"Strange as News from Bree..."

The Lord of the Rings, chapter 9

1650: All New Challenges...
...plus fantastic prizes up for grabs!

by Mike Barber

The great strength of the Middle earth engine, I think, is that the game mechanics are fairly transparent in most areas, though not completely so. As a consequence it is possible to have a good idea of what the consequence of doing X, Y and Z is. The strength of 1650 in particular is that it is all action from T1. Essentially similar startups between games means a team can have a good idea of the options facing them (and the opposition) and so the game has a strategic element that would be hard to reproduce if, say, what the enemy had (& where) was almost pure guesswork.

I am now in my Nth game of MePbm, and am looking for ways of reducing the known aspects just a little, or experimenting with small changes in the game balance. As I understand it, Harlequin now have considerable freedom to amend start up details of the game. I would really like to see some development of the 1650 scenario base to allow new challenges. I believe I helped set up what was the 1st game of 1650 with pre-committed neutrals, and in Game 17 I believe that, with my team & the enemy team leader(s) we proposed the 1st game where the Easterling population centres are divided between the Long Rider, Northmen and Eothraim, leaving just 12 nations per side.

I am NOT suggesting these changes should apply to all games - so if people do not like the thought of playing a variant where the Cloud Lord cannot assassinate before T5 - then those people can just chose not to play that game. In terms of defining what can be done, Clint has confirmed that the following is reasonable:

1) Whatever is done must be based on the existing 1650 nations;
2) Start up amendments can take the form of changes to pop centres sizes, locations, fortifications;
3) Changes to characters should take the form of changes to ranks of the existing set of characters;
4) Starting artefacts could be swapped between nations, but artefacts lost at the start of the game should remain lost;
5) Changes to starting gold may be made;
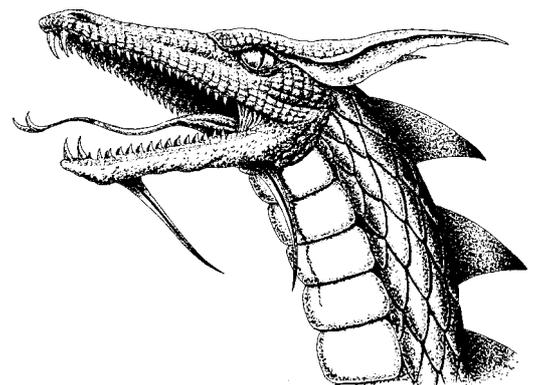6) Special conditions must be easily enforced (e.g. a no assassinations policy before turn 5 would be enforced by any player having characters assassinated) as these conditions will be player agreed, rather than programmed;

Ideally we should devise some flexibility to allow players to chose how to influence their startups. I think these should also encourage nations to address their weaknesses, rather than build gross strengths. For example, if the scenario allowed all the free people 2 characters to have 20 skill point enhancements, we should perhaps also specify that no skill be so enhanced above 70, and that the Noldo could not enhance his mages above 60 (Elrond continues to start at 70), and that Cloud Lord agent ranks cannot be boosted above 40.

Clint is considering whether a nation's special abilities can be changed, and whether it is possible to randomise artefact numbers. We could also consider variants just using local arenas - e.g. Arthedain and Cardolan vs Witch King, Rhuduar, or variants with very specific objectives (e.g. FP to capture Morannon by turn 10)

It would be really interesting, I think, if the Dragon Lord started with 2 city/ castles at 2715 and 2814, say, and the Woodmen started with a 50 emmisary, and the Witch King started with an extra 800HC at 1804, and no kidnap / assassinations are allowed before turn 5, and , and , and.....

Lets get some ideas going, and lets get Clint offering prizes to the best (cheers Clint!). Note that I would expect us to pay an increased set up fee - but that needn't be huge. Say everyone pays an extra 3 -that is 75 for Harlequin which should be worth a fair few hours of messing around with a startup.

Cloud Lord 2950

By Gianluca Meluzzi

The first thing I read about Cloud Lord of 2950 scenario was a presentation saying this position "could not win". Nothing could be less true! Yes, it is among the poorest start-ups: only one good character, awful commanders, very scarce production. Even its "dreadful" original agents are but 30 in skill (when new ones come in at 40!). On the other hand, it has already two characters with emissary skill and a good command artifact, and it is placed really far from most of the threats. So it can grow undisturbed, whilst others must fight to survive.

The Strategic Theatre

The best advantage and fun you can find in playing this nation lies not just in your mighty agents, but in the fact that you can choose your operational theatre. Even more: you can secretly create your one in areas where enemies do not expect it at all, and resolve the entire game with a powerful strike against the vital and undefended major centres of FPs.

In order to have success in this, some points are compulsory. First of all, you must secure your southern border, to free your hands for engagements far from Mordor. Second, you must avoid wars - especially long and expensive ones - at least for a while. But in general, as your strategical position does not require frontal wars, these should always be avoided, in favour only of sneaky attacks against the backs or flanks of enemy. Thirdly, you must carefully study the map, to choose where to establish your future recruitment centres. Fourth and last, you must always be very well informed about the events throughout all the map.

Economic Growth

An economical improvement strategy can be applied immediately without any problems: the best commander (Araudagul, skill 40), receiving the quoted artifact (#56), is able to post a camp every turn, waiting for the emissaries reaching appropriate skill. Also, the immediate creation of a third emissary (better a commander-emissary) is resolutive in turning Cloud Lord in a very powerful nation in the mid term (about on turn 20). The best area to be filled with camps, beyond the obvious mountain hexes of Mordor, are the hills of Khand. But to be free of doing that, you will find yourself facing your first real trouble: the Khand Easterlings.

The Khand Easterlings

If you are playing to win, then there aren't many choices: you must convince them to become DS immediately, or you must wipe them out with all dues speed. Khand is vital for your economy. You must have access to it, and you must be sure that the area is safe from any threats in order to occupy it. If you find yourself facing a military attack from the south, all of your plans to establish armies far from Mordor will be in vain and you will have to enter a long and expensive war to defend your homeland. Of course, it would be much better to convince Easterling player to be your friend than fighting him: it'll save on time, energy and resources, whilst he can also cover you from the Corsair threat.

But a victorious war also can be organized well and fast. You might count in fact upon at least two allies: Blind Sorcerer and Long Rider both have the same problems as you with Easterling nations. A well coordinated jointed attack can defeat the Easterlings in only 5 or 6 turns very early in the game. Your agents can be important in stopping or destroying the enemy armies by killing their commanders. Din Ohtar of the Long Rider can sabotage the walls of the enemy's capital,

so allowing the few troops all of you can pick up, to capture it. The only problem is, once you have defeated the Easterlings, you will border with Corsairs, and it will begin again, though with the difference that the Corsairs are a much tougher adversary than the Easterlings.

Establishing a New Theatre

There are many areas where rich and important enemy population centres are close together, and where nobody can see you. Placing one of your emissaries there very early to create camps can be your best investment in the long term. With patience these will grow and finally, by a surprise strike armies and characters, you can quickly crush whichever enemy you choose. On the other hand, if your action is revealed to the FPs before you are fully ready to attack, this can turn into disaster. For this reason it is better for you to find a trustworthy ally to act with. The best candidate for this is your twin nation: the Blind Sorcerer, to whom most of these concepts can apply as well. Two new theatre examples:

1) Lindon Crescent. From the extreme north-west of Angmar, down to Lindon, until southern Minhiriath, there is a large crescent of lands out of sight from any players and full of beautiful settlements. Establishing camps here, would allow you to turn them into major recruitment centres and to invade Dwarves' and Noldo's lands, and may be even Rangers', in the mid-game. You should try to help the Witch King to survive until that moment.

2) Khazad-Dum. The FPs are unlikely to create a camp on these ruins, due to the Balrog and dragons, who kill characters and constantly downgrade loyalty. You on the other hand can easily take over the place with emissaries, eventually helped by agents if it already has a garrisoned settlement. Then, thanks to the dragons, you will see the loyalty automatically growing every turn as if one or two of your emissaries were there! As nobody but Witch King can see there, you can turn it into city to help him or (much better) to launch a surprise invasion against Lorien and then to enter Mirkwood.

Only precautions: a) have there an army immediately, to keep your characters safe from the hosts; b) if you think you have been spotted, strengthen your position by creating a second recruitment centre in an adjacent hex (possibly 2112).

Taking Advantage

Staying at peace and growing means not just creating camps and improving existing centres. You can, a lot more than others do, send an intervention force to take a target: a small task force of heavy cavalry or a strong emissary to capture a centre, or an agent to steal an artifact. Nations no longer active are your best targets. You should do this much more quickly than any others, with them too much involved in war. But in order to be really fast, effective and always ready, you must be constantly very well informed about general events. So speak to as many players as possible every turn.

Using Agents

Although I won a game with a position having agents as the best of its resources, records of these latter were the most deluding. The problem is that I trusted too much in the +20 bonus, employing them in an assassination or kidnapping attempts always too early; so I learnt that results from agents with a skill lesser than 60 are awful. But I learnt also that apparently there are two dice rolls: a first one for evading guards agents and local militia) and, if successful, a second one against the victim. Cloud Lord bonus of +20 would apply only to the latter, whilst eventual

tolkien: the books

Part 1 of a series on Tolkien's books, by Mark-Edmond, beginning with The Silmarillion.

"Before I begin with my review of the specific sections of the Silmarillion, allow me to pose a question: Is the Silmarillion a history or a cosmology?

Why is this important? Well, it's a matter of approach. Should I approach it as a cosmology that is full of myths, exaggerations, and representative characters? Or should I approach it as a history that tells of actual events in which real people took a part. Don't get me wrong; I know that the Silmarillion is fiction. Naturally, though, Tolkien treats his fictional realm as a real one. So, the question isn't whether Middle Earth is real, but whether the events really took place and persons acted, thought, felt, and even existed the way the Silmarillion describes.

In the end, the Silmarillion is a cosmology that pretends to be a history. I don't care what Tolkien intended, the Silmarillion makes for terrible history. I have a degree in history, but not my masters. I'm familiar with a certain amount of history and historiography, but there's a good chance some of you have more substantial knowledge in these areas. So, feel free to counter this argument. But, approaching it as a history, I found myself making mental lists of things that were wrong with the Silmarillion--things as far ranging as unbelievable character development and the ridiculousness of the "Grand Narrative" approach to history that Tolkien--writing earlier this century--was clearly aping.

If you disagree with me, that's fine. If you think I'm being nitpicky, that's fine too. Because all of that is preface for me to say, don't read the Silmarillion as a history. Don't let character inconsistencies, stereotypes and inadequate physical descriptions, unbelievable turns of events, the passing of hundreds of years in a single sentence, and Tokien's failure to describe the possibly rich and varied cultures of the peoples who are the primary actors in this story ruin it for you. Chances are, I'm going to point out a few of these as we go, but rest assured, whatever I write I'm not mudslinging. I'm not determined for Tolkien to be bad just to shove it in your faces (Lord knows I'd be outnumbered). I'm not determined for Tolkien to be bad at all. In fact--brace yourselves--I'm actually enjoying the Silmarillion. It's really quite good, and I would even recommend it.

Enough with the pre-amble, let's get started. *(to be continued).*

stealth would apply to the former. In fact, one of the ten pure agents I had throughout the game, Druuna "Ammazzasette", came in with 34 stealth. Well, she performed 8 out of the 12 (only!) successful missions I attempted, and she failed only once. All other agents killed or kidnapped but 4 victims, with a cost of 16 "tight security" or "too well guarded" and 5 losses (4 killed, 1 captured); this with an average skill of 50 and no stealth. So the best early use for agents is certainly stealing gold, that's a much easier mission, despite being listed as "hard" in the rules. This helps your economy and allows the characters to improve quickly.

The most effective of the killing missions is a concentration upon an enemy capital. If this happens in tandem with a strong DS offensive, it can result in a terrific strategical success. A group of four is excellent; two ScoChar and a ScoArea are required at arrival, ScoChar in couples because of their low reliability. Enemy agents must always be killed first, to clear for the action of your ones. Then commanders are the best of the targets, overall to help military action and to paralyse capital activity. But if a campaign is not occurring, emissaries are of higher value. Mages are in general not of interest, except when very strong.

You'll need a company commander. But if you are playing really hard, you'll be always short of characters to cover all your needs, so this figure will be probably the first one to be disposed of. Don't use your Nazgul as an agent: you can have plenty of cheaper ones, so don't risk your best character this way unless you are really in desperate a position. Much better to use him as a jack-of-all-trades, for you will need one: army commander, mage, challenger or explorer, as required by the situation.

Armies

All you need in the beginning are 100 men-at-arms in your capital and some 150 HI with Araudagul to post camps; so disband all other troops. Then, as you have a long time before you will be able to afford to create a serious army, begin to horde goods to recruit only HC steel/steel at the right moment: you'll be always lacking of good commanders, training, morale and battle mages, but iron HC will cover all these and will be fantastic in quickly defeating any opponent. Anyway, try to have some 800-1000 of them ready fast, even if poorly equipped: as I said above, sooner or later you will hear of an undefended pop. centre or two waiting somewhere for you to be captured.

Co-operation

Is it better for you to play your personal game alone and forget your allies? If you wish to win the game, then the Dark Servant side has to win, and this requires your help. How? Your nation is poor, at gamestart at least, so you cannot give away gold or goods. And it isn't a military power, so forget sending an army to Ithilien or Rhovanion for the time being at least.

What you can do without troops and money can be even more decisive. First of all your agents, whilst training, can weaken your enemies by stealing their gold and eventually killing some of their characters. This is still far from decisive for the game, but will help other DS to eliminate the odd nation or two like the Rohirrim, Northmen or Woodmen. Then, when your agents are sufficiently strong but your army is still not ready, you can concentrate them against a stronger enemy nation, to help one of your allies who has troubles. By sending some four agents against an enemy capital, or by coordinating with the offensive of other DS players in order to stop or destroy enemy armies, you can make the difference in resolving a strategical theatre.

Third, if you succeed in preparing your secret offensive, the effects can be devastating for FPs. Fourth, and even more important, you can help with your knowledge. As you need to collect information from all players and sides, you can become the more informed of the DS players. So you should pass this information to those players who take a less active role in communicating. In short you are an excellent candidate for team captain, acting as intermediary, promoting joint and coordinated operations amongst all the DS. This is of course the key to victory in Middle Earth the best coordinated team will usually win!

Teamwork

by David & Thomas Crane

We have been playing Middle Earth for several years now, although we tend not play more than one or two games at a time, so we haven't played a huge number of games. We do, however, seem to regularly encounter the same two problems. These are teams being put in games against non teams and our allies (* or on one occasion our enemies) dropping like flies. It just might be that there is a link between them.

We are currently playing in two games and one of them, fourth age game 44, is a typical example. We joined on the dark side and with only twelve turns gone our original allegiance of nine is down to three, one of whom is relying on the two of us to help him to an alternative capital before the freeps roast him. There is a group of neutrals who have not opted for either alternative allegiance and we have a loose alliance with them. But, some of the neutrals have joined the freeps and, as far as we know, our alliance is outnumbered by 12 to 7. We have recently learned that eight of the nine original freeps joined as a team, which may go some way to explaining why so many of the dark servants have perished so quickly.

We enjoy a challenge and we are enjoying this game and fully intend to fight on until turn fifty two or death, whichever comes sooner. However, some of our former allies, who because of their location on the map found themselves facing impossible odds right from turn one, probably don't feel as if they have had an enjoyable game.

When we first starting playing Middle Earth with GAD Games, the experienced players were already complaining about teams being pitted against non teams, so it is an old problem. Presumably, Harlequin don't deliberately put teams in games against non teams so it must be happening because groups of players are joining without declaring that they are a team. We have a solution. What about when a group of players who have joined "independently" are discovered to be a team, sufficient of them are eliminated from the game to even things up. We could test this solution in fourth age game 44. If Clint would like to get in touch with us, we will let him know which of the freeps should be summarily eliminated.

* There was one game of 1650 when we found ourselves allied to a "team" of eight dark servants.

A Fourth Age Review: part 1

by Richard Devereux

Once upon a time there were three gamers who shared lodgings. John played Legends, Dave played Middle-earth, and Mike played Hand of the Demon. One evening they took a break from gaming and went to the pub. As luck would have it, Goldilocks came looking for lodgings while the three lads were out. Finding the door open she went in, and being a nosy cow she had a good look round. First she found John's game of Legends. "Wow!" she exclaimed. "This game is big, far too big for me."

Next Goldilocks found Mike's game of Hand of the Demon. "Hmm," she said. "This game is small, far too small for me." Finally Goldilocks found Dave's game of Middle-earth. "Ooh!" she exclaimed. "This game is just right." She sat down, studied the rulebook, and became so carried away by her enthusiasm (I told you she was a nosy cow) that she finished Dave's turn!

At that point the three lads returned from the pub, and Goldilocks quickly hid in the wardrobe. "Oi!" exclaimed John. "Who's been messing about with my game?" "Yeah," said Mike, "and who's been messing about with MY game?" "Never mind that," cried Dave, "Who's been messing about with my game and finished it all off?"

To cut a long story short, when Dave looked at his turn, he saw that Goldilocks had actually done something quite clever that he hadn't thought of. So when she coyly emerged from her hiding-place, he fell madly in love with her, and they played games together happily ever after.

Enduring popularity:

Middle-earth has been around for a long time (the 4th edition of the original rules was published back in 1992). The point of the above story is that one of the reasons for its enduring popularity is its scale. The map of the campaign area fits comfortably onto a modest table; the rulebook at just over 100 pages is manageable; and the modest number of players involved (25) means not only that you don't have to wait too long for a new game to start, but also you can talk to everybody you need to without the cost in time and money becoming prohibitive. The game itself has sufficient depth and new possibilities to keep players coming back for more, without being over-complex; I've been playing for four years now and I'm nowhere near exhausting its potential.

Another of Middle-earth's strong points is the simple but comprehensive order system. There is only one set of orders, and all orders are given to characters. There is none of the irritating business of one order list for characters, another for cities, yet another for armies, etc. The order sequence is arranged so that

characters interact in a scissors/paper/stone manner: commanders and mages are better in combat than agents or emissaries; agents can assassinate other characters, but emissaries can "double" agents before they strike! Moreover, characters are not limited to one skill as in most other games; they can have up to 4, which allows all sorts of permutations.

With a modest reduction in print size you can cut and paste the order crib sheets onto a single sheet of A4 and still have room for lots of other useful info, eg movement rates, the relationship between tax and loyalty, etc. Show me another game where you can do this (please!).

The hard stuff

The map is cunningly designed so that the relative positioning of the various population centres offers most nations several different targets for their armies and/or characters. However, most such moves open the way for a possible attack by an enemy! Experienced players will know that there are standard opening moves for most nations, but for players who are prepared to run risks, the permutations are almost endless.

The Middle-earth rulebook, maps and turnsheets are second to none in professionalism and clarity. There are none of the irritating spelling and grammatical errors which spoil the presentation of so many of its rivals. Last but not least, ME benefits enormously from being set in the world created by JRR Tolkien, probably the most famous and widely-read fantasy author of all time. Players might have Elrond, Galadriel, Saruman or the Witch-king amongst their characters. They might encounter Gandalf the Grey, the Balrog of Moria, Smaug the Golden, hobbits, eagles, ents or even the Dark Lord himself (gulp!).

Something old, something new

Middle-earth 4th Age scenario (MEFAS) keeps the old order system and terrain map. Fair enough; why change anything that has stood the test of time so well? The most radical innovation is that players design their own set-ups, which changes almost all the population centres for a start. The artifact list is randomised differently for each game, plus there are new rules, encounters and riddles. In the 1650 and 2950 scenarios, experienced players have access to master lists giving details of every character, population centre, artifact, encounter and riddle. All these are irrelevant in MEFAS, giving inexperienced players much more of a level playing field!

Customising your nation

You start with a modest amount of gold to spend on designing your nation. First decide your alignment: Good, Evil or Neutral. Unlike the 1650 & 2950 scenarios, in MEFAS you CAN fight nations of the same alignment. Next choose a race (Men,

MCKELLEN TO LORD OVER "RINGS"

HOLLYWOOD (Variety) - Sir Ian McKellen, flooded with honors for his work in last year's "Gods and Monsters," will play Gandalf in New Line Cinema's trilogy "The Lord of the Rings." At the same time, fellow Briton Ian Holm ("The Sweet Hereafter Di) is in talks for the role of Bilbo.

The first installment of the J.R.R. Tolkien classic franchise, "Part One: The Fellowship of the Rings," is to be directed by Ne Zealander Peter Jackson and goes into production in October, with principal photography expected to last more than a year.

McKellen, who will join the production in New Zealand as soon as he wraps Bryan Singer's "X-Men" for Fox, has been much in demand since "Monsters," which won him prizes from the National Board of Review, the Broadcast Film Critics Assn., the Los Angeles Film Critics Assn. and the San Sebastian Intl. Film Festival.

McKellen's other credits include "Apt Pupil" (1998), "Richard III" (1995), "Restoration" (1995), "Six Degrees of Separation" (1993) and "Scandal" (1989). He won a Golden Globe for the TV movie "Rasputin" (1996).

Holm, who has 83 film and television credits, was in "eXistenZ" earlier this year, as well as "A Life Less Ordinary" (1997), "The Madness of King George" (1995), "Night Falls on Manhattan" (1997), and "The Fifth Element" (1997).

He was nominated for a best-supporting actor Oscar for "Chariots of Fire" (1982), and won a BAFTA award for "The Bofors Gun" (1968). Holm also won a Genie Award for "Hereafter" (1997).

New Line is not confirming castings publicly, saying, "When casting of principals has concluded, New Line, along with the filmmakers, will unveil the entire ensemble."

The three "Rings" films -- which could cost a total of at least $130 million -- will be shot consecutively, a project New Line describes as "an unprecedented production of size and scope."

Orcs, Elves or Dwarves), special nation abilities (eg bonuses to assassination, scouting, shipbuilding etc), artifacts, army & navy strength, population centres and location, and last but not least characters.

The Twin Kingdoms

There are two "superpowers" at game start, both Neutral, North Kingdom & South Kingdom. These start with many advantages, among them more population centres and fortifications, knowledge of the approximate location of EVERY nation's capital, and there is no limit to how fast they can create the maximum 21 characters. The drawbacks to these nations are firstly, less flexibility in design; secondly, everybody else knows where your population centres are; thirdly, everybody else is jealous of your rich position. This means that you will quickly find your outposts under attack from enemy agents, and later by armies and/or emissaries.

When I played North Kingdom, I perhaps naievely proposed an alliance of neutral nations, which could easily trash both Good and Evil allegiances by sheer weight of numbers. I was overwhelmed by the apathy of my fellow neutrals! In another game, I saw a group of neutrals gang up to conquer South Kingdom. It may be better to turn Good or Evil as those allegiances may actually welcome you instead of being jealous of you!

(Part 2 of this review will appear in the next issue - the full text is available in the current issue of Flagship.)

Lord of the Rings: The Film

by Colin Forbes

It's always amazed me that no-one has made a film of "The Lord of the Rings" before. OK, there was the cartoon version in the 80's, but the less said about that, the better. Anyway, the rumours are most definitely true, there will be a Lord of the Rings film, three of them in fact!

The trilogy will be shot exclusively in New Zealand over a period of 18 months, with post-production adding the same length of time again. At three years in the making, this will be the largest production ever to be mounted in the Southern Hemisphere.

Written by Oscar-nominated screenwriters Peter Jackson & Fran Walsh, with Philippa Boyens and Stephen Sinclair, this technically challenging production will assemble an international cast, utilize over 20,000 extras' days, employ a full crew of over 300 (including award-winning high profile technicians from both within and outside of New Zealand), and will feature 1200 state-of-the-art computer generated effects shots.

Peter Jackson's Wellington-based production company, Wingnut Films Limited, together with the special effects company WETA Limited, have been involved in developing and designing this realization of the Tolkien classic for more than two years. During this time a stunning array of miniatures, creatures, prosthetic effects and armor have been created to bring the grandeur and spectacle of Tolkien's richly evocative Middle-earth to life on the screen.

WETA Limited, New Zealand's leading Special Effects house, continues to focus all of its efforts on this one project. Dedicated to meeting the exacting visual and technical requirements of Director Peter Jackson, WETA Digital is developing its own proprietary programs and using state-of-the-art motion control, blue screen and forced perpective techniques to achieve his vision. The people and creatures who populate Middle-earth, as well as their homes, cities (and lairs) are being conceptualized by WETA Workshop with the guidance of Alan Lee and John Howe. Alan & John are internationally recognized Tolkien artists.

New Zealand has been chosen as the setting for Middle-earth. This makes a lot of sense - geologically speaking New Zealand is a wild mix of diverse terrain, which brings with it the necessary sense of grandeur and antiquity. Peter Jackson will use the peace and tranquillity of New Zealand's rolling pastoral farmland, the rugged beauty of the North Island's volcanic plateaus, and the majesty of the South Island's snow capped Southern Alps to bring the screen his interpretation of how Britain, Tolkien's Middle-earth, might have looked 7,000 years ago.

Since the public announcement by New Line Cinema in August of 1998, international interest in this project has been overwhelming; little wonder, considering The Lord of the Rings trilogy was voted Book of the Century in 1997. Internet sites devoted to the trilogy have attracted a record number of hits and thousands of approaches have been received by the production company from people wanting to be involved in the project both behind and in front of the camera.

LATEST NEWS: CASTING

Debates have been raging for years over who should play what part in any LOTR film. Well, it's all over now - or is it? News of the actual casting is beginning to leak out, though New Line Cinema are not confirming anything. That said, most of the names listed below have been confirmed by a reputable news organisation such as Reuters. Many of the actors of course are unknowns, which is good, though there are some interesting cameos. It's good to see Sir Ian McKellern as Gandalf, though personally I'm most happy to see that Peter Woodthorpe, who played Gollum so amazingly in the BBC radio series, will be proving the voice for the computer generated character.

Aragorn	Stuart Townsend
Beregond	Nick Nolte
Bilbo	Sir Ian Holm
Eowyn	Mira Sorvino
Frodo	Elijah Wood
Galadriel	Uma Thurman
Gandalf	Sir Ian McKellen
Gimli	Brian Kline
Gollum	CG (voice: Peter Woodthorpe)
Faramir	Ethan Hawke
Legolas	Jude Law
Pippen	Billy Boyd
Sam	Sean Astin
Wormtongue	Jeffrey Combs

Going Forth

by Gavin Kenny

This time I thought I'd pass on a few little hints and tips that you can use in a 4th age game.

Prices

Prices in 4th Age are never as good as they are on turn 1. Most people usually sell one commodity whilst naming characters on turn 1. If you don't believe that you are going to be hit by massed assassins on turn 1, then it may be a better idea to sell as much as you can. That will give you are nice large war chest and will mean that you won't have to sell for several turns.

Tax Rate

Setting your tax rate in 4th age can be a useful tool in your development. If you raise your taxes early to 59% you can balance your economy to help you raise more camps without having to pay out large debts. If after the camp limit is reached you then lower it back to 39%, then all your newly created camps will gain about 10 loyalty which will help you raise then to villages to improve your economy. If you keep you tax rate at 59% for a long time your created camps will eventually head down towards 15 loyalty, which may mean you will lose them.

Artefact Fishing

Spirits and Wights in 4th age are much nastier than in 1650 or 2950. I have seen many an artefact hunting mage killed by them, even with about 70-80 challenge rank. So, early in the game, there is an alternative tactic you can use.

Ruins

The camp limit in the game is reached when a certain number of population centres is created in the game. A ruin without a population centre on it is counted in this count. Because of this you can re-create a camp on top of a ruins. Therefore it is a good policy to destroy enemy camps with a fortification so that you can re-create a camp on top of it.

Map Moving

Even if you don't think that you are going to need to move your map it is a good idea to start the game with a command emissary. Creating one during the game will cost you 10,000 gold and will require many turns before it will stand a good chance of moving your map. With your command emissary creating or upgrading close to your capital, you have the ability to move your map within a turn.

Fortifications

Fortifications don't just help defend your population centre against an opposing army. In addition they help prevent against agent actions. Without at least a tower your local militia will not be mustered and will not stop agents from stealing or killing on your population centres.

Strategic Points

There are a number of strategic points that if controlled can give you better security and positional advantage. These points should be fortified to prevent enemy armies moving through them into your heartlands. These points form either roads through mountains, a key bridge or a gap between mountains or water. This last category includes the key hexes of 3825 and 2120. Whereas the hex 3825 guards the back entrance into Mordor, 2120 guards the gap of Rohan which separates Dunland from North Gondor.

Major Rivers

There are major rivers that go into Harandor, Gondor, Dunland and Arnor. It is quite easy to sail a fleet up these rivers and take an opponent by surprise. Equally the major river in Rhun can lead to a navy appearing out of nowhere and taking you by surprise. All eventualities need to be considered and the more information you have about the area you are in the better. For instance if you have a capital near 4217 it may well be a good idea to scan all along the river for any enemy ports or harbours. As always information is key in avoiding getting surprised.

Well that's it for now. Good gaming !

From out of the West
Clint ventures into *playing* the game!

Um the sticky subject about Harlequin Service has come up. Most of the problems seem to stem from players getting in turns late. Once again, it is unfortunate but to be fair to everyone we need to have a strict policy of "No turn, no process", as anything else would have favouritism involved. I am discussing this on the MEPBMlist if anyone wants a more in-depth response. We do help out with edits that don't affect other players though to help ease the pain of a SS turn.

I am still looking for "First turn missed" if possible. Please send ideas. It has such a drastic affect on the game when it happens that the DS and FP's need something if a player can't get a turn in.

Well I have finally taken the dive. Now that we have enough qualified staff to run the games I have got the opportunity to play in ME myself! Game 16 sees me playing the Northmen and having some fun with that, and Game 46 (FA team game) has seen the negotiations finished on the nation/map allocations and now we are down to the nitty-gritty of getting our set-ups in and our arses kicked. (On average my team has 1/2 game experience each! We have some good ideas...) But we'll see what havoc we can cause.

The first of the Euro games has started - I am hoping to get more players from abroad playing in this as well as it seems like great fun. Other than that we are reducing the costs of maps to £5 - so gets your whilst they are hot off the press. With that in mind, at the end of the Summer we intend to do a big (8,500 old players) flyer drop which should bring in a few players. If you know any companies who would like to advertise to such players (hardened games everyone of them, from boardgames to Bridge, computer games to CCGs) then please get in touch.

As per usual an excellent issue of Bree for which my thanks to you the players for their contributions, and the editor. Have fun, and make it fun for others...

Clint

HARLEQUIN GAMES