

Middle Earth Play by Mail

PLAYER'S COMPANION

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MEPBM Order Companion

Introduction

In this document, I will attempt, in sequential order, to enlighten the newcomer to how the game works. I will refer to orders, or sections of orders that I feel require some clarification or further exploration. Everything in-between would include those that are either self-explanatory, or those that I have inadvertently left out. The most important thing to realize is that the program runs the game IN SEQUENTIAL order. Thus, combat (200's) comes before recruiting (400's) which comes before movement (800's). Where this is of crucial importance will be expounded upon below. There ARE situations where order number does not necessarily show exactly how the game works.

You will notice, as you play, that many different sets of related orders are intentionally ordered to ensure that you can't get too much out of one turn! For example, Creating Camps (555) is AFTER Improving Population Centre (550), so you can't have a group of emissaries on a hex and create and "instant town" or so. Similarly, you can't Improve a Harbor to Port (530) the same turn you Add Harbor to population centre (535). Careful study of the rules will enable you to understand exactly how the game works and thus to plan more effectively. Be aware that the rules are often quite subtle; a general understanding is more than enough to get going, but careful study of all related issues will sometimes be necessary to ensure the success of each order you issue, the success of the mission, and overall strategy also.

Difficulty levels - Orders and spells are rated as "Easy", "Average", or "Hard", and the rules provide a rough guide of skill level required to perform them. Unfortunately, there are many things that can have an effect on these orders, not the least of which is the fact that the games runs on percentages and randomized results. A 95% chance of succeeding means you have a 5% chance of failing, so don't be surprised when that happens. Rule of Thumb: Add 10 to the bottom end of the range for any kind of reliability. The exceptions to this rule include wherever a veteran ally makes a recommendation against this advice and/or in the event I advise a different range for the *specific* order below.

Items that Affect Order Success:

- 1) Relations - both yours to them and theirs to you. The more they hate you, the harder it is for you to succeed. If you're a FP, Downgrading the Cloud Lord is a priority!
- 2) Population Centre Loyalty - the higher the loyalty the harder it is to affect offensive orders at that pop (your loyalties are defense mechanisms).
- 3) Fortification Level - more fortifications makes it more difficult to succeed. Consider that the greater the fortifications, the more "local militia" there are wandering the streets trying to nab you.
- 4) Enemy Characters Skill Level - some orders explicitly state this (i.e., the 500 order, see below) others do not. But rest assured, where common sense dictates there's a "possibility", conservative play would consider it as good as fact
- 5) Army Commanders - are harder to affect than free characters, all else being equal.

There may be others, either I've missed them or have detailed them below in order sections where they're most relevant. Consider that if it "seems" to make sense and follows similar known mechanisms, your common sense is worth listening too. Everything is random, though. Even if you had a copy of the code, translated into English, such that you knew exactly how each and every order worked before issuing them, there's always the chance of a "critical success/failure". It's believed that there's always 5% on each end of any "roll" that provides for this. The weakest character in the game can win a challenge against the strongest on the first round of Personal Challenge combat if he/she's lucky enough to get this "critical" result. There are NO guarantees in this game...None.

Also be aware that these items are not always taken into account for every order. For example, are army commanders who also happen to have agent or emissary skill harder to 500 - Recruit Double Agent than when the same character does not command an army? The rules only mention Relations between nations for this one. Similarly, do fortifications affect Emissary orders? Here is where experience and common sense will dictate to you.

Most recently, it has been revealed that Who goes first is actually determinable:

- 1) Nations go first by Order. Take for example the 555 Create Camp order. Consider that all nations are trying to create camps with emissaries. For that order, the "Nation Sequence" is randomly generated from 1-25 nations and the emissaries ALL fire their orders in that "order". So, if the Noldo was able to Create 4 camps but the poor Eothraim character got the "camp limit is hit" message, it was because Eothraim were placed down in the Nation Sequence. This ditty won't do you any good BEFORE your turn, but will explain "odd" results on occasion. Note - this randomized Nation Sequence is performed for every order individually. So the Nation Sequence for each order is randomized (i.e. randomize the 1-25 for order 175, then again for order 180, etc...)
- 2) The sequence in which your characters fire their orders is the same as the sequence they appear on your xml document. First come, first serve, so the 40 emissary will go before the 70 emissary if that's where he's listed. The characters are NOT listed in alphabetical order here.

What are the implications of this? Multinational agent and emissary companies are better than unilateral ones, such that you increase the odds of at least SOME of your orders going off. Curses not so much, as you increase your odds that one or more of your cursers will NOT get their orders off in the event of a curse show down. Very much open to interpretation, though.

Always plan ahead. This is expounded on in the Economics section, but it's best to always play the game numerous turns ahead. The game is about Orders. The more efficiently you can utilize your meager order set, the more effective your play will be. Plan for 5 turns, see where you want armies to be, characters, etc. New possibilities will open up, you'll realize you need food in an army, or you expect to run out of money, etc. Then work backwards through your orders to determine what you can change to get X where you want it when you want it. Repeat. Consider some of the order nuances as you go: for example, you can 355 - Transfer Troops from Army to Army with any commander "in" the army at the time, but only the Army Commander can 765 - Split Army. The game is full of stuff like that - experience and asking questions will teach you many "tricks" that appear to be shortcuts. Some are convenient, others may be ridiculous - remember, it's a computer program; it's neither smart nor perfect!

And last of all: re-read the rules. In fact, until you are certain (through experience) it's useful to read through all sections of the rulebook related to your orders. Many sections of the book, and rules themselves, are quite subtle. Be careful that you are certain of what you are reading.

175, 180, 185 - Change Allegiance or Relations

These orders are crucial to ensure your characters/nation are/is effective. Virtually every order that involves another nation/character/army has a relations modifier of some sort or another. They are also listed as "easy" orders, but commanders below 40 do NOT have good track records.

Combat 200's

205 - Use Combat Artifact

After many times issuing this order, some kind veteran on my team tactfully pointed out that my characters were always "using" their swords/staffs/ toenail clippers of woe... Only in the odd event that they happened upon a more powerful artifact would they have to issue this order, one time only, to "switch" between them. The character will automatically carry the item into battle, and is always gaining its benefit during challenges or encounters. Note: Every battle report only mentions primarily involved characters, and only mentions them ONCE each. Your mage may be mentioned casting a spell, but he's using his sword too.

On your turn sheet, you'll notice that the best weapon and all applicable skill enhancers are automatically factored into your characters' challenge rank. Any bonuses to skills will be factored in, shown within brackets beside the "natural" skill, and there's a bracketed + factor next to the spell list for mages, as artifacts are also added to mages spell Casting Ranks.

210, 215 - Personal Challenges

The rule book details how PC's work quite well. What you need to know is your enemy: refer to Turn 0 pdf's or available info sheets for more information on who you're facing. Combat artifacts greatly augment challenge ranks, so be wary. Conservative rules of thumb - when facing an enemy - 215. But you only have 2 orders...so if your army commander Refuses, he can't also Attack AND Move... If you have multiple back-ups, they can all issue Attack and Move - if your Commander dies in a PC, the backup will inherit command and the mission will continue.

Divine Characters with Forces spell will show you, or THEM, any back-ups in armies, Scout Character will reveal some characters in the hex (see 930 order below) - they can be challenged... Get an encounter message for an enemy and you have a character in that hex (see 585 order below)? Give the 210 a shot if you think you can. Oftentimes, powerful characters will show on your population center report also (see Hidden Pops, below this section). There are lots of bits and pieces of information scattered throughout your (and your ally's...) turn reports that can be exploited with this order (and many others, of course!).

Note: Army commanders can only be challenged by characters IN another army (not "only" other Army Commanders). There might be a powerful back-up or mage in that army you're facing - be wary. Commanders CAN challenge anyone else in the hex, though.

Hidden Pops - These pops do NOT show any Enemy Characters present in the hex on your pdf, as your populace is too busy "hiding" to be wandering around openly. Therefore, anyone NOT commanding an army is vulnerable to a challenge. Note who has the hidden pops and who their/your neighbors are. As the Duns once, my WK ally and I sent our curse mages, a Recon, and a Scout for Characters to the Dwarven capital. We wiped him out by killing 3 via the 210 and the army commander by curses. He wasn't able to sell anything to market, split the army to attack my nation (it disappeared...), send money to allies, etc. It was a game breaking move. As the Sinda, I either evacuate my capital or consistently ensure all my characters there are commanders and command an army - then I can sell, transfer, etc, all those crucial capital orders without worrying about the Dragon Lord getting bored and coming in for a quick blood hit.

Dragons are detailed further below (285/290 orders) but I'll note here that they CAN BE KILLED IN CHALLENGE. Their personal challenge rankings range from under 200 to well over 300. If you're lucky enough to have a list of them with their individual challenge ranks, consider wisely how you use that information.

Another point to make about personal challenges: if you have an advantage of 20 or more your chances of victory are as guaranteed as possible. While this obviously affects your challenge strategy, vis a vis the above, also consider using it within a team. Some nations have characters who are quite weak, and they are often Retired (order 740 not detailed in this Companion) as redundant. Consider instead sending them off to challenge a powerful allied character. The winner in a challenge gets an increase in skill (on a sliding scale based on the relative challenge ranks). It won't cost much to pay for this weak character for an extra turn, and you'll help an allied character get better. Usually used to help boost Mage ranks, as they're the slowest to increase in the game (see order 710 below).

225 - Cast Combat Spell

All combat spells affect the First round of combat ONLY. This can be quite important when deciding which spells to Cast or Research. If you are heavily outnumbered, you may prefer to cast an Offensive spell to do as much damage as possible before you're to be wiped out. Similarly, if you heavily outnumber the enemy, or it is close, you may prefer to cast a Defensive spell to ensure you maintain the largest possible surviving army. Thus, if you're going to stampede across the board with huge armies, defensive spells can keep them that way. Or, if you're primary military endeavor is to send out blocking, defensive armies, Offensive spells may be your best choice to better whittle away at your attackers.

See mages (below, 700's) - most people consider using Combat Spells a tragic waste of magic. 2950 or FA with their smaller armies are likely different. Mind you, if you've built up a super powerful force, stacking multiple defense spell casting mages into it will enable it to be considerably more effective.

230, 235 - Attack Enemy/Attack Nation

I'll let the rules themselves detail how army combat works, except to point out a couple things here. First off, discuss with allies how strategic it is for allied armies facing combat to issue different orders here. There may be instances when the Dwarves want to lay waste to everyone, but for some reason the Sinda only want to attack the Dog Lord... For example, if it's known the Dog Lord has a dragon in his army and you want to make darned sure that army is gone (thusly, the dragon flies away also).

Also, exactly how troop losses are split amongst surviving participants is unclear, to me at least. If you don't have a combat calculator, get one...now that you all have a combat calculator, the one I use (Eichman?) allows me to Split Troops different ways. I guess when they were designing it, there were numerous theories unproven also. Last confident word I heard on this was use: "Number of Troops".

Naval Combat is one of those "funny" aspects of the game. Taking a good look at the information in the rules tells the story - most strengths are 5 and constitutions are 3...doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that excepting the situation where one side has overwhelming odds, naval combat is more often a mutual destruction game than anything else. Command rank and Tactics likely play an increased role here. Note, if you're offshore land, your characters will likely swim to shore and survive, otherwise, "sleeping with the fishes" is a common refrain...don't transport your valuable character company on board boats... Note also that spells DO play a more influential roll in naval combat. Spell values are reduced by a factor of 100, so a +750 defense spell is +7.5 to your ships, that 2.5 ships worth. Naval combat almost always only goes 1 round, if you know you're either superior or really close, the extra defense added by a spell might make the difference by saving some ships and allowing your characters to survive. Mind you, you're using a valuable character to increase the odds they "survive"...so you want to be as "sure" as possible.

Navies will anchor ships to attack armies, as per the rules, if the orders are given (or pops, depending on the order) but an army will NOT be able to attack a Navy unless the Navy partakes in the combat (via either an Attack order or a Defend order).

240 - Defend

Mostly useful to designate tactics if you are attacked. The Standard tactic automatically used is not so bad that it's worth wasting a precious command order to "Defend". If you have the extra order and are just planning on sitting there, you'd still be better off issuing a recon... (see 840 - Stand and Defend below)

250, 255 - Destroy/Capture Population Centre

As with 230/235, I'll allow the rules to clearly explain how the combat tables work. I'll just point out the earliest instance of the Larry Rule. If you have enough strength to beat a pop centers defensive value (it's constitution) and after the pop "attacks back" you lose almost all your troops, all you need is One Man, routinely referred to as Larry, to march into the conquered pop, run up the flag and call it your own. Of course, at any point when your army consists of fewer than 100 troops it disbands, but it doesn't disband until you've captured the pop... The order is: 1) you attack pop and defeat its defenses (your army's strength is greater than the pop's constitution). 2) the army defends itself and your army loses troops 3) simple calculation comparing army losses to starting army troop numbers. If there are troops left, your nation takes control of the pop. If your number of troops left is under 100, the army will then disband - but only AFTER Larry marches in to plant the flag and then head off to the farm.

Also note, that when you capture a pop, the loyalties of all the other pops of that nation are affected (reduced), but not so when you Destroy one. Destroy is often a more effective psychological weapon, and certainly assures the enemy won't simply steal the place back with emissaries later, making you have to conquer it yet again. Note, the loyalty of captured pops is 1/2 that of the Natural Command Rank of he who captures it, so it's likely quite easy to steal back later in the game (or threaten, etc).

Rule of Thumb 1: If you expect to be able to keep the pop, Capture. If it's likely to remain a contentious hex, Destroy.

Rule of Thumb 2: Burn Burn Burn!

Suicide: If either of these orders are carried out, successfully or otherwise, that population centre is considered Under Siege for that turn, no production available after this point (i.e. to sell) and no taxes are paid from this pop. If you are fighting an enemy who is likely suffering economically and/or they don't have many pops, it's often strategically worthwhile to "hit the walls" and suicide your army against it. If your army is defeated by the population center's defenses and then disbands as a result of this combat, the commander (not necessarily the backups) is KILLED. Pretty dramatic, but pieces better than pawns are routinely sacrificed in chess.. Consider organizing a series of 100 man armies led by weak and expendable commanders issuing this order numerous turns in a row against an enemy's capital, or 2nd last major town... The enemy cannot Hire an army there either if the pop is under siege - sometimes, it's worthwhile.

The rules state that Destroy is "easier" (or something similar) than Capture. Consensus is that when the Destroy order is given, the army morale is taken at 100 (bloodlust?) and others insist that its strength is also given a minor bonus (increased 10%).

Note the effect of fortifications and loyalty on population center defensive value. Base defense for a Town, for example, is 1000. A Tower is 2000. Add the 2 of them together and the Town/Tower requires 3000 to capture... Loyalty is multiplied to this total as an ADDITION to 100%... So this town/tower at loyalty=50 would multiply this 3000 by 150% and the actual pop defense value is 4500. High loyalties are excellent defense mechanism! Note - this is also a consideration when contemplating the Suicide as above: when a pop is under siege, it has to feed itself and does not receive any of its production. If it's under siege repeatedly it WILL (if not the first time...) run out of food and loyalty will decrease.

260 - Siege Population Center

As per the effects of sieging pops detailed in the Suicide notes above, this order can be useful. I've never used it and only ever seen it fail. It's apparently quite frustratingly difficult. Not something likely worth actually planning on, but if circumstances permit, might be worthwhile. I've been told it's more difficult and takes "more" (higher commander? More troops?) to Siege than Threaten...considering you gain the pop when you Threaten (order 498 below), I see the frustration with this order.

270 - Destroy/Capture Ships

While you may just do your enemy a favor by reducing his maintenance costs, destroying ships on the beach is much more effective than during combat. If you're up against a naval nation, you'll want to find his ships sitting and get them, relegating him to land options. The Long Rider, for example, has only the one large recruiting centre on an island. Destroying his ships on shore keeps him out of the military game, and keeps you in it. Once the lines are drawn around Harador, it's always a worthwhile choice to remove an enemy's navy from play - note, the order doesn't differentiate between Capture and Destroy. Your navy will Capture some of his ships (1/2 to 1/4), further eroding his relative naval power, and Destroy the rest.

285 & 290 - Reaction to Encounter and Investigate Encounter

There are different kinds of encounters. Some are "fixed" in certain hex locations. Hidden valleys, for example. When a character receives an Encounter Message, it either gives a choice of Reactions (use 285), or the encounter says something or other "can be investigated" (use 290). If an encounter is fixed in a location, any character can "investigate" it at any time until it is solved. Some encounters can be "investigated" successfully over and over again. Similarly, there are encounters that can be "reacted" to again and again also. Other encounters wander the land, staying in a hex for only that turn or so. These can still be Reacted to or Investigated by Any character in that hex. For example, if one member of a company of 5 gets the encounter message, any one of them can issue the encounter order.

Some ask if a particular skill is preferred when Reacting To or Investigating encounters. For the 285 order, it's all about the response given – either saying the right word, solving the riddle, or offering the dragon the correct response, whether you be a lowly emissary or a high powered mage, it makes no difference. The 290 order on the other hand is different. This order will usually yield 1 of 2 results: Either you're presented with a Riddle that you have to use the 285 to solve the Next turn, or you'll end up in combat, either against Spirits or a Pukel creature, or some such. In such cases, this combat is run like a Personal Challenge, and thus your characters challenge rank is important. Some of these combats are easy, just run of the mill type combats mostly used to provide a flowery description. Others are more difficult. When presented with an opportunity to Investigate a random encounter, consider the consequences.

Some of the fixed encounters include hex 2312, a nice little gold giving spot called Mirrormere that is available for the Dwarves every 3 turns or so. 2122, the Paths of the Dead, supposedly gives a bonus to Command rank to Argeleb in 1650 and Aragorn in 2950. 2620 and 2720, Amon Hen and Amon Law are fixed site encounters, results are more rumoured than anything else.

Also note, that ignoring this order when faced with an Encounter provides the program with a default FLEE Reaction. While it would be interesting to play with Encounters and try things different than what are published on the "lists", don't be surprised if some of your teammates give you grief over "wasting" a character on a "stupid" encounter...

Keep in mind that your Rumours section in your turn pdf will often show Encounters by characters of other nations. These rumours might be generated on the turn that the character Lands on the encounter, or the turn the character Solves the encounter. When you start reading about unknown characters having encounters, note the locations: are they in the mountains (where Dragons are mostly), are the in/around where you or your allies have located Artifacts? Pay attention to all the information on both your and other's pdf – it might help you better understand not only what your enemy is doing, but also what you might have to be doing (i.e., if they already have landed on an artifact and you can't reach that area, give up on it and search for something else...).

ARTIFACTS

When hunting for artifacts, it's through Encounters that characters "pick up" the trinkets. Mages use their Locate Artifact spells (order 940) to determine what hex the artifact is in. Then, it's a race to get there first and get the toy before the other team does. There's lots of debate about artifacts on most teams, as players have lots of opinions on how best to allocate the ones you have, who does the Locating, who does the Retrieving, how to do so, what artifacts to search for, etc. In general, both teams go for all the lost Agent, Spirit Mastery (a sundry power to many artifacts – this power allows mages to learn the powerful Sickness and Curses spells), or powerful lost Mage artifacts first. But there are lots of artifacts to go for and sometimes not enough spells to use to find them!

For this order section, what might be worth keeping in mind is a correlation that I've both heard about and experienced: the more powerful the artifact, the more difficult the combat to retrieve it. For example, you've successfully determined that the Ring of Wind, a powerful Agent artifact, is in a hex. The first character gets there and in his character results section, he's advised there's a small crevice or trail he can "investigate". This is where it might very well be such that a more powerful "protector" is in-between you and your desired object. Is this always the case? No. In fact, it might be hogwash... The problem with many of these types of assumptions is: once it's in your mind, you'll find all sorts of evidence to Prove it. Any experience that would seem to disprove it you factor in as "random", allowing for the rule to still

be "true" to you. I've heard it, it "seems" to work that way often for me, so I mention it here. It also seems to make sense, but one allows for much to make sense as long as it supports their belief. Always remember: no code, no certainty...

DRAGONS

This is the order used when one meets a Dragon (and the above applies...). If the correct response is given to recruit the dragon, then: The dragon shall join the army led by the character with the highest sum of all skill ranks, artifacts included. Not straight command rank, Not Challenge rank... Once dragons are plentiful, you can manipulate where they go by transferring artifacts around in order to ensure the dragons join different armies! Sub commanders and other characters traveling with the army make no difference. *I have to assume there is a random chance that this does not occur. I've had it reported that dragons have joined the wrong army when taking both modified AND natural rank into account. Has this rule of thumb ever failed for me? No. Have I recruited 100+ dragons? No...*

Combat with Dragons: Dragons are calculated as if they were a combat artifact or spell - their affects only last 1 round, and they do not have any constitution to add to your army's defensive value. Implication - smaller armies with dragons (that don't get overrun...see Movement - 800's below) are considered "nukes" in how they're able to affect much larger and more expensive enemy armies. Dragon strengths are unique to each dragon - they are NPC's with differing skills and strengths, just like Galadriel and Celeborn (1650) are different. Their strengths range from 30,000 +/- 5,000 to over 60,000 +/-.

Dragons don't appear until turn 4, and are thusly recruitable on turn 5. Some may claim they've recruited them on turn 4. Okay, I don't have the program, remember... They don't stay in one hex for long, so if you see them appear (usually on a pop center report) get on them ASAP. They'll usually stay in 1 hex for 3 turns in the early game, that decreases over time. I believe it's a random factor that is modified towards the shorter stay as the game goes on, and I believe that their individual tendencies affect this also (some are more lethargic and sit longer than others...?).

Dragons don't stay with armies indefinitely. One factor I've read is that a dragon will stay with an army for as many turns as the command rank of the army commander /10. So a Regent (60-69) will keep a dragon in his army for 6 turns...? I can't substantiate this, but I don't expect you to have a dragon enhanced army just sitting around for 6 turns! If he ends up that far from the battle (more than 6 turns to reach an enemy?) you've done a poor job organizing your dragon recruitment effort!

Dragons vs Pop Centers: Recall, dragons affect the First Round of combat only. IF you are facing a pop center without armed defenses, they will be factored into the combat. IF you first use them against a defending army, then continue to attack the pop center, will they be factored into the attack on the pop center? I've always thought NO.

ARMY ENCOUNTERS

Sometimes, things will happen to armies – ghosts will scare your troops and steal food from the baggage train – lowering morale. The odd creature or spirits will swoop in and either kill or scare off troops – your troop count goes down. This is a reason to always have more than 100 men sitting in an army on a pop centre – 200 MA is cheap enough to keep an icon without losing it to a stupid encounter.

Sometimes your armies will chance upon NPC's – in 1650, Galadriel and Sauron are examples. If a FP army encounters Galadriel, she'll wander through the army to the commanders, improving morale and then will add E and M rank to any characters with those skills that are With the army. IF a FP army encounters Sauron, he'll likely destroy it... If a DS army encounters Sauron, morale increases and all characters With the army will gain various/any skill ranks, mages learn Lost List spells, etc. If you see these characters on pop centres, try to hit them with your armies and Move/Join as many characters into that army as possible~! The skill boosts are worth it~!

Maintenance and the Economy 300 THROUGH 375

Rumors abound that one of the American Grudge Teams (US1? US2?) has in the past had actual access to the program code. Regardless of whether this is true, I have no doubt that they and others have taken the time (to either read the code or many many pdfs...) to ascertain a very high level of knowledge surrounding the workings (apparent?) of the economic system in MEPBM. I personally believe (substantiated by one player) that this supposed access to the code rumour is in fact, FALSE. I do know that one American player had extensive interviews with the game designers (Bill Field?) about economic theory ((Tom Walton, founder of the Mouth of Sauron?) and produced an article from which much has been learned and "passed on". The general theory is: FP want the market crashed and DS want it up. Why? DS have small tax bases and good metal production. They want high prices to compete with the FP tax base in order to compete militarily.

Note that the information presented on your pdf is assumed to be *at that instant in time*. When you run your next turn, many things may actually change. Note your revenue is qualified as "Expected". They don't use that word without reason: it's not your "Guaranteed" revenue... Change your tax rate and you will receive income at the new rate that same turn (see below). Also, in the event of a season change during the course of your turn, your new turn will run with the new season's production in force. When you're going from Fall to Winter, your production (Central/Northern nations) will drop off and instead of selling 10,000 food, you might only sell 8,000 food... The rule book details percentages of production during seasons, etc. Each pop centre shows the Climate at the time of the turn running. A season change will only change that climate 1 level either way (depending on the season change) so take a look at what percentage gain/loss your production is going to take. This can be somewhat tedious. If you don't care for a down to the dollar/gold calculation, expect a production hit (especially "soft" good, LE, FO, MO) from 20 to 40% depending on how north you are and budget accordingly. I play Rhudaur a lot, Winter is miserable...

The General Theory is that prices are tied to production and cash. Lots of money, everything is expensive, not so much money, everything is cheap. This supposedly "levels out" the market. But if you're selling expensive metals to buy FIXED COST armies, etc, you're in a win-win situation. FP behavior is thus tied to blowing their reserves and keeping them down. Spend spend spend and use their various economic leaders to subsidize their weaker sisters such that the overall money supply is repressed, theoretically depressing prices.

The General Theory also includes aspects of Supply and Demand. Buy out ALL of one product, and the prices for that product should increase. And they do. If you're lucky, they'll increase significantly such that when you sell them you'll earn a profit. Suddenly you have more money to both 1) do it again and 2) put pressure on the market to increase overall. Teams can control the market this way, creating upward spirals that maintain high prices. The other team then follows suit and attempts to decrease prices using various market and order manipulations.

There are limits to how much of each product an individual nation can buy. One nation cannot buy out an entire stock of a product - but multiple nations working together can. There are also limits to how much of 1) any one product and 2) total gold value any individual nation can sell. Under "normal" market conditions, you can get 20,000 gold out of the market, +/- however much. Another consideration is: the more dear the value of the product, the more movement is possible in its price. Mithril prices can fluctuate wildly throughout the game, food which is plentiful and (usually cheap) not so much. The tried and true is to continually buy out Metals, sell for a profit, buy out the next one, repeat ad nauseum. The market opponent tries to "sell into" your buyout - meaning, if you think then enemy is going to buy Steel (at 310 and 315) you sell all your steel (at 320 and 325) ensuring that there is some available product at the end of the turn. They didn't buy it all out, and thus the price won't rise as much (if at all). Knowledge, experience, and guesswork are required in various quantities.

IT has been reported that in a 2950 game, a single nation was able to buy out all the Mithril in the game. But the price only rose enough for him to make a small profit (1500 reportedly). I was under the impression this wasn't allowed as a "fix" the implemented early in the game's development to prevent single nations from cashing in and driving the market bananas's...

When your nation goes bankrupt, you are out of the game! Watch your economy very closely and make sure you plan at least 2, if not more, turns ahead! Your maintenance costs are projected on your turn sheet. Sometimes you get more money, other times you get less. The order is as such:

300 - Change Tax Rate

Use this order wisely! Taxes and loyalty are directly related. Every tax rate change WILL have a random effect on the loyalties of all your population centers: raise the taxes, loyalty decreases, and vice versa. The loyalties of every population centre can change randomly each and every turn, based on the nation's tax rate. Taxes of 39% and less will incur either an increase in loyalty, or no change. Taxes from 40% to 60% (inclusive) result in loyalty changes of -1% to +1%. This occurs randomly per population centre. 60% is thus the highest tax rate that gives a net zero change. Taxes of 61% will

cause either a decrease in loyalty, or no change (thus, a net decrease). Raising taxes is almost always necessary in the game. But, there are situations when lowering taxes is a viable option. Lowering taxes also affects loyalties: by increasing them. Higher loyalties make it easier to improve population centers, and provide defensive bonuses during combat. I've heard about a player who would continually lower his tax rate the turn before someone was trying to attack him in order to get the huge defensive bonus that high loyalties provide (see Combat section of Rules). I've also been advised recently that even a small drop in tax rate, 1%, will give a boost to your population centres defensive impact on enemy agent orders (600's). Example – drop your taxes 1% and it's supposedly *considerably* more than 1% harder to kidnap/assassinate. Doesn't make too much sense to me, momentary euphoria over a government willing to give back to the people so they're all more watchful..?

The affects of this order on loyalty are as follows:

The percentage increase/decrease in tax rate from current is the same percentage increase/decrease that can occur in pop center loyalties. If you raise taxes from 40% to 60%, that's NOT a 20% increase for this purpose, but a 50% increase, as the +20 is 20 out of 40 = 50%. Camps, for example, start at 30 loyalty. A 50% decrease in loyalty would result in a loyalty of 15 - which is a crucial point. Now, the loyalty drop is random by pop and follows a pretty good bell curve, as most random number generators do, so while it's risky, it's unlikely that you'll end up with a camp at 15. It has happened to me and I do it almost every game anyway. The chart below shows how tax rate impacts population center loyalties on a per turn basis.

Tax Rate Range (inclusive)	Affects on Loyalties
0-13%	+2 to +4 NET +3
14-26%	+1 to +3 NET +2
27-39%	0 to +2 NET +1
40-60%	-1 to +1 NET 0
61-73%	-2 to 0 NET -1
74-86%	-3 to -1 NET -2
87% and above	-4 to -2 NET -3

A predominant strategy is to determine the actual affect that raising the taxes would have on your overall game. If you're a small nation with little tax base, your net gain will be miniscule while the effects on your population's loyalties would be quite dramatic if you increase them to 60%. Either it's worth increasing them to 60% for the big boost in cash flow, or it's worth decreasing them to 39% for the continuous boost in loyalty. There are also theory's regarding Creating Camps (552 and 555 orders) that says it's based on Tax Rate - people will agree to gather at a new centre if the government is nice?

You will earn tax money from all your population centers (not camps) that still exist and not under siege at this point. Thus, any pop centers you LOST during combat (250, 255) you do NOT earn taxes from. Any population centers you GAIN during combat (255) you do NOT earn taxes on because they are Under Siege at this point in the Order Sequence. Any population centers that you have that had combat at them last turn are listed as Under Siege in your turn report are NOT included in your Economic Projection, but you DO gain the tax income from them. This is because they WERE under siege at the time your turn was printed, but no longer are at the point of the 300 order... You will receive tax income at the rate that exists AFTER this order: if you increase your taxes, you will receive the increased amount. Note: the expected revenue listed on your turn sheet also includes gold production. Doubling your tax rate will NOT necessarily double that expected revenue.

310, 315, 320, 325 - Buying and Selling from/to Caravans

You have now received tax income and can use it to purchase as much steel and leather as you like, or, more commonly, sell all you have for more coin! NOTE: the tax money is there, you can use it...

Remember: you purchase from the caravans BEFORE the computer pays the maintenance. I've seen someone once buy tones of bronze, only to go bankrupt immediately after when the computer held him accountable! His game was over with thousands of bronze at his capital...I wonder who ended up with it... You CAN Buy product and then sell it right back Same Turn (check the orders...). If you haven't already, you shortly will bump into players who espouse various economic theories, and this is the type of move many will make regarding economic manipulations. The level of knowledge regarding the actual workings of the economy varies amongst players, be wary and above all, get your orders entered correctly!

330 - Cast Conjuring Spell

Note this comes after buying and selling. If you plan on conjuring mounts, you will not be able to sell them in the same turn. Do you pay maintenance on Conjured Hoards (Men at Arms) same turn? Never did it, but I'd have to assume you would. It's a small amount and you only pay 1 per so it's likely not a game-breaker.

340, 345, 347, 349, 351, 353, 355, 357, 360, 363, 370, 375 - Various Transfer Orders

Read each transfer order carefully, and keep the Order Sequence in mind at all times. The 355 order can transfer troops from one army to another, but does not transfer anything from the baggage train with them (see the 765 order). The 357 order can transfer ships to another army, but if giving your ships to another nation, you must have friendly relations with them. If you transfer food from an army to a population centre, you will not be able to sell it in the same turn. If you transfer an artifact from one character to another, the new holder of that tool will only benefit from it using orders after this point (won't use them in challenges, combat, any spell orders before this point), etceteras.

Note: 363 - Transfer Hostages to Character - Commanders will often capture enemies during combat, but all the orders dealing with hostages are Agent orders, so this order would then be used. Hostages get a random shot at escaping every turn. This is variable depending on the Hostage's agent rank, and the agent rank of the person Holding them. Thus, an agent has a much better chance of keeping hostages. Holding hostages has many advantages. Agents can interrogate them for information, not common but may be useful towards the end game (does it reveal Victory Conditions? Capital Locations? Unknown, never tried it...). Hostages, whether captured during combat, or kidnapped by agents (order 605) are still considered characters. The nation they belong to has to pay for them, and cannot replace them like they can a dead character. It's a good idea to keep hostages whenever possible, but agents may injure their keepers when they escape.... It's all a delicate balance...I've had my nation's leader held hostage one game for 27 turns. There was much rejoicing when Celdrahil returned to Dol Amroth after a year away!

Update: Can you issue 355 between Armies and Navies where you shouldn't be able to? Think of the river in QA lands... Seems like it's been done by reliable sources.

Maintenance is Paid

Now you will pay maintenance according to the estimates on your turn sheet. As far as my experience goes (that I can remember, that is...) you pay for everything, even that which you lost during the course of the turn to this point (characters in challenge/combat, fortifications/ships, etc in combat). This is crucial. Why? Not fair! You'll recognize that everything that you could LOSE before this point in the Order Sequence, you CREATE after this point (harbors, fortifications, name characters, recruit troops, etc). So you simply are forced to pay for them at least once. *I can only confirm at this point that you pay for Armies and Characters. I'm assuming the rest here, but if follows the same rules of common sense, so until dis-proven, this section will remain as it is!*

This is absolutely essential to keep in mind. Many a player has gone bankrupt because they misunderstood this crucial fact. The computer will, at this point, automatically increase taxes if necessary. THIS is what you do NOT want to happen if you can avoid it. If you do not have enough money after increasing taxes on your own, or selling what you can, the computer increases your taxes in order to pay your maintenance. THIS will have an adverse affect on your population centre loyalties just like the 300 order. IF the computer has to raise taxes above 100%, you are bankrupt and out of the game. The rest of your orders will still go through, but at the end of the turn (even if your allies ship you a million gold...) you're done. Often, you will not be able to increase taxes (no commanders at the capital or you just don't have the extra order). Oh well, it's a desperate game...

There are many things that can affect your economy after this point. You can Steal gold or allies can ship you some, but this gold will end up in your reserves AFTER any automatic changes. Similarly, if you cut your economy juuusstt enough, you'll be able to create the camps you budgeted for (the 500's), but if you get stolen from (the 600's), you'll fail to name new characters (the 700's). Similarly, enemies can't steal gold that you don't have.... This is why you have to be at least 2 turns ahead of yourself economically. Ship allies gold if they need it NEXT turn...this turn is too late...

370, 375, 444, 448- Upgrading or Making Weapons and Armor

Very rarely used order since you can recruit troops with weapons and armor. The only effective use of these orders is as follows: An army has been building up for some period of time on a population centre. The turn BEFORE they move out, product can be transferred to that population centre. A command character with that army can then make armor and/or weapons on the same turn that the army commander moves the army out. The characters can subsequently upgrade the armor or weapons while the army is on the march. It all depends on how many orders you have and when you have them. If you have a long way to go, this might be the best way to create that effective force, instead of transporting not enough

metals to your population centre over and over again as the army builds up. Note, as usual, you cannot Make and Upgrade in the same turn - more planning necessary.

Recruiting 400-420

The default troop type is Heavy anything. If you have the mounts, you'll almost always have enough leather for them to become Heavy Cavalry. Otherwise, it's 408 - Recruit Heavy Infantry at all times. Troop types are a common refrain throughout the community as many would like to see actual good reasons to recruit the others.

Well, here are a couple...

Light Cavalry has a strength of 8, making them just about as good as HI but with mobility. Now, why would you waste mounts on LC when you can recruit HC...? One effective use of them is as camp burning armies. Run around destroying all the enemy camps in off map areas. You'll destroy many of them effectively with a small force of LC, you'll be able to access them faster and easier (presuming you're fed) and they're 1/2 the price of HC for this type of purpose. If you're many turns from the front, you might consider LC as a cost-effective way to get quality troops to the front faster and cheaper (faster than HI, cheaper than HC).

Light Infantry, Archers, and Men at Arms are excellent and cheap troops to run Navies. Why pay for HI when 1/4 the cost MA can run your Warships just as well? Often you'll see naval nations putting all their warships in one Attack Navy run by a few hundred lighter/cheaper troops while the remaining Transports continually get loaded up with the expensive heavy stuff to ship off to war.

Archers are also potentially a cheap way to get a little bang in during a lost cause. Their strength of 6 is better than LI if you're expecting to lose the battle.

If you ARE using different troop types, you'll have the advantage in Tactics over the predictable HI players you'll meet. Small condolences for sure, but something to consider depending on your economic and strategic needs.

460, 465 - Remove Harbor or Port

Useful to either reduce maintenance costs, or reduce the likelihood of a naval invasion. Cardolan, SG, Harad, the Corsairs, the Quiet Avenger and the Long Rider will likely issue this order (see Sabotage orders below in the 600's). This is because if you remove a harbor or port in a non plains shore hex, enemies won't be able to land their navies, thus armies, and attack. In the event a harbor or port is lost (either via this order, Sabotage, or combat) and there are anchored ships in that hex (anchored at the former docks), the nation who owns those ships CAN pick them up (798 order) with an army in that hex. At that point, that force will be considered a Navy, and of course, can't anchor ships in that hex anymore...

These orders usually require a commander in the high 40's or even 50's for a reasonable chance of success.

470 - Destroy Population Centre Stores

If you have a commander on a population centre that's going to be taken, either by threat that very turn, or through combat the next, and you do not have the order in your capital to ship the stuff out or sell it, you may as well get spiteful and burn it...see Kuwait...

475 - Destroy Bridge

A defensive move, mostly seen along the Anduin at Osgiliath or Pelargir. Sometimes you'll see other bridges taken down, the one separating Cardolan and the Dunlendings, or the bridges in the Rhovanion at 3612 (place and river names escape me).

494 - Fortify Population Centre

Enemy armies will automatically be stopped by "non-friendly/ tolerant fortifications". Putting towers up on strategic population centers is one way to not only slow the enemies progress, but to also determine what's coming at you, as the army size, nation, and commander shows up on your population centre report (unless he is moving evasively. . .). Fortifications will also stop a population centre from degrading from low loyalty (see 300 Change Tax Rate). Of course, if you only have the one Major Town, you may also want to improve the fortifications there (or not...) to help keep it...

Fortification levels are also noted as affecting offensive enemy orders (Emissary and Agent). It's supposedly harder to steal from a town/tower than a naked town.

498 - Threaten Population Centre

An effective way to take an enemy population centre without incurring casualties. Also, if you capture a population centre during combat (order 255) it will be reduce one level (capture a town; it will end up being your village). This does not happen when you threaten it. Threatening is difficult, though. A formula I've seen to determine the chance for a threat is as follows:

The (modified) Command Rank of the Army Commander has to be greater than:

The loyalty of the population centre
+ 20 per level of fortifications
+ 20 if the population centre is the capital

Consider a starting Capital MT/Fort: You're agent scouted the loyalty to be 55. That means, by this formula, you'll need a 55+40+20 or 115 rank commander to Threaten it. Exactly what kinds of penalties are incurred if you do not have the recommended number of troops is not known, but it's been treated as a Percentage Modifier to the above. If you need 1000 troops and you have 800 troops, you have 80% of the troops required and you can modify your command rank by this factor. This formula has been developed over time, but does NOT come from the programmers.

The loyalty of the successfully threatened pop is 2/3 the natural command rank of the successful army commander. Note that pops taken using this order WILL PAY their original owner taxes, production, etc. Of course, any product there they didn't sell is still there.

Emissary Orders 500's

Emissaries are an essential tool in Middle Earth warfare. They have a wide range of uses and are often under-appreciated. A solid emissary plan is as follows:

Create at least 2 at the start of the game, and preferably more during later opportunities to name new characters. Create as many camps as possible. Once the camp limit is reached, improve many of those to villages. Once you have accomplished this, you will have a few emissaries with skill ranks over 60. Together, these characters can perform many tasks for you nation and allegiance, not the least of which is out right stealing population centers! Many players relegate emissaries to the position of national gophers, sitting at the capital issuing buy/sell orders, or chasing dangerous dragons. I personally love the emissary, having both been eliminated and eliminated enemies using them as my primary tools in many games.

500 - Recruit Double Agent

This is effective in many ways. A double agent (agent or emissary skill) will have a reduced chance of successfully doing bad things to you. It's also a good training order to use by doubling your ally's characters. ALSO: A character can only be a double agent to one other nation at a time. If you can double your friends' key characters, then 1) you know the enemy hasn't done so, and if they suddenly are no longer your doubled agent, then 2) you know the enemy HAS done so... It's also easier to double Agents than Emissaries, likely Emissaries know the sales pitch you're giving them and are more resistant...

505 - Bribe/Recruit Character

This order can only be used on a character of an allied nation that is no longer playing. Either militarily eliminated, bankrupt, or inactive for a period of time. If you or an ally is going to be eliminated from play, it is common to have the soon-gone player transfer whatever possible to allies. This includes characters by attempting, wherever possible, to move them as close to their allies as possible. The allies then try to scoop up the good characters with this order.

An inventive formula I've seen that determines your chance of success is as follows:

% Chance = Bribe/200 + 1/2 (E-Char) 100%
or

Chance of Bribe Succeeding = $20,000 - 100(E-Char)$

For example, your 50 emissary wants to recruit a 60 mage from an allied nation that went bankrupt. A 20,000 gold bribe is a virtual 100% chance (actually, 21,000 is 100% chance here). If you've only got 10,000, you've got $10,000/200 + 1/2 (50-60) = 50 - 5 = 45\%$ chance of success. Without having to calculate, even rank characters give a 100% chance at 20,000 and a 50% chance at 10,000, etc. How do multiclassed characters count? Are all their ranks summed up? Are they considered only on their largest rank? Are the "extra" ranks added in on a reduced basis (like calculating Challenge ranks)? No clue, worth asking...

Best guess is you get 6 turns after a nation has been eliminated to pick up their characters - after that point, those characters still exist, but are attached to a nation called "The Unknown", which apparently is of its own allegiance, and you thusly cannot recruit them. I'm quite sure you can still affect them, though (i.e. Challenge them, assassinate/kidnap them, steal artifacts from them, etc).

520 - Influence Own Population Centre Loyalty

This is your basic emissary-training tool. Generally, do a couple of these with a new emissary and then move out of the capital to begin creating camps (555). Once the camp limit has been reached, you'd generally move around from one low loyalty camp to another, issuing this order to ensure all are stable. Loyalty has a definite affect on many aspects of the game. All combat at pop centers, enemy character actions, etceteras. The higher the loyalty, the better for the owner, always! It's always worthwhile to have emissaries improving your loyalty, within strategic limitations, of course.

525 - Influence Other's Population Centre Loyalty

This is the primary offensive order of the emissary. Just as you want your loyalties high, you want your enemy's loyalties low... The effects of this order vary with emissary skill. The lower the emissary that actually pulls the order off, the lower the resulting decrease in loyalty. Emissaries in their 50's will barely reduce enemy loyalties by 5, in their 70's, closer to 15. Generally, it's not worth even trying with emissaries until they're in their 60's, and even then, stick to smaller pops. This order is rife with speculation. For example, does the actual starting loyalty of the pop modify the chances of success? Probably.

The main purpose behind this order is to steal pop centers. This is one of a couple other "double roll" type orders. You can "successfully" decrease the loyalty of an enemy population centre, but NOT steal the pop. Pops can either degrade or transfer ownership at the point of 15 or below loyalty. Consider - you land on a pop that has a loyalty of 14. You successfully decrease the loyalty with an emissary to 8, but do NOT steal the pop... This is because you get the order off on one hand, but the pop switching allegiance is another roll again. Exactly how this is determined, I do not know. I once had an allied emissary sitting on my pop with a loyalty of 1 for 3 turns, each time he successfully got the 525 off, gained lots of skill in doing it, but never took the pop. Next turn some enemy came in and swiped it first time...go figure this game sometimes!

Note: combat affects loyalty (as above). Once lots of pops are captured, loyalties are low all around, making it easier for emissaries to take over pops. Burning pops does not affect the loyalties of the remaining pops of the same nation. If you expect to maintain a multi-faceted offensive, Capture during combat in order to help your emissaries at the 525 point.

Also, the 520 order will only improve loyalties 1-5 points, while the 525 order affects on a sliding scale from 1-15 or so. One emissary sitting on a pop will not be able to defend it adequately against an enemy company...

A population center taken via the 525 order will have a loyalty of 2/3 the emissary skill of the emissary who actually is the one who takes it. If you have multiple emissaries successfully casting the order on that pop, the last one who does it will determine the loyalty. Note, in multinational companies, if one nation takes it and then the allied emissaries get their shot, they WILL reduce the loyalty of their now ALLY's pop if they're successful! They might even steal it from their allies. Some players prefer unilateral emissary companies because they don't want to steal pops and then have allies cut their loyalties down. That's an ideal - if your team has enough emissaries to steal pops, DO IT! Once individual nations have enough to work unilaterally, by all means, but don't wait for that to occur - attacking the enemy is always better and cheaper than building it yourself!

530 and 535 - Improve Harbor to Port and Add Harbor to Population Centre

Why these are emissary orders, I haven't heard... Very little infrastructure is ever actually built in the game (1650 at least...), excepting population centers, fortifications, and bridges have to be replaced often. Docks are actually destroyed (to save money and prevent landings) easily 100 times more often...

550 - Improve Population Centre

The bigger the better! Larger population centers give more tax revenue, are harder to take over, and you can recruit more troops from them. Population centers are essentially the keys to the game - you want as many and as large ones as possible. Improve your camps to villages at least. Camps, while great producers do not give tax revenue. At 60% taxes, villages give 1500 gold, towns 3000, major towns 4500, and cities 6000. Or, each improvement increases the tax revenue of your nation 1500 gold. Improving a camp to a village costs 4000, a village to a town 6000, etc. Thus, the best and cheapest way to increase tax revenue is to improve your camps to villages. Improving villages or other population centers is done after all camps are pumped up, or to create better recruiting centers.

Once the limit is reached, your initial emissaries should be skilled enough (50+) to begin improving those camps to villages. Best bet is to bounce your emissaries around your camps to either raise their loyalties (order 520) or improve them to villages. A general guide to improving population centers is as follows: Success depends on the sum of the Emissary Rank and the Loyalty. Of course, the emissary must be skilled enough to accomplish the Average order.

Whether to improve all your pops or move your emissaries out to more "dangerous" tasks attacking the enemy is often an exercise in intra-team diplomacy. "Nation-builders" who stay at home pumping up are *generally* not highly regarded. But over eager banzai players do nobody any favors when they insist on "trying" to steal enemy pops with low rank emissaries. Best advice is to use your emissaries working at home until their in their 60's, and then they work themselves towards the enemy. If they pull off a couple more skill building orders (Improving, Doubling allies, etc) en route and don't get there until their in their 70's, fine, their activities have been beneficial. Waiting until all your emissaries are in their 70's (such that your original ones are now in their 80's or above while nation building...) does nobody any favors. Get Friendly (180 order above) with allies and join multi-national companies (see Nation Order Sequence, Introduction) and out fighting. It's always cheaper to steal a town than make your own...

To improve a camp to a village, the sum should be equal to or greater than 70 (4000 gold)

Village to a town - 90 (6000 gold)
 Town to a major town - 110 (8000 gold)
 Major town to a city - 130 (10,000 gold)

552 and 555 - Post and Create Camp

Population centers are the keys to the game. You want as many as possible as soon as possible. It's standard practice to name at least 2 emissaries at game start and have them 555 Creating Camps until the pop centre limit is reached. There is a finite number of pops allowed in the game. As camps are created, it gets more difficult to do so. Similarly, climate and terrain are also camp creation modifiers. Mountains are difficult to create in, as are northerly conditions. Standard practice is to have new emissaries 520 a couple turns in the capital, and then head out creating camps everywhere they can! Hit plains/forest hexes first, and then move to rough and mountains. Emissaries (555) gain skill when they create pop centers. Army commanders can 552 Post camps, but they do not gain skill AND it costs twice as much. Most armies are too busy to be wandering the empty wastes posting camps, but it's useful to post while on your way to war, plan on it actually!

The loyalty of the newly created pops is 1/2 the natural skill rank of the character who creates it.

Pay attention to any strategic sites you might consider as useful in the future if camped now. Ask yourself: "if I had a fortified pop here (i.e. 1920), nobody can come get me without stopping and paying the toll..." or "I/we might need a bridge about here (i.e. 2928) at some point..." and "If I send an army all the way to here (i.e. 2305) I might want to pick up some food here (i.e. 2204)..."

There are a finite number of population centers available in the game. Once this number is reached, you cannot create any more. The sooner you start creating camps the more you'll end up with before the limit is hit, the better. There are also apparently a finite number of camps available per turn. Around 10 for the first few turns, then up to 20 per turn after that, increasing yet again at some point (turn 8? Turn 10?) This, and the Nation Sequence (see introduction above) will dictate that sometimes you don't get any camps down and others times you succeed with all your attempts, while your allies fail, or then another turn you ALL succeed, then the limit is hit... This limit is usually hit BEFORE turn 10. Haste in this regard does NOT make waste.

Note, all the fortified ruins in the game count in this total number of pops. Such that, once the limit is hit, these hexes are still available for camping. Go there last if you can. Same story with all starting pops. Hexes that have had their starting pops destroyed will always be able to replace them.

560 and 565 - Abandon Camp and Reduce Population Center

Another couple of orders that are very rarely, if ever, used. If you've got a pop where you are confident that it will be taken over, then on your way out it may be worthwhile to reduce it/abandon it to ensure the enemy gets as little free goodies as possible.

580 - Spread Rumours

Don't do this if you're playing on a Team. The rumors generated appear in the Nation Messages section, or are picked up using the 585 order below. Often times this information is useful to determine many things, i.e. track enemy character movement. If your emissary is sitting with nothing to do, use the order below instead...

585 - Uncover Secrets

This will give random information regarding Victory Conditions of different nations around the world. The key use for this order is IF you are on a population center of another nation, it may give you the capital location of that nation. Capitals get moved around during the game, so this order can track down that bugger of an enemy that scurries around and just won't die. Also note, this order gives Victory Conditions of nations, more of the nation whose pop you're on when issuing it. In FA, this might reveal crucial information like SNA's (Special Nation Abilities, i.e. who has the +20 to kidnap/assassinate in that game...) or Artifact numbers, which are randomized in that scenario. The key here is if you're wandering the wild or on your own pop, you'll get random information from around the world, if you're on a pop of another nation, you'll more likely get information specific to that nation.

Agent Orders 600's

Agents are often considered the most fun characters, and the Cloud Lord, the agent nation supreme, is often considered the most fun nation to play. The penalties for failing agent orders can be severe, thought, capture, injury, or death. Emissaries don't play in the same life insurance category generally... Agents are trying to do subversive things. When they fail, they'll often get one of 2 messages: the person/place was "too well guarded" or they were "stopped by local militia". There is no "militia" in the game; this line was simply invented because it sounds better than "Bootlicker failed his random roll". I had heard that this local militia only existed on Fortified pops. This is not true. I've been stopped by local militia on unfortified, heck, HIDDEN pops before...it's a Random Roll failure message and nothing else.

People often HATE this item when trying to do something on Allied population centers. "Why should my allied local militia stop me from assassinating a known enemy to all???" Answer being, IF there WAS a local militia, they're not privy to the on goings of national leaders, agents, etc. Do assassins brief the local constabulary when operating in foreign, even if "allied" regions? The police are there to stop crime if possible...so stop whining. Besides, as before, there is no local militia. There ARE modifiers regarding pop size, fortification level, relations, etc. So, it's more difficult for my agent to assassinate an enemy on a friendly pop than on my own.

Ever fail an agent order due to "tight security"? Check the 500 order above and the 600 order below...

600 - Counter Espionage

Useful when your ally who had your character Doubled (see 500 above!) advises you that he is no longer receiving reports from that character. Note: it takes an emissary to Recruit a Double Agent, it takes an Agent to ferret that spy out. This is something that can be done every now and then. If you "seem" to "always fail" against a particular nation, take a turn out to try this "anti-virus" move.

Here's a quick agent-training method that I read about and have seen put into practice. It takes considerable resources to maximize fully, but can be effective. Everything is a Pro vs Con value judgment in this game in regards to allocating such character resources. This order is actually quite easy. And it gives you a skill rank increase *for every "spy" you uncover*. A group of allied emissaries gathers and 500 - Doubles some of your characters. Your agent issues this order and gets a potentially huge one-turn skill increase. The emissaries also get an increase too, so it's worth contemplating if an ally (or group of such) has some 50ish emissaries just itching to get into battle but not yet good enough to do so. They'll improve and you'll get a thief up to assassin level much faster than just by stealing.

605 and 610 - Guard Location and Guard Character

Basic agent training. Guarding a location protects from gold thefts or sabotages (bridges, fortifications, and product stores) while guarding a character protects against assassinations, kidnappings, or thefts of any artifacts the guarded character is carrying. Guards reputedly are effective against agents up to double the guards rank (43 agent guards at 86) but a failed guard will generally be injured, usually a set amount equal to the agent skill of the guy who blew past your guard to success. New agents generally guard until they're in their low 40s, when they are capable of stealing gold from enemy camps. Note: this double-effectiveness rule of guarding isn't highly regarded in the community (I'm being polite...). Guarding is quite controversial. Also note that multiple guards do NOT stack their effectiveness - they're accounted for individually. 12 weak agents are barely more effective than 1 weak agent.

615 and 620 - Assassinate and Kidnap Character

The best reason to have agents. Generally, agents cannot perform these orders until they're in their 60s or so. Kidnapping is easier than assassinating, but one agent can only have a maximum of 3 hostages, and hostages escape, sometimes injuring their keepers! While keeping hostages is often worthwhile, it's mostly better (certainly more effective psychologically!) to just kill and kill and kill... Rule of thumb: kill anyone with (or suspected to have) agent skill, and kidnap the rest where possible.

New information claims there is a limit to the number of hostages allowed in the game. Once this limit gets hit, any attempts to Kidnap enemy characters will simply fail, and I guess nobody will end up getting captured in combat. I wonder if that means they'll have a greater chance of getting killed in combat instead of captured? One report had this Hostage Limit (all hostages, not just Kidnap victims) at 50 for the game. Whether that is true or not, I have not seen documented proof. Why have a limit here? Well, if there was no limit on the number of characters allowed, then there wouldn't be a limit on how many of those are hostages. Limit the number of characters allowed and you have to limit this also. It's a game, not reality...

Raw agent skill being greater than the target is a major bonus reputedly also. Experience will show you that even Ji Indur with Dog Lord artifact will fail against Tarondor more often than not early on... So go for the weaker Eothraim commanders instead.

665-680 - Sabotage Orders

Depending on the strategic plans of you and your allies, you may prefer to blow something up instead of killing someone, especially if you find nobody to kill...may as well leave your mark! Bridges (see 475 above) are often worthwhile to destroy, as are fortifications if you intend on moving militarily against a target. If you know that your enemy is stockpiling timber to build war machines or a bridge, it may be worthwhile to try and burn their woodpile. BUT: note the order sequence required to gather timber in order to say, replace that crucial bridge. At the end of one turn, the transport orders (947 and 948) are used to gather all the timber at the population center. You cannot sabotage the timber this turn because it isn't there yet... Similarly, the bridge would generally get build immediately thereafter, at order 490, so there won't be any timber to burn... (But there "may" be a bridge to sabotage...).

It may be strategically worthwhile to harass an enemy supply route by blowing various backfield bridges. You can also help allies AND increase your agent training rate by sabotaging allied Harbors, Ports, or unwanted fortifications. It's easier to do so with good relations, thus giving your agent an increased skill boost early. Mind you, your allies high loyalties will help prevent these "hostile" acts. And remember the Items that Affect Order at the beginning: almost all these items affect Agent orders. And, most algorithms in the program are reputed to have various sliding-scale effects. So the higher the fortifications, the harder it is to Sabotage them, for example. Always keep in mind potential issues surrounding relativity in this game!

This is another order that allies share to help train each other's agents. If you don't want to steal gold from each other, sabotage stores instead (just make sure your ally doesn't sell it at 320/325 same turn!)

685 - Steal Artifact

Artifacts are extremely valuable. What you can't find for yourself, someone else has already picked up somewhere, so steal it from them! Similarly, you CAN steal an artifact off of a dragon, or any other NPC (Gandalf, Galadriel, etc). But this takes a good agent and the repercussions are severe!

This is also an excellent way to transfer artifacts between allies. Instead of powerful characters moving around and "wasting" an order to 360 (Transfer Artifact), have an agent in his 40's steal it and move it around. This gives him a good boost in rank and helps the team get organized.

690 - Steal Gold

Basic Agent Training Part II. Once you hit your 40's, you should be able to steal from camps. The larger the population center, the greater it's fortifications, the higher its loyalty, the more difficult it is to steal from AND the greater the chances of getting injured! Also, you do NOT want to be relying on stealing gold to keep your economy afloat. If nothing else, you pay maintenance before this point, so stealing a million gold won't prevent bankruptcy that turn...

General agent rule of thumb:

30's guard

High 30's to Low 40's steal from allied camps

Low to Mid 40's steal from enemy camps, steal allied arties, etc

50's increase the size of enemy pops to steal from, sabotage allies stuff (ports, harbors, fortifications)

60's can start attempting Kidnap/Assassinate

Again, note how many potential modifiers there are to order success. Do NOT waste a 64 agent by attempting to assassinate a high-level army commander at a high loyalty large fortified enemy pop! You bump into a weak enemy emissary in the desert? Sure, give him a shot!

Mage Orders

Mages are easily the least appreciated character in the game. Games don't go as long these days and mages are really most effective through the mid to late game as so many of their key roles require high level mages to fill adequately. Again, much of what mages do follows general rules of "common sense". A low level mage using a Palantir will get a picture of the region but little data, while a higher level mage who might be farther away may also identify various armies in addition to the map, for example.

Identify the mages you have and the spells they have and assign them long term roles to work towards from the start. I.e., if Ringlin already has a Reveal spell, he can be the one who works towards learning Reveal Pop Center instead of wasting Elrond's time learning the spells from the beginning. Be relatively conservative in your usage of them. A 50 mage will have a harder time learning a "Hard" spell (use the same approximate range as orders, i.e., 60-100...) and if he learns it, will likely get a lower casting rank such that he won't be able to successfully use the spell anyway. Most Hard spells will give you casting ranks of the 50's (60 mages) through the 60's (70ish+ mages). I've never seen a mage get Curses, for example, higher than 62 myself. If you want to use these hard spells, you'll need to have mage artifacts to cast them. But you'll likely need the mage artifacts you have to cast Locate Artifact True in order to find the mage artifacts you want...etc. Hard decisions are made here. Disregard at your peril.

Mages are unlike other characters as they can issue 2 "skill" orders per turn. They can cast 2 spells, for example. But when they do, they lose health. As with EVERYTHING in this game, it's a random shot at a sliding scale of modifiers giving a random result based on a sliding scale of possibilities: if you cast 2 Hard spells successfully, you can lose up to 90 health points! This is a risky move at any point in the game; health comes and goes, from agent actions, challenges, curses, and random encounters.

There are some spells that have a double-roll effect, like the 525 order detailed above. For example, Reveal Population Center does this. When the game was created, nobody knew like they do today where all the hidden pops were. When you cast this spell, the first roll determines IF you successfully "reveal the presence" of a hidden pop. You'll get the result "Khazad Dum was revealed at 2212". The second roll then determines if you actually "unhide" it. The first roll takes Casting Rank into account (that's your natural casting rank + artifacts). This second roll takes Natural Mage Rank into account. So, if you learned the spell with a 47 mage and he successfully cast it (the first roll) with a slew of artifacts, he's got poor odds of actually un hiding the pop! Your result will say "Khazad Dum was revealed at 2212, and is no longer hidden." If you were completely successful - the "and" separates the 2 rolls.

700 - Forget Spell

Most mages never learn their maximum number of spells, but, if you get too low a casting rank on one you really want, Forget it and try again (note: you can Forget and Research it again on the very same turn...Research Spell is 705..).

705 - Research Spell

You CAN research 2 spells in one turn. Often, players will attempt a "double tap", by researching a Prerequisite spell, and the higher level spell on the same turn. This will only work 50% of the time, though. The computer processes all 705 orders in random order, regardless of which one you typed up first! Thus, it may attempt the higher level spell first, conclude that you do not know a prerequisite, and fail. It will then attempt the other 705 and succeed. Unless you are desperate, do one a turn.

710 - Prentice Magery

The automatic mage training order. Until you have decided your mage is to play a very specialized role in the game, issue the 710 order at every available opportunity. Mages are the least appreciated character in the game. Often relegated to specific roles (this guy casts this spell, that guy picks up artifacts, etc). It also takes longer to train mages up to useful skill levels because they do not have average and hard orders that give them greater increases. Also, between Spell Casting Rank and Mage Rank, mages have 2 factors involved in their success instead of the usual skill rank only, and artifacts seem to be used in one situation and not another (see Double Roll issue in 525 and Mage Order intro above). Time and experience will teach you exactly how mages work in the different situations. Best advice I can give at this point is to ASK advice or specific questions of veteran allies or other players on either the mepbmlist@yahoogroups.com, or www.pbmforum.com. I think mages are unappreciated essentially because they are much more complicated to use "well" than the other characters.

Character Naming 725, 728, 731, 734, 737

Unless your nation has a special skill to name character at skill level 40, all your characters will come with 30. While agents, emissaries, and mages can only name similar characters, commanders can name any kind of character, and multi-classed characters using the 725 order. For financial reasons, players sometimes want as cheap a character as possible. It is possible to name a character with only 10 skill points - if you have a character with 10 of that skill and he uses the 728, 731, 734, or 737 order, he'll create a new character with only 10 skill - not 30. You cannot do that using the 725 order. If, for example, you issue 725 and only designate 10 emissary skill, the computer will automatically assign the remaining 20 skill, and it will be defaulted as command skill. Also note, if your character has 24 emissary skill and issues the 734 order, it can only name a new emissary at maximum 24 skill (can, of course, designate the new character at any skill level below that, minimum 10).

All time favorite character: 10-20-0-0, the Command/Agent. He can do almost all command requiring miscellaneous orders to manage the military, train up to eventually be an able agent, and if leading armies will force the enemy to Assassinate him instead of kidnap. If kidnapped, his agent skill gives him a shot at escaping capture. While it's expensive to name the 10,000 character just to feed him to the wolves, it's potentially crippling if the enemy is running an effective Kidnap campaign against you, where you have numerous expensive characters you cannot replace nor use.

All time favorite character II: the 10 commander. Useful if you're just running armies continually to the front and you expect to die (but can't afford the 10-20 - see the Eothraim...). Good company commanders who simply 215 - Refuse Challenges and 820 - Move Company, and cheap fools willing to commit suicide against enemy pops (see 250/255 orders above).

Also note: you CAN name a new command character AND 765 - Split Army to him on the same turn, simply as a result of Order Sequence. Ensure that you select a 5 character id that is virtually guaranteed, and watch any order entry mistakes! I once failed to split army to Bradley as I had apparently named a new commander Eradley that turn...

If you have an SNA (Special Nation Ability) to name a certain character at 40, you'll likely need it. Many people hate naming pure commanders for any purpose and think the Name Commanders at 40 to be a waste. Others rarely if even name new mages, even as the Blind Sorcerer, so the Name Mages at 40 SNA is a waste to them. The Emissary and Agent SNA's are easily seen as valuable. I personally like the Mage SNA and always try to get Arthedain and Southern Gondor (the FP who have this power) to use it. The FP have close to 1/2 the mage power of the DS and, if the game goes for a while, will NEED them!

Another idea to keep in mind is the concept of the Camp Limit. Instead of using the 725 order to name one pure 30 Emissary, and then having him name cheaper emissaries after using the 734 order, some argue that blowing the extra money on naming as many emissaries as possible on turn 1 or 2 is worth it. They get to 520 and increase their skill the

next turn, instead of waiting and naming, and you'll get so many more camps out of it before the limit is hit, that you'll be far ahead economically in the long term such that the extra cost of the 725 is more than accounted for.

Movement Orders 810-870

Be very careful with movement! Army and navy movement is especially rife with pitfalls! Again: if unsure, ask! Send your proposed orders to an experienced player to verify! Movement is fraught with such peril, and is so drastically important; it is the one thing you want to guarantee, before all else. Read the tables, calculate foodless movement accurately (round up!), and triple check your map for terrain, bridges, fords, etc.

810 - Move Character

You cannot start or end in water. You might be surprised...

825 – Cast Movement Spell

Count as a regular movement. Sometimes worth practicing just to build the casting ranks for when it's necessary. Of course, Teleport is the dream – a Teleporting Curse Squad or Assassin are always nice. Dragon Lord fills an extremely useful role by Teleporting around to pick up and deliver artifacts. And some artifacts provide ANY user with the ability to Cast teleport – others allow your Mages to Learn it. Use the difference.

830 - Move Navy

If you hit land, even Shore/Plains, you stop unless that land has a riverside - you can't "bounce off" the shore to avoid a potential enemy – once you hit land you stop. Note that Unfed navies move at ½ the distance – instead of getting 14 hexes to sail on, they get 7.

840 - Stand and Defend

A useful order if you think your enemy is just going to try to move past you. Consider you have a smaller force that blocks a larger enemy force. If you're army is very likely to die, there's a good chance that the enemy will assume you'll just Refuse Challenge and then Move Character to get back home after his army is lost in combat. So, instead of attacking, he just Moves on by you hoping to maintain his complete force AND strand you sitting there. So you issue this army and he can't move - you're both just sitting there for another turn! Frustrating AND expensive.

OVERRUNS: Somewhere in the rules you might have read where an army may be able to "push past" another army that would have otherwise blocked it. This can happen, but what more likely is to happen is the Overrun, where the larger army "pushes" past with such force that it stomps your army and ALL CHARACTERS TRAVELLING WITH the army to death. This is a contentious and oft-discussed issue. General rules are along the lines of anywhere from 5:1 troop superiority to 10:1. Troop constitution plays a role also, such that HC may overrun MA at a lower ratio. Command rank is also expected to play a role. Rule of Thumb: if your army is small, either get it into combat or get it out of there...

Overruns occur when the larger army attempts to leave the hex where the two armies have met. Note the word "attempts" - they don't have to be successful. For example, if the order was issued, but the army ran out of movement points available such that they could NOT leave the hex, it will be considered an attempt and the overrun may occur. Fortifications will prevent overruns as they prevent the attempt to leave the hex. It's also possible to "overrun" an army but have that army survive... This is like a critical success on the supposed victim, and that army somehow managed to "push past" yours. Good luck for them, frustrating for the player who thought he killed an army and characters...

850/860 - Move Army/Force March Army

Move gives you 12 points to use, Force gives you 14 (Navies always get 14, except when unfed, and they get 7...). Where those extra 2 points come is unclear, I believe the last I heard (and forgot to note...) they came at the "end", so after everyone moves 12, YOU move another 2. In other words, movement "pulse" 1 occurs at "time 1" for everyone.

Each terrain feature is factored by 1/3 when moving as unfed, and it's always rounded against you! This is why navy's movement is cut in half when unfed - 1 mp (movement point) turns into 1.333 which is rounded up to 2. 1->2, 2->3, 3->4, then 4->6, 5->7, 6->8, and then 12->Cannot Move!

Example using Fed Foot: you start in the Plains. Your first movement crosses a minor river (2), then the next hex is plains (+3=5), then Forest (+5=10) then another Forest hex (+5= Nix!) You stay in the first forest hex, and your message says that "terrain stopped movement" or something like that.

Same example unfed Foot: you start in the Plains. Your first movement crosses a minor river (2=3), then the next hex is plains (+4=7), then Forest (+7=14), and you're stopped again. But this time, if you had issued Move Army instead of Force March, you wouldn't even have made it to the first forest hex. The orders look the same in both MEOW and Automagic, so make sure you get them right!

And here's one of the best ones: another Larry Rule. Some think it should be changed, and others think it was specifically programmed in, but it's simply the way computers work. IF your army has food in the baggage train at the time of movement, it will move as if fed. A very simply "if-then" programming case. This means 1 food in your baggage train will provide your 5000 Heavy Cavalry with full Fed movement. This is Larry waving the last sandwich at the troops, espousing them to march onwards! Every Onwards to Glory! The implications of this rule are quite staggeringly numerous. As long as your pop center feeds your army as it builds, you only ever need 1 food in the baggage train for it to be considered Fed until it finally eats that last can of beans on the march. Consider a different case: Armies eat at the time Maintenance is paid, consider it a simple transaction using Food instead of Gold. But movement happens at the 830/850/860 point. Imagine a large army is starving at the 370-400 point, but a smaller force with a couple extra cans of beans is then Transferred into this larger force at the 780 - Transfer Command point. Now the combined army has food in the baggage train, satisfies the "If-Then" at the 800 point, and the force is considered fed.... How to "fix" this rule? Well, it's been suggested to put the "If-Then" at the 400 point, such that no matter what happens to Army A after that point, it moves as if unfed. So, the commander of Army A can simply 780 to the smaller army instead of vice-versa...same results. An example that computers are neither intelligent nor malicious - they are simply what they are.

Note, in this regard, the 300 series order 347 - Transfer Food Army to Army happens before Maintenance (feeding) so is of little use here.

Scouts and Recons 905-935

Information is power. Each order gives different types of information that can be useful: who has troops around and how many, the loyalty of population centers, map information, etc. The Free People should use the Palantirs (scrying artifacts) to find the Cloud Lord and Blind Sorcerer armies in the beginning, and then anyone who has one should use them to hunt down the off map areas for pops, icons, etc. When agents are travelling in a company, say a theft squad in training, the thieves should each Steal and issue a scouting order (unless they're stealing from major centers, and they prefer to be safe and refuse challenge/ steal). 915 and 920 are miscellaneous orders and give useful information. The 920 can give the population center loyalty, the presence of any docked ships, etc. You will get a clearer picture of your world, and you never know what may be useful! When a commander is travelling, across the map, try and have him go via an area you'd like to Recon.

905 - Scout Army

Want to go more than 12 hexes without casting a Movement Spell or using an artifact as a character? Issue this one. The agent can move 12 hexes, and then if he selects Y to "follow" the army he's scouting, he'll do so - regardless of how far beyond the 12 hexes that army ends up. Mages play a nice role here. If you pick up the scent of an army (say, via a Palantir, Recon, Scout Area, army that survived combat) not only can your agent simply try this order to end up wherever the army ends up. Also have a mage cast Divine Characters with Forces and you may learn the name of any backups with the army. Have multiple agents try to chase this force and you can wipe them out entirely (or issue challenges to the backups if you like). You can also use it to follow your own army around. Useful if you expect it to get cut off somewhere by an enemy army - your agent is in the right place without having to guess.

930 - Scout for Characters

The effects of this order are highly variable. Two identical scouts may end up with vastly different sets of information using this order in the same hex on the same turn. The higher the rank of the character, the harder it is to Scout. One thing I've been told on numerous occasions is that you need both a Name and a Title else it's likely a false lead. For example, if you see "Regent Celdrahil" you can take that to the bank. If you see "Celdrahil, Free People male", well, he might be there he might not...

Transport Orders 947 & 948

Note that from your capital you can 947 a Percent of product, while from ANY pop you can 948 a Finite Number of product. Try different scenarios to move product around. For example, if you want to ship an ally timber but only have the 1 capital order, use it to 947 all your timber to another pop you have an extra character in and HE can 948 the number of timber units to the allied pop. Don't ship to Hidden Pops!

If you want 50% of your mounts in one recruiting center and 50% in another, you can neither 947 50% to each, nor can you 947 100% to one and THEN 947 50% to another. You have to count the stuff and use the 947 - 100% to one and then 948 what you need to the other. Always be aware of the caravans taking 10% - they do it for EACH order! Example, you have 5000 timber at X and you want to send 3000 to Y. Issue 948 and you send 3000 to Y, the caravans take 10% (300) leaving 1700 at X. Or, if you try to 948 all 5000, you'll only ship 4500. They take it from what remains, where possible. Another implication of this is that 90% is better than 100%! How? Well, if you ship 100% of a product, the caravans will take their 10% and you'll only ship 90%. If you ship 90% of a product, the caravans will take their 10% of *what remains*. That's actually 9% of the total! You ship the same 90% and you *still have* 1% left over! Might be handy in the case of Food, such that you'll likely still have at least 1 food (providing you haven't already sold it...) at every food producing pop center even after shipping all you can. This way, you can still 770 - Hire Army and give it that crucial sandwich at least for Larry to keep the troop happy.

949 - Transfer Ownership

A common order to mix pop centers around to needy allies or provide back up pops to allies in need. The loyalty of the new pop is the average of the 2 Emissaries involved. Note, weak emissaries can fail this order - if it's absolutely necessary, do it properly!

Other Issues

Stealth

Stealth impacts on your characters in many ways. Consider the meaning of the word, and right away you think that they're better at hiding. Correct! Consider 2 characters on a pop, both have the same skill and resulting challenge rank. 1 of them shows up on the enemy's pop centre report – the one with stealth does not. (providing the stealth bonus is enough for them to remain hidden...). That's the type of thing Stealth does. It also supports offensive actions, both Agent and Emissary. How it impacts Emissary rank, I do not know (I've only been assured that it does). But I've been told it's affect on agent rank is essential like a 2/3 bonus – add 2/3 of the stealth rank onto the agent rank directly. Now, I'm sure it doesn't work that way in the program, but that's how a highly respected player deals with it when making his decisions. Similar to showing up on the pop centre report, it's more difficult to find a stealthy character when Scouting for Characters. Does stealth add to the ability to Scout for Characters? Does a stealthy scout have an easier time finding stealthy opponents (or are they the same question?)? I've heard both sides. Stealth increases agent skill directly, so wherever that's required, it's in play.

How many stealthy characters do "Stealth Bonus" nations get? 1/20? 1/10? 1/5? My experience has been all over the map. I had an Ice King with about ¼ get stealth, I've had a Noldo not get a single stealthy character (18 named to date...) while Cardolan, the Dwarves, and the Eothraim all have stealthy characters in that game... When you get it, it's great, hopefully it's on an Agent or Emissary such that you can really use it the most..!

Navies

At any time you have ships "anchored", an Army can pick them up, even if they're Anchored in a hills hex without a port/harbour. Mind you, they'll pick them up, become a Navy again, and not be able to land in that same hex again, or move as an army again. But it's possible.

Also been told that every Cavalry troop is 1/150 of the ships carrying capacity and every Foot is 1/250'th. Seem obvious? Well, in the event you have 100 LC and 100 MA, can you fit them on 1 Transport...?

Anti Agent Game

Guarding is vaguely effective and ineffective at the same time. Frustrating it is to Guard. Apparently agents Guard at double, but when a 70 point agent issues a Guard order and is then injured by a lesser agent, or killed, one must wonder why bother..? But the next time a 40 point agent captures an assassin. Methinks a lot has to do with the natural rank of the offensive agent (the higher the agent, the less likely you'll guard) but then, it *is* a dice game...

You can Double (500) agents. This order is based on a natural rank comparison. Early in the game those "scary killer" agents are yet only 30 (Din O, Khamul) or 40 (Ji Indur, Erennis) pointers with artifacts. You're new emissaries actually have a reasonable chance to Double them right away – rendering them relatively impotent against you for many turns of the agent player's frustration.

300 order. Lower your taxes – by just 1% - when th enemy agents are attacking your pops. Just try it....

Ready – Set – GO!

Momentum is key. First out of the starting blocks has an extreme advantage in any race, and this game is a race in all aspects. So let's take a look at some of the races:

Artifact Race

With your team turn 0 pdf's, you have to compile a Mage listing that details ranks, artifacts held, and spells known. From there it's a matter of determining which mages are to learn the Artifact Lore spells required to find the toys. Elrond, Erestor, Ringlin, Nimrodel, Cirdan, Tharudan, for the FP, anyone 50 or better for the DS (of which there are too many!). Those who know spells have to cast them and learn the higher ones. Note Spell Difficulty levels. Locate Artifact True (LAT) is a Hard spell, one that a 50 has a reasonable chance to learn but his resulting casting rank will be random slanted towards Bad... Have the best mages learn LAT ASAP while the 2nd rung guys learn Locate Artifact (LA). A typical FP team might, for example, have Elrond know LA only and maybe a couple other LA's or RA's (Research Artifact). Turn 1 it's decided which artifact Elrond will find (he Researches Spell – 705 #428 and Casts Lore Spell – 940 #428 same turn). That'll likely be the Ring of Wind or Tinculin, depending on the agreement of the team. Elrond is a virtual guarantee due to his high rank and powerful mage artifact he starts with. Give at least one LAT mage enough artifacts to up his casting rank to a guaranteed level – you'll want this information at least once a turn.

With at least 1 LAT happening every turn, you can turn your attention to using your various other LA's to either triangulate artifacts or simply track others. By LA'ing a known enemy artifact, you'll learn the name and location of the bearer, to within 1 hex. This 7 hex range is almost always good enough to infer exactly where that character is. If Khamul is "at or near 0209" you know for damn sure he's on 0309 if that's where you've located the Ring of Curufin the last turn~! 3 LA's on the same artifact will usually spread out enough to give you the true location, but now always, so it's really a risk-reward assessment for your team on how you want to utilize these.

Which artifacts to go for? Well, all the lost Agent or Stealth artifacts are usually the hottest. Tinculin is also popular as it's the most powerful Neutral Mage artifact and also provides access to learn Spirit Mastery spells. The FP start the game with a significant character deficit in both mages, agents, and artifacts for both. The DS start with skills and toys to provide 2 or 3 virtually guaranteed assassinations on turn 2, while the FP would have to have 3 nations coordinate movement and artifact transfers in order to kill, maybe, on turn 3 with 1 artifact enhanced agent. FP mages are no better. The Noldo have 3, the Sinda also, but that's it for FP mages at game start. So, how do the FP use their lesser mage power to find the artifacts they need? It's always quite the debate. One thing is for sure: If you start with the ability to cast LAT on turn 1 with a virtual guarantee, you have to go for them! Cast on the Ring of Wind first, Ring of Curufin next while you LA on Tinculin, and run every possible character to those locations to secure those toys. Getting those early can seriously reduce the disparity between the allegiances. If you do NOT have a "guaranteed" LAT on turn 1, it's almost worth considering a concession of the Ring of Wind, and even the Ring of Curufin... Instead, focus on as many of the mage artifacts as you can, leaving the DS to waste their "head start" on the Agent toy's you're not even going for. Remember, it's a race: if you start ½ a step behind, you'll likely lose the whole enchilada. Let them run left, you run right, and plan your character naming strategy and agent roles accordingly.

How to get artifacts? Well, ideally, you'll have a high rank/challenge mage be able to move to the hex and 900 that particular artifact. He's joined by a guard and a reasonable Scout for Characters. Note, the FP do not have a reasonable agent of any stripe in the beginning, so providing for both of those is nigh impossible... So send the closest character and hope for the best. Rest assured that the enemy is likely there. Check your Nation Messages sections to see if anyone else got an encounter in that hex in the event you did not. Assume the enemy knows you are there and be prepared to Refuse Challenge if necessary. One thing I've done with success (random or calculated, I'll likely never know) is move to artifact hexes with one mage and run him out the next turn while another mages heads there. The first will either 1) grab the toy with the 900 order (rare) or 2) find an encounter and 290/810 the following turn getting the artifact at the 290 order or 3) 290 and 810 but the 290 reveals a riddle. This is where the next mage shows up. Presuming the enemy has a rumour that your First mage got an encounter, they'll be looking to challenge HIM, while your second mage can "hopefully" sneak in, answer the riddle the following turn, and sneak out again while the enemy flails away at the 210 order and doesn't get the encounter. Note, when encounters are "triggered" there's usually a random number of turns that go by before they can be triggered again. A crevice in a hillside to investigate can be abandoned, but another character can go there and investigate later, WITHOUT getting the message.. Note, that works both ways. If you go to a hex where a lost artifact has been located, and do NOT get the encounter message, the ENEMY did! You can still 290 the encounter! (and they might try to 290 your encounter!).

It's a race. If you have the spells to start early, you'll win the lion's share of them. If not, you have to adjust your strategy accordingly and be happy with what you end up with!

Camp Race

Name emissaries and get them out camping ASAP. Unless you start with a 30 emissary, you will be tempted to name 1 with the 725 order, and then have him name another with the cheaper 734 order the next turn. I recommend spending the money, orders permitting, on naming as many emissaries as you plan on carrying as soon as possible, even if that's at 10,000 a pop. Emissaries usually have a hard time creating camps in their 30's, so as much training as possible is required before they're reliable. If they're sitting around naming new emissaries, they're not training. If you send them out at 30 skill to create camps, if they are successful, you've created a 15 loyalty camp that has good odds of disappearing unless your taxes are at 39 or less. When that emissary finally creates a camp, he'll get a skill boost, giving him a better chance at creating more and higher loyalty ones also, but a 2 or 3 consecutive sets of failures, and it's turn 4 or beyond, you have no camps and a 30 emissary wandering about wasting time and money.

In a recent game, I named 3 emissaries on turn 1. On turn 2 I had 1 of them 520/810 out to try early camps with his basic training while the other two each stuck around to train an extra turn before heading out. I had some failures, but my head start gave me 3 emissaries in their 50's come the camp limit at turn 10 and 2 extra pages worth of pop centres. This is expensive, of course, but the more you can make and the earlier you can make them the better. These camps can now be improved relatively easily by your now good emissaries into tax paying villages. As you create more villages, your taxes improve such that you can afford to create more villages. Once your emissaries have improved a few camps to villages, you're making more money and you have 3 emissaries in their 60's who can go on the offensive. The player who can create 15 or more new pops, improve 5 of them to villages and then start stealing enemy villages or even towns all by turn 15 is really rocketing ahead in this crucial category. Note, I do not do this for personal glory – some nations simply have more pressing matters to attend to – but on the team **SOMEbody** can be maximizing the pop building process for the greater team benefit as a whole. Who? Any neutral, depending on your choice of game that particular contest, Say, Arthedain, Cardolan, the Dwarves, the Noldo as the FP (Northmen ideally too...) while the QA, Cloud Lord, Long Rider and Blind Sorceror as the DS are likely nation building allies. You might say "Cloud Lord? Why waste naming an Emissary with HIM?" And I say "Everyone needs emissaries, so only name 2 with him instead of 3...it's a total team effort."

It's a race. The pop limit will get hit, if your team isn't doing what it can to take it's share of this finite resource, it's behind the 8 ball for the long term. Short breathtaking victories are always stunning and fun, but what if they don't work out? Mistakes and luck to the enemy abound here – plan on a long game.

Note also, that the camp limit is fluid. Pop centres will degrade, get burned, etc, as the game goes on. As a player keep an emissary out camping around. As a team, keep a few out doing it – once the war starts getting strange, this limit will open up again.

552 comes before 555, as noted in the Emissary section. Use this where you can (afford...?) to and you'll get more camps out of the pool before it dries up.