



"Strange as News from Bree..."

The Lord of the Rings, chapter 9

# News From Bree

Middle Earth PBM Newsletter - October '98

## A Newbies Guide to Middle Earth Part 1: Which nation to choose?

By Colin Forbes

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So, you've seen an advert, read comments in Flagship or been recommended the game by a friend and have sent off for the rules. Now what?

Fortunately a newcomer to the game has one advantage, the rulebook is amongst the better examples you will find in PBM. However once you have had a brief look at how the game works you will be faced with the thorny question of which nation to choose. I dare say there are as many opinions on this as there are players, essentially it will depend on what you want from the game. To help out I'll suggest some good starting positions for a newcomer to the game. You'll notice I haven't said much about neutrals - in general I'd recommend new players not to start as a neutral. Middle Earth is a team game and in my opinion should be experienced as such before taking on a neutral position.

### Character Positions

If character play is your thing, then either of the Elven positions will suit you, the Noldo Elves being the prime choice and one of the best positions in the game. With stonking characters and a position well behind friendly lines the Noldo Elves are an excellent position for someone trying to find their way in the game.

On the Dark Servant side the choice is wider, virtually all the Dark Servants have good characters, though in the case of the Blind Sorcerer this is limited to mages. On balance I would recommend the Dark Lieutenants, who have a good spread of characters that will allow you to get right into the game. In some ways I'd recommend the Dark Lieutenants to a new player above the Noldo, simply because they are less isolated. The other position to mention here is the Cloud Lord, agents are his thing, and lots of them too, though other characters are less good.

### Army positions

On the other hand, you might want to get right into the action! From the Free People point of view North Gondor or the Eothraim should be amongst your choices. As North Gondor you have population centres coming out of your ears, the only trouble being that

you'll almost certainly start losing them pretty quickly. Good armies and an excellent economy make North Gondor an attractive position. The Eothraim are also exposed to armies coming out of Mordor, however they have a massive cavalry army which can do a lot of damage if used properly.

If you're intent on being a servant of Sauron, then think Dog Lord or possibly Fire King. Both will be in the thick of the action straight away, and have interesting recruitment possibilities as well as reasonable characters.

### Balanced Positions

If you are looking for a balanced position where you can have a go at both army and character actions, then you could do worse than chose South Gondor. A rich nation with large armies, though you must remember to talk with the two southern neutrals. The Dark Lieutenants are also to be highly recommended, with the Ice King an interesting option for someone who feels like living dangerously.

### Nations to avoid

Although it is more than possible to win with any nation in Middle Earth, there are a few which could all too easily go horribly wrong if this is your first game. On the Free People's side avoid the Woodmen and Northmen, whilst think carefully before going for the Dragon Lord or Witch King on the Dark Servant side, both are extremely exposed positions!

*In part 2: I'll be taking a look at things to do to make sure you don't take an early bath.*



**Game 12**

**Nations Available:**

1-25

**Comments**

List just opened

**Game 117**

**Nations Available:**

1-11, 16-18, 20-25

**Comments**

Three week game

**Game 22**

**Nations Available:**

2,4,6-8, 11-20, 24, 25

**Comments**

About half full

**Game 44**

**Nations Available:**

10 places available

**Comments**

so far the game has filled up as follows: 2 good, 2 neutral, 5 evil, both kingdoms & 4 people who will decide depending on what is necessary.



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in the main body of the text  
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## Strategy: Multi-classed characters

By Gavin Kenny

Naming a single class character is easy, you know what to expect, but what of the more interesting options open when you name a multi-classed character? This article explores the different combinations of multi-classed characters and looks at the different strategies that each one can bring to the fore. First we'll look at the multi-classed character named most often - the command agent.

### Old Faithful - Command/Agent

The command agent that typically gets named is a 10 commander and 20 agent. This configuration is often used as a backup commander in an army or a potential company commander. The command rank is deemed secondary to the agent rank which is used to guard either the army commander or the best agent in the company. Where this type of command agent is used in an army as a backup, the command rank can be improved not only by character doing a train troops (430), but also by the army commander doing a train army (435). In this way the command agent can get a bonus of between 5 and 10 to his command rank, making the lower initial starting level of his command rank less important. The other two configurations that I have seen are C15/A15 and C20/A10. These are sometimes seen where the nation is short on commanders, but does not want to name a pure commander for the long term.

Alternatively they are sometimes named by nations that get a bonus for stealth who want a commander, but don't want to waste and stealth bonus they might get. Often in the short term the agent rank is not improved and the character is to be heavily involved in combat early on. I must admit to not being a fan of this configuration, but accept that it is sometimes used.

### Bridging Characters - Command/Emissary

The bridging character term I used in the title does not refer to the creation or destruction of bridges in the game. What it actually refers to is establishing a bridgehead in another area of Middle Earth. Command Emissaries are excellent characters for moving in to a population centre gained in another area of Middle Earth from the one your nation starts in. Often in these situations the loyalty is lower than you would hope, and the command emissary is the perfect character for raising an army on the pop centre and raising the loyalty at the same time. Meanwhile your pure emissaries can go off doing other upgrades (550) or influencing you own (520) or others pop centres (525). Additionally they can transfer the army once it is large enough to another army commander and the whole process can begin again. The second use for a

command emissary is as an emissary commander, although I must say I would still prefer a command agent for this role since the scout can provide you with invaluable information about agents from the other side who need to be double agented by your team.

### War Mages - Command/Mage

War Mages tend to work better in the 2950 or 4th Age scenarios where the army numbers that can be maintained are a lot tighter and where spells cast during combat could potentially make a huge difference to the result. A C10/M20 with the right starting spells could immediately go in the back of an army and cast either offensive or defensive spells. Alternatively (if the battles are raging near your capital) you could have the command mage on your own pop centre until the turn before you know a battle is about to take place. A move and join army (870) order will get your war mage into the army in time for the coming battle. For all the DS players out there it can be quite useful to have sickness or weakness as a spell for the war mage. That way any enemy commander who gets injured during the battle might well get sick as well and die from it. This could well swing a battle your way that you thought you would lose, although is perhaps only appropriate in tight hard fought battles where the commanders stand a chance of getting damaged.

### Saboteurs - Agent/Emissary

The most offensive of the combinations, the agent emissary has the power to reduce an enemy pop centre loyalty (525) and steal gold from it (690). Later on it can influence other (525) and assassinate enemy characters (615). The only problem with this type of character is that it requires a fair time (as with most of the multi-classed types) to get up to a reasonable level. Also when you have to move the character you have to sacrifice one of its two skill orders unless the character is in a company.

### Stationary Standard Bearers - Emissary/Mage

The worst combination of skill ranks. The problem with it is that the ranks are counterintuitive. An emissary really needs to go out and create camps or influence away other nations pop centres. Your mages really need to be on your own pop centres practicing magery (710) or learning spell (705). The best use I can see for this type of character is to have it sit on one of your own pop centres influencing it up to a level that a pure emissary can come along and upgrade it. This is quite a defensive and long term character that can be used to do sell orders as it really needs to sit somewhere where it will get bonuses to both ranks.

I would name this as a E10/M20 if I was naming this type of character. For example the Cloud Lord has a character Ar-Gular who is

## across the pond

A summary of news from GSI's Middle Earth newsletter "Whispers from the Wood".

The latest issue was a little disappointing, containing player messages and only one article, though previous issues have had several interesting articles and a useful question and answer section (in addition to reams of player messages). I've only ever seen this newsletter as an e-mail (text only) but if anyone would like a copy by all means drop me an e-mail: [bain@suilven.demon.co.uk](mailto:bain@suilven.demon.co.uk) or send an SAE marked "Whispers" to:-  
106 Ashford Ave, Hayes,  
Middlesex, UB4 0NB  
and I'll send you a copy of the latest issue.

### International Grudge Match

GSI are organising a Canada vs Rest of the World grudge match. If you have a team who would like to face the Canadians, then why not contact their team leader Mike Hunnensen. You can e-mail him at:  
[basconc@ionsys.com](mailto:basconc@ionsys.com)

### Draw your own character picture!

GSI have announced that they will accept custom sketches for newly named characters! They will scan the picture in (providing it's the same size as the artwork in the game) and use it for any character you have just named. Mind you, for the privilege of having your own artwork in the game (which they will presumably re-use later on) they will charge \$6.50!

perfect for sitting on one of his towns performing inf own (520) and prentice magery (710) until it is ready to become a major town and thus a backup. In the long term I would see this type of character becoming mainly an emissary with the mage rank not improving much above 50-60. Once it has all the spells it needs it will move around doing emissary actions and casting spells.

### Blinking Assassins - Agent/Mage

The key word with this combination is 'Teleport'. In 1650 or 2950 Teleport can be learnt through having the correct artifact. In 4th age you can gain this special nation ability during the start up. Agent mages with teleport can go anywhere around Middle Earth and assassinate. They are very much a long term character since the character will have to prentice magery (710) and Guard Location (605) for quite some time before it is good enough to learn teleport and good enough to

kill. Naturally a few handy artifacts in the right skill areas will help this character becoming more effective faster.

### Jack of all Trades

Sometimes I have seen people name 10/10/10's of the various different configurations. The only reason I am aware of for people to do this is that late in the game they can get more character points on the useless remaining skill which may help them get ahead in characters. I am really against this type of character as in my experience you can never really get more than two areas up to a sufficient degree at one time. I'm sure there are people out there already leaping up in the air about to violently disagree with me.

Good luck to one all in your battles to either dominate Middle Earth or restore the land to freedom !



## The Name Game...

This is a summary of correspondence on the subject of character names. Thanks to all players who took part in this discussion, and sorry there isn't sufficient space to quote you all fully here. Harlequin have taken careful note of all your comments, good and bad.

Adrian Beattie got things rolling with the question "Is Vital Statistix an appropriate ME name?" "No", said Clint. "Can't really imagine Gandalf going up to Vital Statistix and having a chat about the death of Frodo... it is not the feel most players want or we want to encourage."

But Adrian wasn't convinced and threw the matter wide open for discussion. First response came from Nick, who said PBMs should be fun, and therefore "we should be allowed to submit what character names we like within reason," and added, "I think people can tell the difference between a fun name and an offensive name."

James agrees whole-heartedly. "Surely the decision of whether a game is to be played strictly in the spirit of ME should be left to the players." He suggests that when players set up in a game they should sat whether they want it 'True to Tolkien' or 'Freestyle' so Harlequin can class them accordingly.

From Steve Lewis: "I don't play Middle Earth to have the names of my characters "policed" by anyone." Non-ME names don't detract from the game. "Quite the opposite." In another message he states, "...giving the players a good service is more important than "policing" characters names... I'm not asking for a change in policy... just some flexibility."

Henning Rindback agrees that offensive

names should be banned, but names taken from outside of Middle Earth should be allowed.

Colin Forbes summed up much of what people were thinking when he called for a clear policy on the problem of names as soon as possible. His view is: "I myself always try to keep within the general 'flavour' of Middle Earth... that said, I don't see why people shouldn't name characters as they wish... Please remember that Clint is legally bound to disallow any names that are offensive, but naming characters along theme lines should surely be allowed." And finally: "(1) Establish some kind of ground rules. (2) Apply them consistently - which means (1) has to be well thought out. (3) TELL PEOPLE FIRST."

### Harlequin's Decision

Once again, thanks to all people who took part in this discussion and all your comments whether specifically about naming characters or more generally about our service to you, have been noted. We will be giving priority to improving our overall service. On the matter of names we have decided the following:

1. The majority decision seems to be that any names should be allowed, barring ones that are obviously offensive. Now that we know how you feel, we are happy to go along with this. So,
2. Players will be free to create any names that they think are appropriate, whether or not they are in keeping with the world of Middle Earth.
3. Names that are potentially offensive to other players, however, will be disallowed. It is generally apparent whether a name is offensive or not so we'd ask you to use your discretion here.

## Fourth Age: Opinions wanted!

I will be writing a review of Fourth Age for a forthcoming issue of Flagship and would welcome all comments on the scenario. You can contact me (Colin Forbes) at: 106 Ashford Ave, Hayes, Middlesex, UB4 0NB or [bain@suilven.demon.co.uk](mailto:bain@suilven.demon.co.uk).

## To All

Do you find yourself surrounded by allies who only want to wait until the right time to attack, who don't like to take risks, well, I, Don, am attempting to put a team of suicidal, homicidal, insane, and treacherous bastards together - preferably DS-1650, no nice, honest or trustful players need apply. Apply to Don - (01834) 843210

## Future ME Player?

Thilo Rammholdt is proud to announce the birth of his son Max Fabian (9 lbs / 4.1 kg). Apparently he is supposed to be as beautiful as his father - but will he be as good a Middle Earth player?

## To the FP, game 5

On behalf of the Dark Servant team I apologise for cutting your game short! (I won't go into the reasons here) Perhaps we could reconvene the game at a later stage?

Colin Forbes

## To everyone in game 40

Does the word "neutral" mean anything to any of you. I have been attacked by all sides and no real attempt was ever made to get me on *any* side (even the neutral alliance!)

Tom Fyfe

Mordor is a powerful fortress, although less invincible than it might appear. It has a lot of entering points, too many to be all guarded at the same time. Also, it has many outer and inner gaps, allowing an entering or entered force, to move too fast inside it. This means, many damages can be made in the interior by a surprise flank or back attack, or even by a massive frontal attack, before an adequate reaction can be organised.

The realisation of a specific system of integrative population centres and fortifications will considerably decrease these weakness points. Contemporaneously, it will turn the north-western corner of Mordor into two mighty, unrestrainable spearheads against Ithilien and Rhovanion: the Mordor spears.

## Entrances

Mordor can be entered only across mountain hexes, except easternwards, where it is open plains without any barriers. These entrances can be classified as follows:-

**Chief Doors:** Those in mountain hexes with roads, major towns and fortifications, needing 3-6 movement points to be entered; chief doors cannot be crossed in a single move by an enemy force. Their only required improvement is to be turned into cities.

**Back Doors:** Those in mountain hexes without roads, with centres or not, fortified or not., needing 12 movement points to be entered and eventually crossed.

These might be found to be too many to be all provided with guarding sufficient defence. Anyway, even unfortified camps would be a considerable improvement.

**Gaps:** Those in plain or hill hexes, not fortified, needing but 2-5 movement points to be entered and crossed. All these should be reinforced by creating camps and towers.

In all Mordor has the following doors and gaps: The Morannon Chief Door (3221), the Morgul Chief Door (3124), the Udun Backdoor (3122), the Harad Backdoors (3430, 3530, 3630, 3730, 3830), the Rhovanion Backdoors (3921, 4021, 4121, 4221), the Khand Backdoors (4227, 4226), the Rhun Gap (4321, 4421), the Khand Gap (4325, 4425)

## Outer and Inner Gaps

Gaps are forced passages for moving armies, between a pair of open manoeuvring areas. These are present in Mordor interiors as well as in its surroundings, namely: the Nurnen Sea Gap (3825), the Nurn Gap (3526, 3626), the Gogoroth Gap (3425, 3424), the Harondor Gap (3331, 3332). All gaps should be closed by creating camps and towers wherever possible.

## The Spears

This is a new concept. A spear is a line of recruitment centres, of the same nation or allegiance, placed at a single turn's infantry march (forced or not, but with food) to each other, in any direction. A recruitment centre is a major town (early game) or city (mid - let game) organised so that to recruit the maximum troops every turn without interruptions. The best for a Spear is to be completely owned by the same nation. Mordor has already two spears at game start, facing but one of northern Gondor. They are (respectively): the Morannon Spear (Mordor, 3423, 3122, 3221), the Morgul Spear (Mordor, 3423, 3224, 3124\*), the Tirith Spear (Northern Gondor, 2923, 3024, 3124\*\*)

Morannon and Morgul Spears both start from the same point, Barad-Dur. All the three spears can be improved, with deadly and decisive effects in the opposite side throughout the game. If Free Peoples can prolong Tirith Spear by taking over part of Morgul Spear, or prize Morannon Spear, Mordor will be under a very serious threat, having continuously enemy armies inside it's front door. On the other hand, if Dark Servants can strengthen their Spears by turning the Isenmouthe hexes (3222, 3323, 3324) into recruitment centres, and/or by prizing Tirith Spear, the Ithilien front of Free Peoples will be wiped away without mercy. The Spears, to be effective, should non-stop recruit HI and/or HC at full strength, every turn, so that to provide a continuous and unbearable military pressure against the enemy - especially Gondor.

## Roads and their strategy.

Mordor is served by six roads of strategical relief: the Eastern Anduin Road (3120, 3212, 3022, 3023, 3024, 3025, 3026, 3127), the Northern Ithilien Road (3017, 3018, 3119, 3120), the Rhun Road (4318, 4419, 4420), the Khand Road (4230, 4329, 4228, 4327, 4326, 4325, 4324), the Cirith Ungol Road (3024, 3124, 3224, 3324), the Isenmouthe Road (3221, 3222, 3323)

Of course, these are double-edged weapons as they can be used by Mordor to attack Ithilien, Rhovanion and Khand, and vice-verse. The eastern Anduin Road can be used by Mordor to attack Gondor - by crossing Anduin River = and to attack Harondor, but it cannot be used as well by Gondor to choose quickly a Door to be crossed, and to southern nations (S. Gondor in the first place) to send armies to help, whatever the side. Dark Servants can easily control it, if they prize, improve and strength Osgiliath (3024). This will force any enemy army moving towards the road to fight there and, of victorious, to suffer immediately one or more powerful counter-attacks from Mordor Spears.

The northern Ithilien Road is very useful to Mordor to send troops north or to receive fast help from Mirkwood and Rhovanion. As it is of some danger as well - being possibly used by Rohan,

# Questions

## Too much Information

*"The problem I find with games that have been going a while is the 'too much information' syndrome. Players have too much."*

Agree? Disagree? We'd like your comments on this for the next newsletter.

## Maps

*"Would it be possible for you to make maps where all the starting pop centres appear on it? (With info on size, nation, fortification, docks, hidden, and capital status?) I really miss this kind of map, and ME is a strategy game not an exploration game, so this would also be extremely helpful to any new players that don't have access to the pop centre lists!"*

*Marcus Dylewski*

Anyone got any comments / suggestions on this? Get in touch and let us know. We chatted to GSI and they have no plans - but if there is a database out there with the info and/or map maybe we can get something sorted out for you all? Something to think about anyway.

## Neutrality: Does it exist?

*"Recent events in a number of games have left me with a number of questions over the whole subject of Neutrals in Middle Earth (1650). A conversation with Clint revealed he had some of the same reservations. Namely, is there ever a true neutral? How many people go into a game as a 'Neutral' knowing full well which way they are going to turn? Do teams of DS and FP ever really communicate properly with the Neutrals anyway? Comments? Articles?"*

*Colin Forbes*

Elves and Northmen to attack Morannon - the centre of Thuringwathost (3120) is enormously important, for it stops any enemy force before it can enter that chief door. It should be always owned by Dark Servants; if it is eventually lost, it should be immediately recaptured. It is not relevant whether it is reduced by continual battles as long as it has at least a camp and a tower. If destroyed, it should be immediately rebuilt.

Rhun and Khand roads are of secondary and obvious employ: only rare and not very strong enemy forces (riders overall) should be expected to use them. As they enter Mordor by Rhun and Khand Gaps, closing these latter will be sufficient. Cirith Ungol Road makes mighty Morgul Spear; though, if captured by Free Peoples, it can easily become the doom of Mordor. It can be reinforced by creating a fortified major centre at 3324. Isenmouthe Road serves Morannon Spear but, like Cirith Ungol road, it is deadly for Mordor if free Peoples can have access to it. It can be reinforced by creating a fortified major centre in 3323.

## Closing Entrances and Gaps.

All hexes of chief doors and gaps should be guarded by fortified population centres. This will force any enemy army to stop movement. Camps with towers or in mountain hexes are not a strong defence, although they will allow Dark Servants an extra turn to organise a reaction, as well as precious information on enemy army size, nationality, army commander, title and characters travelling with the army. Some guarding centres already exist at the game start, but others are to be created and/or fortified.

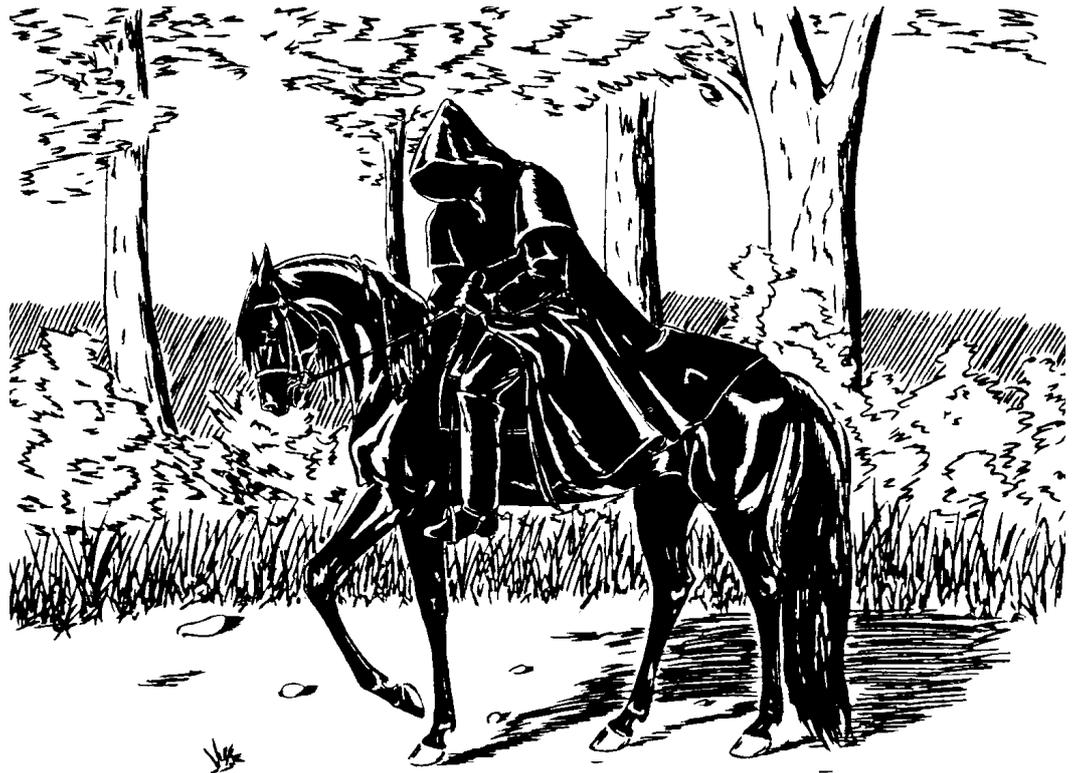
## The New Fortress Mordor

Mordor Spears born with a potential recruitment per turn of not more than 2000 troops. The potential of New Fortress Mordor Spears is 4000: a lot of difference! And it can be furthermore increased to 6000 by prizing Osgiliath and by improving to cities Thuringwathost (3120) and Gorgoroth's Gap's camps (3424,3425). Spears improving and closing gaps should be the base strategy and program of all Mordor nations from the very early game turns until totally fulfilled.

No enemy - be he as mighty, clever and coordinated as you like - will be able to beat a thing like New Fortress Mordor: an impenetrable factory, recruiting and vomiting out devastating amounts of troops every turn. For such an organised machine war losses will never be a problem, whilst nobody will be able to bear forever the tremendous economical and military effort of facing it.

To realise this complex project, a high and well-organised early effort, a full agreement and good co-operation among players and a precise respect of adopted actuation plan are indispensable. Each nation should complete the realisation of its own part of the project, whatever that means, within the first 15-20 game turns. This time already allows for naming and development of new emissaries, order failure, timber and money purchasing.

\*ME2950; \*\*ME 1650



## questionnaire

Some of you have mentioned that we need to work on improving our service to you. In order to do this we propose bringing out a questionnaire so we can find out exactly what you think about Middle Earth and how we are running the games. We have asked for suggestions as to what sort of questions we should be asking.



So far Kim Anderson has responded with the following suggestions:-

*1) Ask what your company can do to make the game run better. You have taken over the game from Allsorts, running it exactly as Allsorts did.*

*Ask what things Allsorts did wrong, so you can correct them yourself if they are causing general problems among your customers.*

*2) Maybe you could send out a point giving questionnaire, where you ask your customers to judge your company's efforts over this first period of time when you have been running Middle Earth. Fix a score from 1-10 in subjects like: How well has the GM handled his job? Has ME degraded or increased in quality after Harlequin has taken over? Why are there never any beers when you need them...?*

Well, we can't promise free beer, but we will take all your comments seriously. If anyone else has any matter they'd like to see aired in the questionnaire, please let us know.

Clint



## From out of the West....

### GM comments and general feelings about the game

Well it has been a while and I must say it has been an eye opener running and playing in Middle Earth. The game is much faster moving than any other (excepting CTF) that I have played in by PBM and it took a while to get used to that overall feel for the game. I think I have got it now - (I hope this shows!)

How about the players? Well a hardened bunch of gamers I have ever met in my nightmares! No, seriously I like gaming hard and playing fair as I can - and this seems to fit the style of play of most of you. Games come and go quickly - and the play is fast and furious. I hope to be able to keep up to the pace and have even suggested a few additions (if only GSI could take us up on it all!) Even though we have had 4 1/2 computers break on us from Allsorts since taking over and two email servers kill us for a few days we have struggled above it all and I can (mostly) confidently feel that we are getting the hang of it.

I am looking forward to actually getting to meet a lot of you (at the pubmeet and cons) so that I can get to hear some opinions up front - it's always much easier that way. The major bonus of it all is that the GMs become human (rather than just a computer processing your turns) and also the players become human as well (there's only so much you can get from a five minute phonecall after all).

Other than that I hope to see ME build up and up - already we got more money coming in and players than when we took the game over - and with a big push advertising it in the future I can expect more. The service - well I am happy with it - we sort out little problems the same or next day and the harder ones such as

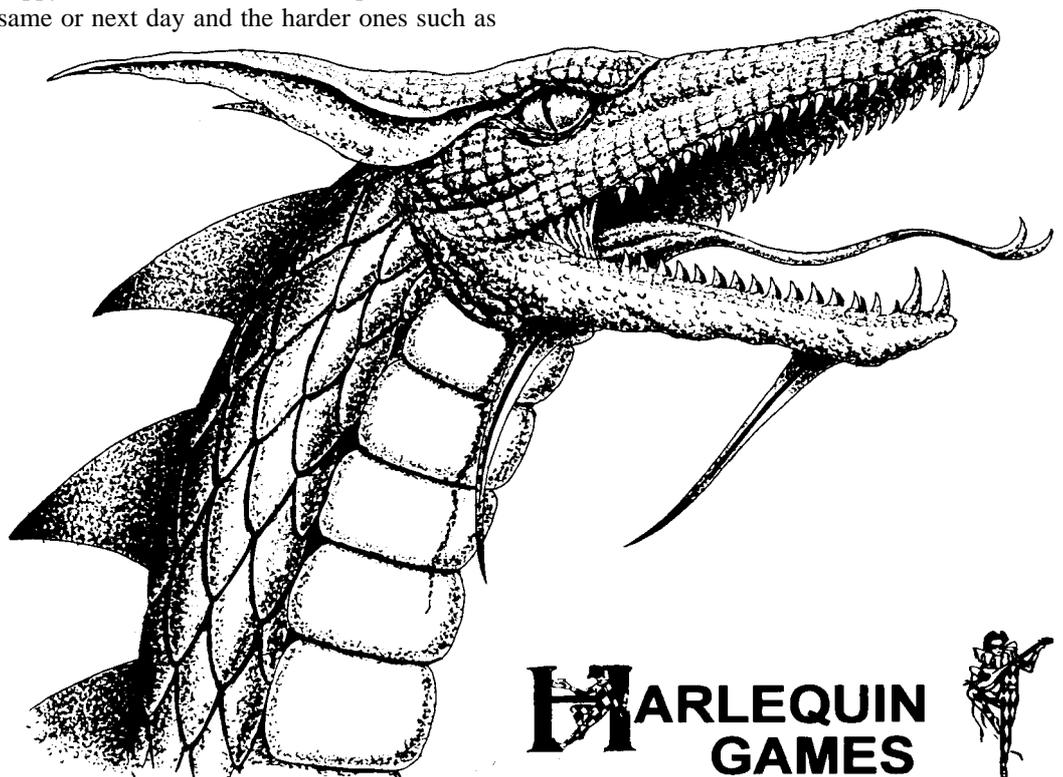
missing turns etc don't take much longer. I still expect that we will get a 1% error rating in inputting (anything more than that is unacceptable on our part - any less in-human), but they are generally easily sorted out. I would like to see more players in Fourth Age (a game I would particularly like to get involved in myself) and see this (or something similar) as the future of the game for new players.

So overall opinions is that it's been a (mostly) pleasure, a lot of (hard) work and looks good for the future. I would like to see the newsletter come out more regularly - every 3 months maybe? (What do YOU want?) Contributions such as proclamations, strategy, playing styles, artwork, individual game reviews, winners and lists (not enough space in this issue) are much needed. It is up to the players to put the work in here I'm afraid (we can only do half the work) - but well worth it in my humble opinion.

Plans for the future include getting a nice winners certificate produced (anyone got an old one so that I can see what to aim for? Any suggestions?) and speeding up our return of turns (when we get the latest computer back from the doc.) I would like to see some variants of the game - and a team game of FA as well. An appropriate questionnaire (any ideas what you would like to see?) as well is a must - but bringing one out as soon as we took the game over wasn't felt to be appropriate.

That should do for now, enjoy and don't forget to get your feedback in. Have fun, and make it fun for others,

Clint



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