quite awhile).

for newbies, tho' it has the disadvantage of a lower concentration of veterans. The "ideal" way to learn MEPBM, IMHO, would be to play 2950 with some veteran teammates. Not easy to accomplish ... best bet would be as a neut (or "fill-in") player in a 2950 grudge game. Note that this is not a very self-serving thing to point out (given that I like to play 2950 neuts), as it may cause a "run" on neutral positions for 2950 grudge games. Nevertheless, I think 2950 is still the "way to go" compared to 1650 or FA for a newbie, as the early-game difficulty level is lower, and thus one would be more likely to survive ones mistakes than in either of the other 2 scenarios.

As for what I prefer ... probably 1650 grudge games (12 v 12 format). Why? multiple reasons, including all of the "classical chess" type arguments, because of the drawbacks of FA (especially the "agent issues"), and because of the slowness of 2950. Still, I try to be in at least one game of each scenario at a give time (I tend to play alot of games, tho' I have dropped off in "game count" dramatically over the last year, due to a conscious decisions to improve the quality of my play and enjoyment of the games, both of which suffered when game count soared ...). I had sworn off FA altogether, but it's now "back in the mix" now that the agent-limited scenarios are available (currently playing in 1 FA NKA, 1 2950 grudge game, 2 1650 grudge games, and one 1650 "regular" game - albeit the one-week variety, which I prefer, but that's a `_whole_` `_different_` `_topic_` ...).

I think that 2950 is probably the best scenario

SENDING ORDERS

After some unfortunate incidents in a couple of games, I thought it might be an idea to highlight MEPBM Games own advice on the subject of sending in orders. The two things I would add to the advice offered below are:

1: Always send orders by post or email if at all possible. Faxed orders are much more prone to errors since inevitably there is a loss of clarity and definition.

2: Ignore the fact that the GM won't process the game until the morning after the deadline printed on the order sheet. Send your orders in on time and you'll find a large proportion of obvious errors you may make (eg confusing 605 and 610 orders) will be picked up by the GM, who will then contact you to clarify the matter.

Please always put the game number and nation number in the subject line of your email. Also please make sure that the main body of the email has your name, account number, game number, security code and nation number. If you are sending a diplo we only require this information in the subject line and information as to what you want to send on to the recipient. It speeds things up for us if you can include as much detail concerning your question or problem. We very much appreciate this.

Format of orders

Please send your turns in by email in a plain format or using an attachment such as .txt. Please don't use any html or .xls formats. We can accept some .doc files, but experience shows that many mailers interact with the format to make it hard to read, so we only accept the simplest formats. We do not accept other formats. If you are not sure how to send your turn in such a manner, please get in touch and we'll help.



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.

Victory through Team Play

The story of game 35 concludes

by Colin Forbes

Readers may recall that a group of madmen journeyed to Cardiff in the lost period between Christmas and the New Year of 2000, engaging in a face-to-face game of Middle Earth. The day was a roaring success, so much so in fact that the majority of players decided to continue the game in a more traditional manner.

I have to say that I wasn't too sure whether it would be possible to carry on the excellent teamwork the day itself had featured. Co-operation on a grand scale is all very well when you're sitting around in the room together, but trying to achieve the same degree of unit via the phone or (gasp) the dreaded email, is another matter entirely.

Since Middle Earth is a team game, it seems to me that, before returning to the game itself, I should therefore I should explain how we organised the team via the more traditional PBM method. Essentially everyone agreed to send a full report (by email or phone) to two members of the team who would then produce a team newsletter. In addition to a general overview of the situation, every other turn the newsletter included a database of all population centres and characters (friendly and enemy), not to mention who has which artefact and so forth. And so the game continued ...

Of Gold and other Matters

As things stood on turn seven of the game, the Free Peoples were very much on top. The opposition had seemed to be rather disorganised on the day and we had clearly benefited in game. All was not a bed of roses however! My Dwarves had been forced to lower their tax rate and as a result were running a huge deficit which threatened to bring a halt to the conveyor belt of recruitment which had been a feature of the Dwarves over the first few turns. Worse, there wasn't much hope of early contact with the enemy, which would at least mean burning off a few troops. Luckily South Gondor was in a much better position, and was able to send several sackfuls of gold to Khazad-dum.

Imagine my horror therefore when the first 'proper' turn arrived showing the Dwarves on the brink of sudden bankruptcy! In mounting horror I saw my production had also plummeted - what had happened? Checking back I couldn't help but notice that the seasons had changed from Spring to Winter literally overnight. Consequently the climate had worsened and all my lovely mountains were so inhospitable that production had fallen through the floor. Fortunately a quick phone call to Harlequin set matters right and all my missing production was restored. This is typical of the service provided by Harlequin - when mistakes happen (which is rarely) things are usually put right with a minimum of fuss and bother.

Of War and Destruction

Things were starting to heat up again. Two Dwarven armies were drawing themselves up for battle outside the gates of Mordor, whilst South Gondor was busy killing Quiet Avenger major towns in and around Harad. A number of the Free Peoples had booming economies as a result of stupidly high

market prices. Sadly this also meant the enemy had enough gold to recruit at full power.

Then came the great assault on the Witch King. Having driven the Dragon Lord from Mirkwood, of all Sauron's foul servants, only the Lord of the Nazgul himself remained in the north of Middle Earth. For some time we had been plotting Murazor's downfall, picking off his population centres one by one. Now the armies gathered on Carn Dum itself, capital and last remaining stronghold of evil in the north. Trouble was, the Witch King had a small army sitting on his capital. Whilst this posed no military threat per se, there was a chance that it had a Dragon in tow - if it did and we attacked the city we could end up being wiped out to no avail. The Dwarves therefore attacked the small army, leaving Arthedain to seige the city and await the triumphant Noldo army which had been stomping around taking Witch King settlements. As things turned out, there was no dragon and the Noldo easily threatened the city the following turn. The Witch king was defeated! But what of the war in the south?

Of Battles in the South

As readers may recall, South Gondor's first task had been to move south against the enemy holdings in and around Harad (all normally neutral settlements having been shared out amongst the pre-aligned nations at gamestart). This had more or less been achieved by turn ten, so my attention could switch to the Mordor front.

Armies were beginning to gather for a push through the Minas Ithil pass, whilst the Dwarves were sneaking an army through eastern Rhun and Rhovanion for a surprise attack through the back door of Mordor. By turn eleven we had nearly ten thousand troops on Minas Ithil itself, facing a rather frightened Fire King army - who obviously had originally had ideas of taking the city, but ran into the main attack wave of Free Peoples' forces! Ahead of us a small Dwarf army and a slightly large South Gondor force were running the gauntlet of Cloud Lord agents in an attempt to kill off any armies containing dragons (the one thing that could stop the gathering forces at Minas Ithil).

Of Victory!

Most Middle Earth games last for between twenty five and thirty turns. However as things turned out this game was to last a mere sixteen turns before the other side resigned en masse. Victory was ours! Dwarven armies were poised to strike into Eastern Mordor, whilst South Gondor was pushing deep into Southern Harad.

One of the problems with writing a game diary such as this for Middle Earth, is that it's all written from my own point of view. I'm very much aware that I have glossed over the vast contributions made by the rest of the team. For the most part my two positions played a supporting role to the efforts of Arthedain and the Noldo in the North, and North Gondor and the Eothraim in the South. For the record the Noldo Elves (Chris Littlejohn) won, closely followed by Arthedain and Cardolan (both played by Tom Fyfe). I am sure I speak for everyone however when I say that the team victory was more important than the performance of any individual nation. And that I think is the attraction of Middle Earth, even after all these years. In no other game does one get the same sense of camaraderie, of shared trials and collective loss - or triumph!

alternative voting

Clint writes ... *I am looking to compile a list of players who would like to have an alternative voting system to see who wins the game. This would then be compiled and potentially put on the web.*

I would need:

Your Name:

Your Account number:

Year Started Playing MEPBM:

Approx number of games played to, or almost to, the finish:

Approx number of times been on the winning side:

In the future do you expect to play:

1650?

2950?

1000?

Variant?

Grudge or Individual?

Would you agree to having these details put on a web based player directory?

We would like to discuss and work out the details of a player rating system.

If might include a component based on player votes. In principle would you like to be part of a system of this kind?

Anything I have missed?



stand-by positions

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

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

1000: 3 - one of which is a North Kingdom

2950: Silvan, North Gondor, Fire King, White Wizard, Khand Easterlings (e)

1650: Eothraim (m), Dunland (m)



Bree errata

News from Bree would like to apologise to **Jeremy Richman** for the missing byline on the front page of issue 9.

Hall of Fame

Game winners, losers and honourable mentions

Third Age: 1650

Game 19

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**.

Game 52

This finished 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 66

Game 66 got off to an ominous start for the Free People players with several of the original players dropping before the game began. However, thanks to a good recruiting job by Brian Medus, the Free People had a full team to combat the Dark Servants by game date. Amazingly enough, we were able to co-ordinate our efforts in a most efficient effort and by turn five, we had thwarted the Dark Servant's early attacks. The Dwarves, The Northman, and The Eothraim stopped The Dog Lord, Long Rider, and Blind Sorcerer after the lost of three population centers around the Sea of Rhun.

North Gondor, with the help of the Sinda re-acquired the towns of Tir Anduin and Tir Limlight from Dark Lieutenants then crushed Gothmog's army. Up north, Cardolan and Arthedain, with help of The Noldo Elves withstood, The Witch King's and Rhudaur attacks The Free People descended on Goblin Gate and Dol Guldur and soon The Dragon Lord was on the ropes. In the pass to the south, the early advances of the Dark Servants was stopped at Osgiliath by the Gondors. Noticeably absence was Din Ohtar and Ji Indur. It seems that Din wore out his welcome at Shrel Kain and Elladan terminated him. We still have not figured out with Ji

was up to. On turn five, The Fire King learned what happens to a few hundred men in an unfortified town (North Gondor removed the fortifications of Miinas Ithil on turn one) when 7000 South Gondorians move past into Barad Ungol. They become part of the road. On turn Six Barad Ungol had fallen and on turn eight Barad -Dur was destroyed.

Meanwhile, our diplomatic efforts began to pay off as the four uncommitted neutrals joined The Free People and all hopes of a Dark Servant victory was vanquished. The Quiet Avenger quickly fell and Free People descended on Durthang and Morannon. Up north, Cardolan, Arthedain, and Dunlending had crushed Rhudaur and were closing in on The Witch King. Also, throughout the game, The Noldo agents showed up key locations and kept the Dark Servants off balance. The Dragon Lord, who was barely clinging to life, suddenly struck in north Mirkwood capturing several Northman and Sinda population centers. The Cloud Lord agents finally made themselves present as they tried valiantly to hold off the Haradwaith army, who had approached Kal Nargil from the south. However, it was a case of too little too late. On turn eleven, The Dark Servants wisely conceded the game.

I want to thank my team mates for their co-operation in what I considered a well played game. We had good plan and we implemented it in audacious manner. We were also had few lucky breaks at several pivotal points of the game. I would like to congratulate the Dark Servant Players for playing a good game and wish them good luck in the future (unless of course I'm on the other side).

Richard Z. Wilson (South Gondor)

Game 302

This game ended with the ONE RING thrown into the pit by Cirdan. The Easterlings and Corsairs went DS and Harad and the Duns went Free. The west and the Mirkwood were secured early However, the Corsairs and QA virtually over ran South Gondor in its entirety and the LR secured a grip on the Sea of Rhun. The Noldo and Cardolan recovered South Gondor, with the help of a new SG player, and smashed the Corsairs and QA. Free armies contained the DS in Mordor and made inroads on the NW and west passes. After two years of play, the BS found the ONE RING and took it to MT Doom. When we last stopped counting there were almost 70 characters on site for "the Metallica concert". When the dust settled Elrond had killed the RING bearer and Cirdan had the RING. First place to **Brian Hansen** (Woodmen), second place to **John Barret** (Duns) and third to **Ed Mills** (Arthedain).

Game 312

The Free Peoples rode great team coordination to victory over the disorganized DS in Game 312-1650. Despite starting the game with North Gondor and Eothraim both missing their first two turns, the FP were able to get good replacements who soon righted their foundering positions. The Easterlings, Harad, and Dunlendings joined the cause of Good, establishing a 3-2 split. A coordinated attack by the Sinda, Woodmen, Eothraim, Northmen, and Dwarves burned Morannon to the ground while Cardolan, The Dwarves, Noldo, Dunlendings, and Arthedain were destroying the evil turncoat Rhudaurians and the WK. Meanwhile, the Easterlings gutted the interior of Mordor

pubmeets

Two pubmeets to organise!

Flyer & Firkin - Sat 18th Aug in Reading 2pm start. We're also intending to a Pubmeet in Paris in October. Is there a group of players able to make that? If so can you contact Clint so that he can decide if there is going to be a Middle Earth presence?

News from **Flagship** that A summer meet in Exeter is being planned - editor Carol Mulholland will be there. Contact Flagship if you're interested, so they can get some idea of numbers before fixing a date. If you're visiting the West Country this summer, just get in touch. Flagship are provisionally looking at **August 25th** (Bank Holiday weekend). Contact Carol at: carol@flagship-pbm.co.uk

with multiple cav armies. It was just a matter of mopping up after that as the IK, FK, and DkLts fell to combined emissary and army assaults. The top 3 finishers were Cardolan, the Woodmen, and the Dwarves, played by **Facade**, **Tom MacCabe**, and **Jeff Horne** respectively, but all the FP contributed greatly to this victory. A true team victory.

Game 317

A victory for North Gondor, 2nd Eothrim and 3rd Sindar (**Jon Kilpatrick**, **Kurt Meyer**, **Rhett Covington**) - bad luck to the DS here.

Third Age: 2950

Game 28

With the DS conceding on turn 21 after the last neutral turned free, I would like to thank the following

- The Free side (especially those who were playing their first middle earth game, and those who helped them out).
- The DS side (the rangers were laughing when we threatened away Mt Gram, but Mordor was tough).

For 10,000 timber a pop, you would think the bridge would have eventually stayed up.

c) Yahoo (they helped up swap turnsheets and emails).

Noldor/South Gondor/Khand were the top three. But we didn't lose a single free, so that's pretty good. P.S. I really think leaving Mt Gram alone was a bad idea!

Game 111

A win to the DS - with all 5 Neutrals on their side, the Duns (run by Darren Comeaux), Corsais 2nd (Allan Champine)

Fourth Age: 1000

Game 46

A three team scenario sees victory for the forces of the FP with the Individual laurels going to the might of **David Slatter**. Outclassed economically the Neutrals (played by GMs and friends) were playing for a draw (ended on turn 45) but the strategic victory (fought over by both Neutrals and FPs) was eventually taken by the FPs. DS were quickly eliminated from the game. 2nd was **Phillip Quirk**, 3rd **Andy Naylor**.

Infinite Threads

Infinite Threads is a new FREE 'zine and e-zine created and run by experienced players and GM's of Play-By-Mail and Play-By-Email games alike. The 'zine is based along the lines of Diplomacy 'zines the world over, and is published once month, with web updates (for fortnightly games) every two weeks. The 'zine contains a number of articles and games - at present the list reads as follows:

- * *Diplomacy (standard) - 7 players per game*
- * *Downfall Diplomacy (a variant based upon Tolkien's Middle Earth) - 7 players per game*
- * *Bozisha Miraz (adventure in the far south of Middle Earth) - open to all*
- * *Great White Hunter (a sort of Jungle Battleships) - open to all*
- * *Soapbox (humourous political game) - open to all*
- * *Stockbroker (stocks and share game) - open to all*



Other games will be created as and when required, or requested by players (subscribers). A full list of games is available from the website or the address below - anyone taking an interest should contact us for a copy of the latest issue (also available for download from the website)

Infinite Threads, 9 South View Terrace, Exeter, Devon, EX4 6JF
Email: colin@infinite-threads.co.uk
www.infinite-threads.co.uk



From out of the West

Latest News from MEPBM Games!

Well once again we see an increase in the games, now upto 75, which we are very happy with. Slightly under half (300 or so) are North American players, so we're looking into increasing that player base in the near future. Having finally seen the advert for *Lord of the Rings* so I am getting a little excited about it all - the next few months look very promising. We're 3/4s of the way through creating the *Battle of the Five Armies* so we'll bring that out to the players - it's a scenario designed specifically for new players but might prove interesting for veterans as well.

Don't forget we run regular pubmeets (**Aug 18th** is the latest one in Reading) - I would love to come to one in the US - but would need a group of players to make it worth my while. :-) Once again a thought provoking Bree - (lucky me gets to read it before it hits the "printers") - but don't forget we value your contributions to it - as the saying goes it would not have been possible without y'all. Finishing touches on the new GWCs - just so that they look nice! - a new advert in the offing (nice colour ad), Rulings/Queries first draft out soon and I might get my new shiny accounts system soon as well. We just need more time to fit it all in to our busy schedule...

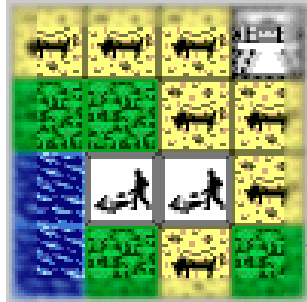
Middle Earth
PBM Games



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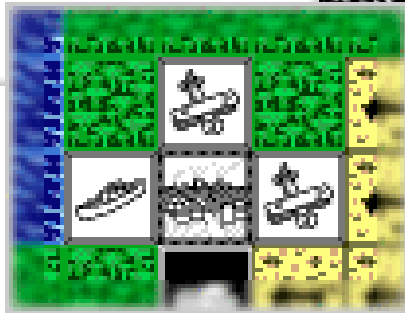
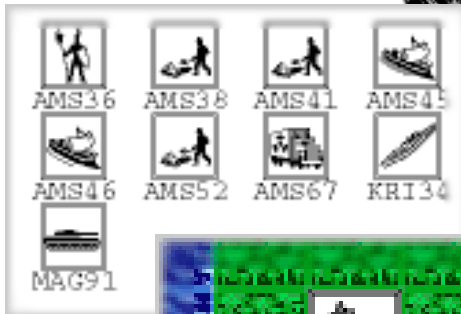
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exploration, research, settlement
and conquest ...

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you gain access to a
vast number of
technologies, troops,
government types ...
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