The Official MECCG Newsletter

Balrog Review!

Letters from the Guard House

James Kight

It's definitely been a long year for MECCG and ICE, and there are many issues to ponder. I will try my best to give a summary of the year that was 1998 in my opinion column. I tried also to be as gentle as possible with certain "sensitive" topics.

I have decided to forego listing tournaments and rankings. Most of the time this information is too timely for me to bother publishing it, and from what I understand, the ranking system will no longer be in effect.

Let me apologize for the delay with this issue. I can use all sorts of excuses: everything from the Holidays to the flu to article delays to the plague. Thanks for understanding and being patient. I would much rather delay this newsletter than put out a substandard issue.

I have included some pictures from the US Nationals, as well as some general MECCG pictures from around the US. Thanks to Oskar Silow for his contribution. Feel free to send me your own pictures. See the bottom of page 2 for contact information.

Another pleasant surprise for this issue was the sheer number of articles and ideas submitted. I had to actually pick and choose. If you didn't see your idea in this issue, chances are it will appear in the next issue. Some of you have expressed interest in certain types of articles. My suggestion: go ahead and get it together, and send it to me.

Anyway, enough yap; the important stuff is just ahead! Enjoy your foray into Issue #4, and I will see you again next issue!

Focus On: *Coleman Charlton of ICE*

This issue's Focus On column features one of the founding members of ICE, and one of the co-designers of the MECCG card game, Coleman Charlton. An interesting and informative interview. Let's see what Coleman had to say...

TOMN: How long have you been with Iron Crown Enterprises, and how did you get started?

Coleman: I have been with ICE since it was founded in 1980. There were 10 or 11 people who participated in putting out our initial three products (Arms Law, The Iron

Wind, and Manassas). After the first 3 or 4 months we realized that we were not going to be able to pay salaries for years.

So, soon afterwards we were down to 5 or 6 people working part time. I was in grad school in computer science, so I could put in hours at ICE and support myself with teaching and research assistantships. I started full-time at ICE in 1983 when we started paying salaries to the principals at ICE.

TOMN: When was the decision made to create a collect-

able card game based upon The Lord of the Rings? Popular rumor has it that ICE first approached Wizards of the Coast to produce MECCG game first.

Coleman: I'm not completely sure of exact dates, but here's my best recollection. In mid 1993, we decided that a Middle-earth CCG could be a good project. However, instead of planning to do our own, we contacted Wizards of the Coast. They were very enthusiastic and we entered into a agreement for them to do a

Focus On: *Coleman Charlton (cont.)*

ME CCG with design input from ICE. Several of their designers visited us and discussed some approaches, but no firm design work was ever done. WOTC seemed to have too many other projects that took precedence. In late '94 through early '95, we recovered the rights to do a ME CCG and proceeded to design, develop, and produce ME: The Wizards.

TOMN: Did ICE feel comfortable doing the card game themselves or was it a matter of market necessity?

Coleman: At the time, we felt that it was a matter of market necessity. WOTC did (and still does) have a much larger distribution and sales network than ICE. They also had experience with a different set of production and printing resources than ICE had traditionally used.

TOMN: Had you ever had any experience with the dynamics of CCG's? What surprised you the most about tackling such a project?

Coleman: When we started the METW project, I had been designing, developing, and editing board game material and RPG rules for almost 15 years. Many of the dynamics of a CCG correspond to good board game design elements.

Once I became involved in the project, the most surprising thing to me was the intensity of the collector element in the CCG market. Many players are driven to get a copy of every different card, even those cards that have little if any benefit in play.

TOMN: What were your original goals with MECCG?

Coleman: It had to be a good game, it had to be fun to play, and it had to accurately reflect Tolkien's world – Middle-earth. As for marketing purposes and distribution requirements, it had to fit into the standard CCG format: starter decks and booster packs. In addition, it could not absolutely depend upon dice and a map/board – that's why we were forced to include region cards and random numbers on cards.

TOMN: Are those goals still viable or have they changed?

Coleman: We have realized that we should have added another goal: It should have been easier to learn to play. With hindsight, we should have simplified certain rule elements and we should have come out with the Starter Set and Challenge decks earlier.

TOMN: How does ICE contact an artist in whom they are interested?

Coleman: Jessica Ney-Grimm and Jason Hawkins handle the acquisition of art for MECCG. Many of the artists we use know each other, so we were able to contact many of them by networking. Many other artists had already worked for us doing covers for RPG products and board games. Some artists had already done Tolkien art for calendars and other projects. Still other artists contacted us; they were eager to do Middle-earth material – its a very popular subject that had provided few opportunities in the past.

TOMN: Who officially owns the artwork once the deal has been made and the artwork is completed?

Coleman: The artist owns the original, physical art. However, the art may not be reproduced and may not be used commercially without permission from Tolkien Enterprises and ICE.

TOMN: As the general public understands it, ICE is first in line for the rights to gaming material based off of Unfinished Tales and The Silmarillion. What reason has the Tolkien Estate given for its reluctance?

Coleman: The reluctance is primarily on ICE's part. Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit provide the Tolkien material that is most familiar to the board base of potential customers for our products. We do not feel that an increase in available Middle-earth material justifies the additional financial commitment that would be required to contract for the rights to that material.

TOMN: ICE has changed quite a bit in the last 10 years, from being mostly RPG oriented (with MERP and Rolemaster) to being mostly board game and CCG oriented. Did you foresee this drastic change?

Coleman: No, if we had foreseen the rise and success of CCGs, we would have put out CCGs before WOTC did.

Design & Contact Information

Focus On: *Coleman Charlton (cont.)*

(Continued from page 2)

I consider the original Magic design to be a new archetype – a good solid card game combined with the collectible format of trading cards. This new approach changed the whole adventure game industry much as D&D did the 70's.

TOMN: How have you adapted to the changes in the industry?

Coleman: We have diversified our product mix. In addition, we are in the process of changing our marketing and sales focus to direct-to-retailer and direct-to-consumer approaches.

TOMN: I used to equate ICE with very detailed material for MERP and Rolemaster. Lately the RPG products from ICE have been few and far between. Some other companies have been or are currently experiencing a lull in role playing material. How would you explain the change?

Coleman: Unlike many other companies, ICE has continued to put out RPG material (admittedly on a reduced scale). This reduction is primarily a result of redirected resources into CCGs, board games, and miniature games (Silent Death). Basically, ICE is responding to the current, unstable situation by diversifying its product mix.

TOMN: What do you think would help ICE become a better gaming company all around, especially where development and support are concerned?

Coleman: As mentioned above, we are diversifying our product mix and we are focusing our marketing and sales efforts on direct-to-retailer and direct-to-consumer programs. This includes an increased emphasis on the internet.

TOMN: What are your specific duties with the card game and with ICE in general?

Coleman: I am the Managing Editor at ICE – I am responsible for managing the product division at ICE. This includes all efforts on products from initial design through development and production – right up until a product goes to the printer. Specifically, on the card game, I did the base design for ME: The Wizards. Then, I participated as part of the design team on all of the other MECCG products.

As the content editor for the MECCG line – I am responsible for reviewing all MECCG material and giving detailed feedback to the series editor (previously Mike Reynolds, currently Craig O'Brien).

TOMN: How far before the completion of an expansion do you work on the design?

Coleman: We try and start working on an expansion as early as possible. In practice, we have had between 2 and 5 months to work on expansion designs (more for Lidless Eye).

TOMN: Are there specific issues these days that you look to address with each expansion or do you have a storyline idea?

Coleman: With the last couple of designs (White Hand, Balrog, and Dwarflords), the process has been primarily theme driven. But with each one we have had specific mechanical issues we wanted to address. For example, we wanted to make ring strategies more viable, so the Balrog has cards that can "hold" special ring items so that they won't take up room in your hand waiting for a ring test.

TOMN: What prompted the change from collectable to fixed format?

Coleman: Recently, the CCG market has been shrinking – even Magic sales have be slowing (on a relative basis). We were looking for a way to make MECCG more accessible to more people. Fixed decks make the game more accessible (cheaper and more playable out of the box). In addition, fixed decks are economically viable at lower print runs than collectible decks. This means our foreign partners (who have smaller markets) will be able to print fixed format expansion when they might not be able to print collectable format expansions.

TOMN: What exactly was the reason for the delay for the release of Middle Earth: The Balrog?

Coleman: We had finished all of the production work for a collectable format MEBA this spring. But, at that time, the domestic distribution network was in the process of melting down. So, we were not sure we wanted to make a major release in that atmosphere. At the same time, some of our foreign partners were trying to persuade us to allow them to publish MECCG expansions in a fixed format in order to do smaller print runs.

We ran the numbers on doing fixed format expansions and decided to redo MEBA in a fixed format. The distribution atmosphere improved by this fall, and we reactivated our printing plans after pre-selling the entire print run of MEBA to various domestic and foreign distributors.

TOMN: Earlier this year ICE made an exclusive distribution deal with Chessex. From what I understand, this deal was made to make distribution of ICE

Focus On: *Coleman Charlton (cont.)*

(Continued from page 3)

products easier and to generate some immediate capital for ICE. Is this true?

Coleman: Yes. For the last few years, Chessex has been the largest domestic distributor (well over 50% of all domestic adventure game distributor sales). In 1997 and early 1998, several other distributors went out of business and most distributors became very, very reluctant to order anything (other than Magic).

This dramatically affected all adventure game companies: GDW went out of business, TSR was bought by WOTC, Avalon Hill has recently been bought, West End Games is gone, and many smaller companies went under. We entered into an agreement with Chessex that would have had them focus on and push the sales of our products in exchange for exclusive distribution.

TOMN: Industry rumors have previously indicated that Chessex occasionally had problems paying their bills. If this is indeed true, did you hear about this prior to the agreement, and how much research was done for this agreement?

Coleman: Chessex had always been our most reliable distributor. We spent months talking and meeting with Chessex and going over financial information and potential scenarios. After the agreement was finalized, several unforeseen cash-flow problems arose on Chessex's end. These immediate cash-flow demands combined with an overall decrease in adventure game sales led to Chessex's instability.

TOMN: Now that Chessex is effectively no longer in business, how does ICE plan to forge ahead with distribution plans?

Coleman: When it became apparent that Chessex had stability problems, ICE returned to non-exclusive status. ICE is currently working closely with Alliance (the merged Armory and Chessex distributor) and various other distributors. As mentioned previously, ICE is increasing its focus on direct-to-retailer and direct-to-consumer approaches

TOMN: What are ICE's immediate plans for MECCG?

Coleman: We have a design for ME: The Dwarf-lords almost complete, and we have preliminary design ideas for ME: The Elf-lords. But, it is uncertain as to whether or not we will put out those products before the revision (see below).

TOMN: What is the next project/ expansion for MECCG after The Balrog?

Coleman: ME: The Dwarf-lords – you are a hero (free peoples) player, but your main character is one of seven different Dwarf-lords. Your goals are the Dwarves' goals, not necessarily those of the free peoples. For example, you might try to take and rebuild Moria while gathering together the scattered Dwarven tribes.

TOMN: What do you think is the most prohibitive aspect about MECCG thus far?

Coleman: Aside from the built-in financial barriers of all CCGs, MECCG's biggest problem is its steep learning curve. Once you know how to play, most of the base rules are intuitive; but, it is difficult to absorb all of the rules without someone teaching you. In addition, we have too big a body of errata and clarification's – primarily due to design mistakes we made early on.

TOMN: Concerning ICE's plans with the revised Middle Earth card game that has been discussed, what are your objectives?

Coleman: Currently, ICE is discussing releasing the revision (LORE CG, the Lord of the Rings Expandable Card Game) in late summer or the fall of 1999. Remember, all of these comments are just possibilities – we have not made any final decisions yet.

The revision would use the same card titles and card backs as the current game, so that current players could use existing cards along with copies of the revised card text.

Our primary objective is to make the game more accessible to a larger body of players. This would be particularly important with the LOR movie coming in 2000.

We want to maintain the good features of the current version, while streamlining and simplifying certain elements. If we can do this, the game would be: easier to learn, fun, playable in 30-45 minutes, and errata/ rulings free.

The revision would use the "fixed/ challenge deck" format and each box (slightly larger than two decks side by side) would include a map/board that would handle all movement (eliminating site cards) and perhaps dice.

Some of the major changes being considered are: Map driven movement would be used with site information on the map. Each playable card (e.g., item, information, etc.) would carry its own playability information like factions and allies do now.

Focus On: *Coleman Charlton (cont.)*

We would introduce simplified timing – each action and its effects would be played out in full before another action could be announced (with exceptions based on keywords on specific "counter" cards). Players would alternate taking actions during movement phases.

General influence and direct influence would be combined into one variable: influence. Current mind values would be rescaled to run from 0 to 3 or 4. Each player would have a base of 6 influence with specific characters contributing more influence. We would remove the concept of followers. You would be limited to a maximum of two companies at one time. Any number of characters could be brought into play each turn with no limitations on the location of your Wizard (now called your main character). You would never be forced to discard a character due to a lack of influence.

We would eliminate on-guard cards, but allowing certain hazard play when any attack is resolved. We would remove long-events and make such card effects text driven. We would change the turn sequence so that cards are only discarded at the end of the turn. In addition, all cards previously moved or replaced into the draw pile (the old play deck) would be placed in a reserve pile instead. This would eliminate reshuffling except at the end of the turn.

We would reduce the majority of 4+ MP sources to 3 MPs. A number of current rules would become card driven: different MP types for doubling purposes, influencing an opponent's characters and resources, etc.

Minor items would be playable from your draw pile, discard pile, or sideboard. Hazard card removal during the organization phase would be standardized. You would always receive +3 towards removal if tapping.

TOMN: Overall, has the direction of the game been as you had wanted or expected?

Coleman: Originally, we were just hoping that METW would be a success in and of itself – we weren't sure we would ever do anything else in the line. That's why we included most of the high-profile characters and other cards in that set. The success of the various expansions has been gravy. Of course, the explosion of the errata/rulings was neither desired nor expected.

TOMN: What do you wish you could have done differently?

Coleman: With hindsight, I wish we had originally compromised the standard CCG format and put out a "fixed format/challenge-deck" - type product that included dice and a map in the box. If we had combined this with simplified rules and an immediately available starter set, I think MECCG would have been dramatically more successful.

TOMN: Are there any gaming products on the market currently that you admire or take example from?

Coleman: These are some of the products I currently admire (aside from ICE's products of course): Settlers of Catan (Mayfair), Age of Renaissance (Avalon Hill), World in Flames (Australian Design Group), Magic (WOTC), Jyhad (I know its not currently being published, but I think its the best multi-player CCG), Illuminati (Steve Jackson Games), Deadlands (Pinnacle).

TOMN: What is your biggest wish/resolution for 1999?

Coleman: My primary wish is for the adventure gaming industry to stabilize on a retail and distribution level. This would enable ICE to proceed aggressively with our plans for Middle-earth products that can take advantage of the LOR movie coming out in 2000.

My thanks to Coleman Charlton of ICE for taking the time and having the patience to answer my questions.

Next Issue I will interview Monica Wilson in an attempt to discover more about the administrative aspect of ICE. Monica has long been the solid glue that has held MECCG together, and is responsible for all the Rings, Pins and Coins that we all receive when we participate in each tournament! Believe me, it would be very difficult to imagine MECCG without the support of Monica. Next Issue, we'll see what she has to say!

Card Review: *Fury of the Iron Crown*

James Kight

Fury of the Iron Crown

(Promotional card released in 1995)

Unique. May not be played if *The Iron Crown* is in play. The prowess of one strike of an attack by an Orc, Troll, Man, or Nazgul creature is increased by +4. After the attack is resolved, if the creature is *not* a Nazgul: the creature is removed from play (defender receives the marshalling points); and, in addition, if the defender has *The Iron Crown* in his hand, he may immediately play it with a character in the defending company.

"...and now he was come again, bringing ruin, turning hope into dispair, and victory to death." LOTRIII

I know most of you are wondering why I am reviewing this old card, but I will try to make it all clear. *Fury of the Iron Crown* has been around since the original release of Middle Earth: The Wizards, and it has seen some use, but from my experience, not a lot; at least not like Minions Stir or even generic Orcs. Let's face it...it's just not that popular a card to play with. First of all, it's unique, and it gives your opponent the marshalling points from the creature. Sometimes.

Used to be, when you used this card, you almost never used it with an Assassin or Rogrog or Olog-Hai or something else that gave good points. You know you're going to give points, but the trick is to make the playing of it worthwhile, so that you are just about guaranteed to wound a character. An Ambusher targeting a Wizard, a keenly played Abductor, or a Pickpocket are some good examples of cheap MP hazard creatures that could use a good boost.

Let's cover the benefits of this card

against a hero player, then move on to the minion, Fallen-wizard and Balrog alignments. The versatility of this card will become somewhat more apparent when we get to those alignments.

Before we go any further, I'll clear a few things up. *Fury of the Iron Crown* does not work with automatic-attacks, but it does work with agent men attacks (there are 19 agents so affected). Since the timing of on-guard cards are so specific, the agent must attack during the movement/hazard phase for you to have an opportunity to play this card.

Unless you're a newer player and haven't much experience playing MECCG, the man hazard strategy is one of the most popular and consistently solid of the hazard strategies. Men can now be keyed to everything, and here are some examples: Wilderness (Brigands), Border-lands (Thief), Free-domains (Ambusher), Shadow-lands (Lawless Men), Dark-domains (Mouth of Sauron), Ruins & Lairs (Pirates), Coastal Seas (Corsairs of Umbar), Shadow-holds (Sellswords Between Charters), Dark-holds (Mouth of Sauron), Border-holds (Abductor) and Free-holds

(Assassin). If that weren't enough, there are more than enough Orcs, Trolls and Nazgul to fill in the blanks.

What I am getting at is that this card is very playable. It's playability gives you some flexibility. You can decide when is the best time to boost that creature even if you'll be handing your opponent a point or two or three.

Rank Upon Rank and Minions Stir are vicious enough, but a well-played *Fury of the Iron Crown* can be the key play in the death of one of your opponent's important characters. It's easy enough to see the difference between a regular Ambusher attack with 2 strikes at 10, and a boosted 1 strike at 10, 1 at 14, especially when you are choosing who gets the strikes.

Nothing annoys me more than someone playing Forewarned is Forearmed when I am about to pound his wizard with my Assassin. You can even the score if you play *Fury of the Iron Crown*. If they are going to make it only one attack, why not make it at 15 instead of 11? He may get the points, but by god, he had better earn them. Two points isn't such a bad tradeoff if you manage to kill his wizard. All you need is just that one body check. Granted, *Fury of the Iron Crown* is unique, but card recycling isn't really that much of a problem these days.

Orcs and Trolls also benefit from this card, although Trolls aren't exactly the most playable of creatures. And Nazgul...what can we say that hasn't already been said? They're big, they're bad, and even better, you don't give the points automatically when you use *Fury of the Iron Crown* with them. I can see it now: a company moving to Carn-Dum, only to face a nasty Witch-King enhanced with *Fury of the Iron*

Card Review: *Fury of the Iron Crown (cont.)*

Crown. 1 strike at 21/7. Or just to get things out of hand, add The Pale Sword for an additional +1 (at least) and a sure-bet 6 corruption points! Ahhh, who doesn't love a combo?

Most of these things can be applied in equal measure against a Fallen-wizard player. Just keep in mind that more than likely, your men hazards will be the most effective.

With the advent of the minion alignment however, Orcs, Trolls, Men and Nazgul are considered detainment in just about every case (with a few exceptions). Even if they aren't detainment, minions rarely get points from such creatures. The most recent errata for *Fury of the Iron Crown* will help explain:

• Orc and Troll characters may use a creature enhanced by Fury of the Iron Crown as a trophy.

• A player only gains marshalling points from the creature if he would have received them normally.

That means that the minion alignment would never receive the points from a boosted assassin whether or not he defeated the attack, unless they play *Remnants of Old Robberies*, which as I recall, is not in wide use these days.

Since this is the case, you can detain and attack to your heart's content. As long as you don't use creatures that have an * by their MPs, you should be safe. There are more than enough non-asterisked creatures to choose from.

The real purpose of using a card like *Fury of the Iron Crown* is to make that one all-important strike out of

reach to all but the lucky or seriously-prepared. I've seen quite a few minion decks use Tuma, Burat and Wuluag as back-up characters.

Why wouldn't you use their own characters against them? All three can be keyed to wilderness (which means non-detainment), with the lowest possible prowess now being 15. Since the card is out of play regardless, that means that they cannot play whichever troll they've just defeated. Even if they don't defeat the creature, it's out of play because of *Fury of the Iron Crown*. Now you just get a better chance to wound or discard one of their characters in the process.

Now that the Balrog cards are out, you can probably see an even greater use of this card. All of the characters for a Balrog must be either an orc or a troll. Why not try to use Buthrakaur or Umagaur against the Balrog?

Let's examine that a little closer. Let's assume that your opponent is playing a Ringwraith. He starts the game with Lieutenant of Angmar or the Lieutenant of Morgul, both of whom have hazard manifestations: Rogrog and Gothmog respectively. During the course of the game, play Call of Home on either one, then play their hazard manifestation with *Fury of the Iron Crown*. As soon as you play *Fury of the Iron Crown*, that manifestation is out of play. Guess what? No more Lieutenant.

You can also try that against a Balrog player who uses Buthrakaur and Umagaur. Use Call of Home to return the character to their hand, then use *Fury of the Iron Crown* to remove their hazard manifestation from the game.

Since these manifestations are non-asterisked, you won't have to worry about giving up points, either. And

against both the Ringwraith and Balrog player, most of these manifestations are easily playable. So next time you're thinking about your hazard strategy, try using *Fury of the Iron Crown* and see how it helps.

Do remember that minion players get an additional 5 GI to use for such hazards as Call of Home, but with good GI management, you might be able to catch your opponent unguarded. Try helpers like So You've Come Back, Rebel-Talk, and Shut Yer Mouth to make your opponent's GI harder to maintain.

Why aren't more players using *Fury of the Iron Crown* in their anti-minion/Fallen Wizard decks? Beats me. It's probably more a case of out-of-sight, out-of-mind. *Fury of the Iron Crown* is unique and in the manner described vs Ringwraith or Balrog, you may have to be a bit selective as to when you play the card. The good thing is that you can simply hold either Call of Home or *Fury of the Iron Crown* in your hand until you get them both together with a manifestation. Not the easiest combo to play, but I would be willing to bet that it can be a truly devastating and unexpected one. Give it a try!

Next issue: Foreign Promo cards, promo reissues, and the hard-to-find German promos! Submission for the promo article by Jiří Štípek of the Czech Republic! Thanks Jiří!

Featured Artist - *Christina Wald*

James Kight

The Featured Artist this issue is Christina Wald. Christina has done work for many different CCG's besides MECCG, and in fact does many types of art besides fantasy and/or CCG art. I myself first remember seeing her work with early MECCG and in Legends of the Five Rings.

A few years ago a friend of mine attended a convention and had the chance to meet and talk with her. While he himself wasn't a collector of art, he felt that she was more than pleasant, and still chides himself for not getting a piece while he had the opportunity. I kept that in mind when I made my list of artists to interview, and decided to contact Christina. Here is my interview.

TOMN: How did you get started in the art industry?

Christina: I started to get really interested in art when I was in Jr. high and High school. My best friend and I were always writing stories together and would do costume designs to accompany the characters. Soon we became interested in comic books and wanted to write our own. I was pretty much drawing all the time (much to the chagrin of my teachers).

When it came to choosing a major in college (University of Cincinnati), at

Pallando's Apprentice illus. By Christina Wald © 1997 ICE

first I chose Graphic Design. I switched to Industrial Design my freshman year when I realized that I did not want to take 5 years of typography classes. The program had a good foundation in illustration. I started doing illustrations for role playing game companies shortly before I graduated. Doing work in this industry was kind of a fluke.

TOMN: Do you do anything on the side besides art?

Christina: I am a total science geek. I love watching scientific documentaries and reading books and magazines on the subject. Sometime in the next ten years, I would love to go back to school to study genetic biology or astronomy. I also love to collect gadgets and the latest tech toys. I still read a lot of science fiction, fantasy, and mystery novels. In addition I collect comic books still. I also like to travel and try to squeeze it in whenever I can afford it. This year [my husband and I] went to Romania.

TOMN: What is your favorite subject matter to paint?

Christina: That is hard to say and changes constantly. I love the challenges of any illustration. The Middle Earth set was especially fun though.

TOMN: What is your preferred medium?

King Under the Mountain illus. By Christina Wald © 1996 ICE

Christina: Painting in acrylic on gessoed board.

TOMN: Did or does ICE give you example artwork to go by? (Tolkien's old sketches, other prior work, etc.)

Christina: Sometimes. It really depended on both the complexity of the illustration and how concrete their vision of the piece was. Each illustration always came with an informative packet--some were way thicker than others.

TOMN: What is the greatest goal you have reached so far?

Christina: That is really a hard question to answer. Can I get back to you on that one?

TOMN: Sure. Let me think of a better way to ask, and I'll revisit the question later. Have you ever turned down an assignment? If so, why?

Christina: Yes. When I was so booked I could not possibly squeeze another thing in.

TOMN: How is the CCG industry different now than it was when you started (in relation to artists)?

Chill Them With Fear illus. By Christina Wald © 1997 ICE

Featured Artist: Christina Wald (cont.)

Fatty Bolger illus. By Christina Wald © 1995, 1996 ICE

(Continued from page 8)

Christina: It is a collapsing industry and a very unstable one. Hopefully things will change soon but as an artist it is less and less a reliable source of income. It is too bad because CCG art is a lot of fun to do.

TOMN: Who is your own personal favorite artist (not necessarily CCG related)?

Christina: There are so many. Norman Rockwell, N.C. Wyeth, Salvador Dali, Andrew Wyeth, Louis David, Rembrandt, Ingres, Degas, many of the Renaissance painters and the Victorian Painters. As far as industry related, I like the work of Donato Giancola, Doug Chaffee, Chris Foss, Jeff Miracola, Angus McBride, and James Gurney. I am sure I am leaving a lot out.

TOMN: Foss? I remember a lot of his work from some of the recent Traveller releases, but it seems that I've seen some of his work before too.

Christina: Well he's from England, so it may have been some time between him completing the work and some company here in the states publishing it for others to see.

TOMN: I spoke a little bit with Audrey Corman in Issue 2 about realism. In what sort of ways do you think your approach to art is different?

Christina: Well, Audrey does some fantastic work. I know her well. Sometimes I think it's more important for me to make sure the art looks "right", not necessarily "real". It really depends on the picture.

TOMN: So a dragon or dwarf doesn't necessarily have to look "exact" for it to convey the message.

Christina: Right.

TOMN: You're on a desert island, no wait, that's too easy...you're in a roudy convention, with lots of fans and dealers running about and talking. What makes it worth the all the effort?

Christina: The joy of doing what you want to do artistically.

TOMN: When you start a particular piece, what determines the first stroke or sketch line?

Christina: When I start, I usually do a couple of really rough thumbnails to determine the composition.

TOMN: Have you ever surprised yourself with your art or created something completely unexpected?

Christina: I am almost always not totally pleased with my work. Although there are aspects of a particular work I like, I always see ways that I need improvement. I think the days of

Giant Spiders illus. By Christina Wald © 1997 ICE

The Oracle's Ring illus. By Christina Wald © 1997 ICE

being surprised by my art are in the future.

TOMN: What is the most current music that you're listening to?

Christina: I am a huge Bela Fleck and the Flecktones fan and listen to that the most lately. I also like the Dave Matthews Band, Squirrel Nut Zippers, Seal, Loreena McKennitt, Enya, Psychograss, Acoustic Alchemy, Violent Femmes, Sting, Paul Simon. I really listen to a wide scope. I also like a lot of classical music. It really depends on my mood.

TOMN: Many artists have trouble with the human figure...What is the most difficult thing for you to paint or draw?

Christina: I would say that the human figure and drapery over it poses the most challenges and the most can go wrong with it in any illustration..

TOMN: Did any of your paintings for MECCG not make it into the final product?

Christina: No.

TOMN: Which one is your favorite piece from MECCG?

Featured Artist: *Christina Wald (cont.)*

Christina: That's hard to say...there are about two or three I really like. Chill Them With Fear, Worn and Famished, and maybe Jerrek.

TOMN: It's interesting which pieces of art eventually become everyone's favorite. For Audrey, most everyone mentioned Thror's Map, and I would say that part of that was the popularity of the card itself. Another popular card of hers would be The Lidless Eye, which for awhile was one of the more sought after cards. Chill Them With Fear is like that.

Personally, I really like the color in Giant Spiders. Much better than the original in my opinion, but not necessarily the most popular card.

Christina: I never really got into the popularity aspect...I also sort of have a soft spot for Kill All But NOT the Halflings, but that's probably because I really liked the way the hobbits turned out.

TOMN: What about Fatty Bolger? The infamously lost card?

Christina: I heard about that one...it's supposed to be lost somewhere overseas. I myself have only seen one.

TOMN: Well, they eventually reprinted the card. Probably so every-

Elerina illus. By Christina Wald © 1996 ICE

one could have one and to prevent a ridiculous second-hand market on Fatty Bolgers. I heard of a few early on going for around $50. I hope whoever has them now enjoys them.

TOMN: Do you do any work on the computer? Retouching, anything like that?

Christina: I do use the computer. Sometimes it's just much quicker. Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, programs like that.

Dragon's Breath is a good example of how I use the computer. I don't know if you can tell it or not, but Bilbo is supposed to be somewhat transparent in that picture. I tried to use the computer a little to accomplish that.

TOMN: Hold on, let me get that card...yeah, now that I look at it closer, I can see it. How hard is it to do that?

Christina: Not terribly. It takes a little practice getting used to the different format.

TOMN: Is fantasy your genre, generally? What other types of areas do you prefer?

Christina: I also like Science Fiction and more general, non genre illustration. It is the challenge of each piece, not the genre, that interests me.

TOMN: Do you do any research for your pieces?

Christina: Yes, I am a bookaholic and use any assignment to increase my collection.

TOMN: You mentioned earlier that you collect comic books. Which ones do you collect?

Christina: I like Cerebus, Kabuki, books like that.

TOMN: Cerebus? No way! That's like my all time favorite. Kabuki too. I think David Mack's artwork is really astounding. He really seems to have a feel for emotions.

Christina: Well, I like to support the local artists. He's about 20 minutes away from me.

TOMN: Do you ever use models?

Christina: Yes.

TOMN: Are there things that you have yet to do with your art?

Chrinstina: Tons. I am just now starting to do art for greeting cards.

Thief illus. By Christina Wald © 1995 ICE

Worn and Famished illus. By Christina Wald © 1996 ICE

Featured Artist: *Christina Wald (cont.)*

Kill All But NOT the Halflings illus. By Christina Wald © 1995 ICE

(Continued from page 10)

TOMN: Really? Greeting cards? That seems so...different.

Christina: I also have done and still do some conceptual artwork for toy ideas…kind of rough ideas of how someone might play with a toy or use a particular product.

TOMN: Hmm. I guess you never think that type of work would be interesting.

Christina: Some of the work I do now is dependant upon who pays.

There are still a few companies who owe me for the work I've done.

TOMN: Who else have you done work for?

Christina: Aside from ICE, I've done art for Battletech and Dune.

TOMN: And L5R! I remember Master of the Tea Ceremony very well! That's one of my favorite pieces from that game. You had a few different pieces from that one that I liked.

Well Christina, I think that's about all the questions I have. It's been a real pleasure talking to you about your art and learning more about you.

Christina: Anytime. It was my pleasure. Let me know if there's anything else I can answer.

TOMN: Good luck in the future!

Christina: Thanks! You too.

Again, my thanks to Christina for taking the time to answer all my questions and talking a little bit about the industry.

Coming up in Issue 5: Steve Otis. And in Issue 6: Angelo Montanini! Stick with us!

Terror Heralds Doom illus. By Christina Wald © 1998 ICE

Survey Question: Responses and This Issue's Question

Last Month's survey question asked readers which was their favorite character, and if possible, why. Here are the results:

Ioreth - 12 votes – By far the most popular character. The ability to sit and zap hazards for 1 mind and 1 one direct influence is very hard to pass up.

Galadriel – 2 votes. Much more versatile with the release of Show Things Unbidden.

Dain II – 1 vote – Flatter a Foe! C'mon!

Lieutenant of Dol Guldur – 2 votes – Versatile as a sage, and can give you an extra card in hand.

Lieutenant of Morgul – 1 vote – Big, tough, ranger. 'Nuff said.

Annalena – 1 vote – versatile sage/scout. Underrated.

Aragorn II – 2 votes – Still one of the game's most popular characters, probably because he's got so many

specific cards.

Eowyn – 1 votes – A cool Nazgul killer, and a woman besides! Grrrl Power!

Thrain II– 3 votes – Warrior/Ranger/Sage, big & tough, and possible King Under the Mountain.

Lieutenant of Angmar – 2 votes - A Troll scout? Yeah baby! Ruse this!

Elrond – 1 vote – Another popular Elf-Lord. Vilya makes him virtually unstoppable.

Carambor – 1 vote – Nice early game Shadow-Magic user. Has a tendency to die early, though.

Sam Gamgee – 2 votes – Hobbit, Scout, Ranger! How much cooler can you get? Way too many useable cards to pass him up for a hobbit deck.

Celeborn – 1 vote – Solid warrior/sage, with a sizeable influence against Galadriel. Maybe it's the lipgloss!

Faramir – 1 vote – 5 mind warrior/ranger. Another underrated character.

Beorn – 1 vote – Surprising, considering the high percentage of decks that use him. Solid warrior/ranger, with enough specific cards to warrant his being a starting character. An alternate choice for Black Arrow.

Grimburgoth (w/Open to the Summons) - 1 vote – Already a huge beefy nasty agent, Open to the Summons makes The Grimburgoth a whopping character.

Elladan/Elrohir – 1 vote – A vote for one twin is a vote for the other. Easy to use warrior/rangers, decent prowess.

Halbarad – 1 vote – Counterpart to Ioreth. A sage/diplomat with 1 direct influence, Halbarad's weakness is his body of 5.

Now for next issue's question:

What is your favorite hazard strategy?

Bob Mohney: *Balrog and Beyond*

Bob Mohney

First the good news, *Middle-earth: the Balrog*™ (*MEBA*™) should be released by the end of December. Despite repeated problems with the boxes, the set should have shipped to distributors during mid-December, and we hope to release it to the stores during the following week. ICE would like to thank everyone for their patience. We know that the last few months have been very frustrating for our fans, but we think the final product will be worth it.

Middle-earth the Balrog expansion will be sold in two boxes, each of which retails for $18.95. Together, they make up one complete set. Buy one of each box, and you can assemble the complete 104-card set with significantly less cost (under $40) and trouble than under the traditional pack format.

The boxes are titled "Middle-earth: The Balrog The Shadow-deeps, and "Middle-earth: The Balrog Balrog's Host." The set itself has 104 new cards. New cards will be printed with a black border. Cards from previous expansions will have a gray border.

Each Box of *MEBA* contains a fixed, preconstructed deck of 132 cards. The deck has over

half of the new expansion cards, multiples of certain Balrog cards, and enough cards from earlier MECCG expansions to play a well-tuned Balrog deck right out of the box. The enclosed insert provides the deck list—along with tips for play-for each of the two decks, brief Balrog player rules, and the easy-to-learn Challenge Deck rules.

Balrog has sold out with the exception of a small supply that we are reserving for direct mail. At the current time, we do not plan on re-printing the set, so get your cards fast.

If you have access to the web, you should check out Sierra's website www.Middle-earth.com. Sierra is producing a multi-player on-line role playing game set in Middle-earth. ICE and Sierra plan on several joint promotions over the next year. Sierra is also very interested in purchasing content from ICE, so don't be surprised if you recognize stories or images from *Middle-earth Role Playing*™ or *MECCG*™.

As I am sure most of you know, the first *Lord of the Rings* movie is slated to be released in 2000. ICE expects that the interest in Tolkien related products to skyrocket as the release date approaches and we have no intention of missing out on this

wave. Consequently, ICE is working on a second edition of the card game to come out next summer or fall. What we want to do is retain the flavor of *MECCG*, but make the game much easier to learn and play. Our goal is to make it compatible with the current card game.

That wraps it up for now. Next issue, I'll have more info on the new card game, the future of MECCG, and some info on ICE's other Tolkien related projects including our upcoming fantasy miniatures system and some new boardgames. Happy Holidays to you and yours from myself and the ICE crew!
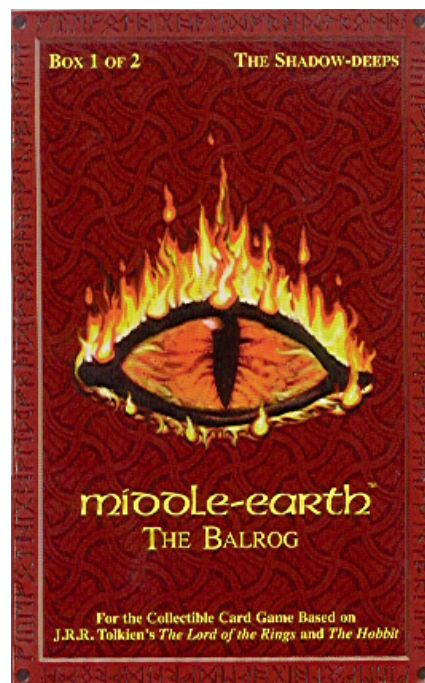
Balrog Box 1: The Shadow-Deeps © 1998 ICE

Game Review: *Settlers of Catan*

James Kight

One game I had always been intrigued by but had never managed to pick up is Settlers of Catan. For some reason I had equated the trading and commodity aspect of Settlers to be, well...unsettling. I've never been a big fan of trading in a board game. That is until recently.

I finally saw a few people playing at the inaugural Ice Breaker and decided to give it a try. I had my own copy of the game, although it was a few years old. When my friends and I returned home, they were eager to try it was well, and had even gone so far as to purchase two copies of the game.

One of the interesting things about Settlers is the simplicity of the rules. It doesn't take that long to learn the rules, but like most games, the strategy is not so easy. In this article I will focus on the 2-4 player version.

Setup: The first thing to do is to lay out all the non-water tiles in a hexagon-shaped pattern, making sure the placements of the tiles are not pre-determined. The rules suggest a method as shown in figure 1. After the tiles are placed thus, then the port tiles are placed as shown in figure 2 (making sure they face the greatest number of land hexes), and then the remaining water tiles are filled in as in figure 3.

There are 8 types of tiles: Hills, Plains, Mountains, Pastures, Forests, Plain Water, Ports, and the Desert tile. Hills produce Brick, Plains produce Grain, Mountains produce Rock (or "Ore"), Pastures produce Sheep, and Forests produce Wood. The other tiles do not produce anything.

While the distribution of the land tiles

are random, the letter/number tokens you place (as directed in figure 4) determine the chances that a particular land tile will produce when the dice are rolled. As the numbers on the particular dice are rolled, you receive one of that commodity for each settlement that is on a corner of that tile.

To begin the game, each player places one settlement and one road (together). Then each player does the same thing again, but in reverse order. When the second settlement is placed, you receive the commodities on the land tiles that the second settlement is adjacent to. *For example, if you place your second settlement on the corner of land tiles producing wheat, rock and sheep, you would receive 1 resource card each of wheat, rock and sheep.* The desert tile does not produce anything.

After the beginning placement, players take turn rolling the dice, gathering commodities, trading commodities, buying developments/settlements/roads/cities, and/or playing developments. To win, you need 10 victory points. Each settlement is worth 1 victory point, each city is worth 2 victory points, certain development cards are worth 1 victory point, and having the longest road or largest army is worth 2 victory points apiece (see Development Cards).

At the beginning of each turn, players roll the dice and add them together. The land tiles that match the resulting number produce 1 commodity card for each player with a settlement on one of its corners. The tiles produce 2 for each city adjacent to a producing land tile.

The Robber: The robber is an interesting aspect of the game. The
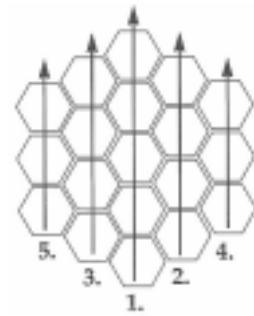
Figure 1: Placing the tiles

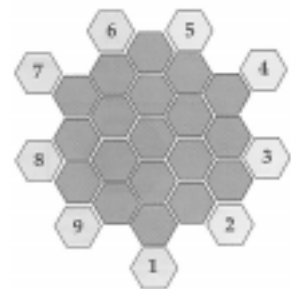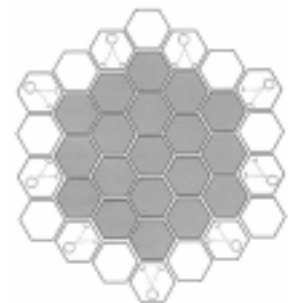Figure 2: Placing the Port tiles
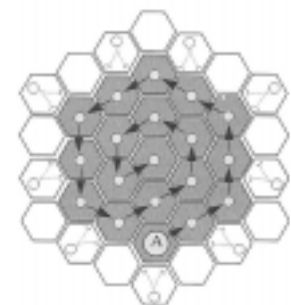

Figure 3: The completed board

Figure 4: Placing the numbers

Game Review: *Settlers of Catan (cont.)*

robber begins in the desert tile. When a "7" is rolled, the player whose turn it is can place the robber where he wishes, with the following exceptions: the robber cannot be placed into the desert, and he cannot remain on his current tile. When the robber is placed, that land tile no longer produces when its number is rolled. In addition, the player who places the robber may take one resource from any player whose settlements border the land tile in which the robber is placed. If any player has more cards in his hand than the legal limit (which is normally 7), then they must discard half of their hand to the bank rounded up. As a clarification, only the tile and number where the robber is placed does not produce; all other land tiles of that type continue to produce, as do all other numbers that match the one on which the robber is placed.

Trading: Each player may, during their turn, trade commodity cards with other players in any manner that is acceptable to the trading players. Any trades may be made as long as one of the trading players is the current player. Trades may only take place between two players. A player may also trade with the bank by trading in 4 resources of the same type for 1 of any other type.

Ports: Ports are the exception to the 4 for 1 trade-in rule. If you have at least a settlement on a generic port (3:1) you may trade 3 resources of the same type for 1 of any other type. If you have at least a settlement on a port of a specific resource (2:1) you may trade 2 resources of the specified port type for 1 resource of any other type. With the specific resource port, only that resource may be so traded.

Building: After you have completed all trading, you may then begin to turn in your resources to the bank to "build" such things as settlements, roads and cities. In addition, you can buy development cards. Each cost for building and buying is displayed on a quick reference card for each player, and is displayed in figure 5. You may not trade with other players after you have begun purchasing, and settlements and cities built must be placed in corners, not on a flat edge. In addition, cities/settlements may not be built on adjacent corners from each other. There must be at least 1 corner between the two settlements/cities. Tactically, what that means is there will only be one city/settlement on each port. To build a city, you must pay the required resources, and replace one of your settlements with the city. If you run out of anything such as cities, roads or settlements, you may not build any more of that type.

Roads: That also means that to build city/settlements in a line, there must be at least 2 roads between them. Roads must be built in connection with one of your other roads/cities/settlements. When building roads in consideration for the longest road, only the longest continuous road is considered. If another player's city/settlement interrupts a road, the road is considered stopped, and you may no longer build from that particular end of the road. Whenever you have at least 5 roads together in a continuous line and your road is longer than anyone else's road, you receive 2 victory points for having the longest road, which is represent by the card that indicates "longest road". If at any time you no longer have the longest road, you pass the card to the player with the longest road, and he now has 2 victory points for having the longest road.

Soldiers and Armies: Soldier cards when revealed allow you to move the robber as if you had rolled a 7, but in this case players do not need to discard from their hand if they exceed the legal

Figure 5: Building Costs Reference Card

hand size. Whenever you have at least 3 soldiers revealed and more soldiers than anyone else, you receive 2 victory points for having the largest army which is represented by the card that indicates "largest army". If at anytime you no longer have the largest army, you pass the card to the player with the largest army, and he now has 2 victory points for having the largest army.

Development Cards: Certain development cards give you certain benefits. When you purchase a development card, you may not reveal it until your next turn, except victory point cards (all cards but Monopoly, Discovery, Road Building and Soldier), and only if it would give you enough victory points to win. All other development cards give 1 victory point as indicated on the card.

Monopoly: When you play this card, announce one type of resource. All other players must give you all their resource cards of that type.

Soldier: Move the robber and steal one resource from an adjacent player.

Discovery: Take any 2 resources cards from the bank and add them

Game Review: *Settlers of Catan (cont.)*

to your hand. These can be two different resources or two of the same resource. They may immediately be used to build.

Road Building: Place 2 new roads as if you had just built them.

Alternate Rules: There are a number of alternate rules that are offered, anything from the ability to retain more cards (in relation to the robber) to the different layout possibilities. Give any of them a try as you and your play group try to find which ones are right for you.

Strategy: Because dice are involved, there are certain odds involved as to which numbers will come up when the dice are rolled, and this fact will definitely play a major role in where you decide to place your settlements and cities, especially during the game setup. Below is a small odds chart to show you which numbers have the greatest chance of being rolled. The percentages shown here are only approximations.

2 & 12	3%
3 & 11	6%
4 & 10	8%
5 & 9	11%
6 & 8	14%
7	16%

When you are placing your beginning roads and settlements, keep these percentages in mind. Also remember that your *second* placement determines which resource cards you will begin the game with since those are the resources that will be given to you at the start.

A good tactic might be to place your first settlement near a few tiles that have a high percentage of coming up,

and then place your second settlement closer to the harder-to-get numbers (unless better numbers are available) so that you can already have at least one each of those resources in your hand when the game begins.

When you open your copy of the game, you might notice that both Brick and Rock have one land tile less which to produce. This will put a strain on developments that include these resources, and you will find yourself frequently trading to get either brick or rock as the game unfolds. It all depends on how the tiles are placed, as the number distribution is always the same. Will you get an "8" on one of the rock tiles, or will it be a "12"?

As you begin your development, there are some choices that you will have to make. Do you go for the longest road? Do you try to get at many settlements as possible to cover all the numbers you can? How bad do you need that port?

A Few Tips: Try to place your first settlement in an area that has good median numbers like a 6 or an 8 or a 7. If you can put yourself on a corner in between a few good numbers, you will be assured of a fairly good supply of resources of those types. Make your second placement as thoughtfully, but try not to leave any resources out. Remember the scarcity of both brick and rock when you make your second placement. If you can manage to get either brick or rock (or both) in your first placement, so much the better.

Some players attempt to surround a few good tiles will strategic placement of their settlements. Just because the rules require at least 2 roads between settlements, that doesn't mean it needs to be only two. A good placement can corner off a resource with only 2 settlements. Looking at each tile as a

hex, you will see that by using the normal 2-road spacer, you can place up to 3 settlements around the tile (hex). If you space the settlements 3 roads apart, you can surround the tile with only 2 settlements, effectively blocking anyone else's access to that tile. If you plan well, you may be able to try this with more than one tile.

Try to get to a port as soon as possible. Being able to trade in surplus resources is a serious advantage as the game goes on. If you can get both a land tile and a specific port of the same type, you have a good lock on trade-ins, especially if the land tile produces frequently.

Try to maintain a good balance between settlements, cities, roads and development cards. Let the "longest road" and "largest army" victory points come to you as a result of good planning, not one-sided development.

I really enjoy playing this game as often as I get the chance, and I highly recommend it to anyone who likes a good, simple solid game. Originally in German, Mayfair has released their own version, which has been recently followed up by Iron Crown's own release. Definitely pick up a copy if you can get one!

Next issue: Settlers of Catan Card Game Version! It's a completely different game!

The Letters of Middle-earth

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Mike Urban

January 13, 1999

Contents

1 Introduction

In a 1955 letter to W. H. Auden[1], Tolkien wrote,

> . . . languages and names are for me inextricable from the stories. They are and were so to speak an attempt to give a background or a world in which my expressions of linguistic taste could have a function. The stories were comparatively late in coming.

The Elvish languages we know as Sindarin and Quenya, and the letters used to write them, can be traced to the earliest days of Tolkien's creative work, and lie at the very core of the world of Middle-earth. The dozen volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* reveal a complex and ever-changing linguistic tapestry, and the study of Tolkien's linguistic inventions in their entirety — or even of the languages as they existed when *The Lord of the Rings* set them into a more or less 'final' form — can literally fill a book.

This article will focus on a single aspect of Tolkien's invention, from a 'practical' rather than theoretical standpoint: the writing systems that appear in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. As we will see, even this relatively narrow area is complex, and a short list of references for further research by the interested reader appears at the end of this article. The vast majority of the information here can be deduced from *The Lord of the Rings*, especially Appendix E, but like the Hobbits, sometimes we like to read articles 'filled with things they already knew, set out fair and square with no contradictions'.

The writing systems in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* fall into two broad classes: the angular *runes* (ᚱᚢᚾᛖ), which appear prominently on Thror's map in *The Hobbit* and atop the title pages of *The*

Lord of the Rings; and the *Tengwar* (ᴛᴇ̃ᵍʷᵃʳ), the flowing letters that appear on the bottom of the *Lord of the Rings* title pages and the illustrations of the Ring inscription and the West-gate of Moria. Tolkien is careful to distinguish these two forms of writing, and the phrase 'Tengwar Rune' describing the Wizard and Ringwraith glyphs in the Challenge Deck rulebook is an oxymoron; the characters are simply runes. And it is to the runes that we will first turn our attention.

2 The Runes

The Futhark

In the historical world, the 24-character runic alphabet (known as the *futhark*[1], an acrostic name based on the sounds of its first six letters) appeared in Northern Europe in the 2nd or 3rd century. Its origins are debatable; it may be derived from the Roman, or Greek, or even Etruscan alphabets. Runes were used to make magical inscriptions, to inscribe the owner's name upon a weapon or other article, or as an artisan's signature. For example, a horn dating from ca. 400 bears the inscription ᛗᚨᚺᛚᛖᚷᚨᛋ ᚷᚨᚢᛏᛁᚤ᛬ᚺᛟᛚᛏᛁᛉᚨᚤ᛬ᚺᛟᚱᚾᚨ᛬ᛏᚨᚹᛁᛞᛟ "I, Hlegest of Holt, made the horn", quite reminiscent of the inscription on the West-gate of Moria. Most common are memorial or funereal inscriptions, such as might be seen on a tomb.

The futhark spread rapidly throughout the Germanic world, and Anglo-Saxon migration brought it to England, where it was adapted to the sounds of Old English. This form of the runic alphabet remained in use throughout the Anglo-Saxon period.

In the introduction to *The Hobbit*, Tolkien writes:

> Runes were old letters originally used for cutting or scratching on wood, stone, or metal, and so were thin and angular. … [the Dwarves'] runes are in this book represented by English runes, which are known now to few people. …

I and U are used for J and V. There was no rune for Q (use CW); nor for Z (the dwarf-rune ᛉ may be used if required). It will be found, however, that some single runes stand for two modern letters: *th*, *ng*, *ee*; other runes of the same kind … were also sometimes used.

Table 1 shows the runic alphabet as adapted by Tolkien. Everyone will remember the appearance of these runes in the inscription on Thror's map:

ᚠᛁᚢᛖ᛫ᚠᛟᛏ᛫ᚺᛁᚷᚺ᛫ᚦᛖ᛫ᛞᛟᚱ᛫ᚠᚾᛞ᛫ᚦᚱᛟ
ᛗᚨᚺ᛫ᚹᚨᛚᚲ᛫ᚨᛒᚱᛖᚨᛋᛏ᛬

"Five feet high the door and three may walk abreast."

Tolkien's use of the runic alphabet is pretty straightforward, but there is some variation between a strictly letter-for-letter transliteration (as in ᚠᛁᚢᛖ ('five') in which the silent 'e' is preserved) and a more phonetic approach (for example, ᛞᛟᚱ for 'door' rather than ᛞᛟᛟᚱ). Also notable in the moon-letters is the use of ᚺᚹᛖᚾ ('hwen') for 'when', which follows Old English usage.

Exercise 1 *(from a letter to Katherine Farrer, 1947[2]):*

ᚨᚠ᛫ᛚᛖᛏᚢᛖᛗ᛫ᛁ᛫ᚹᛁᛚᛚ᛫ᚺᛁᚷᚾ᛫ᚨᚠ
ᛞᚱ᛫ᛚᚠᚲᚺ᛫ᚨᚠ᛫ᚦᛖ᛫ᚺᚨᛒᛁᛏ᛬

Exercise 2 *How would you inscribe 'DEATH TO ORCS' on a wooden box containing your killer-Dwarf deck, using the runes from The Hobbit?*

Just as the ordinary Roman-alphabet lettering on Thror's map, in English, can be considered to be a representation of the 'real' Middle-earth lettering (presumably Tengwar) in the Common Speech, the Anglo-Saxon runes stand in for 'authentic' Dwarvish lettering, also in the Common Speech. However, it was not until the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* that readers received their first glimpse of these Dwarvish runes, Tolkien's own creation.

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[1] or fuþark, with 'þ' representing the *th* sound in '*th*in'

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
ᚠ	ᛒ	ᚲ	ᛗ	ᛖ	ᚡ	ᚷ	ᚺ
I	**J**	**K**	**L**	**M**	**N**	**O**	**P**
ᛁ	ᛁ	ᚴ	ᚱ	ᛘ	ᛅ	ᛟ	ᛈ
Q	**R**	**S**	**T**	**U**	**V**	**W**	**X**
ᚴᛈ	ᚱ	ᛊ	ᛏ	ᚢ	ᚢ	ᚦ	ᛉ
Y	**Z**	**TH**	**NG**	**EE**	**EA**	**ST**	**EO**
ᛤ	ᛣ	ᚦ	ᚸ	ᛦ	ᛞ	ᛧ	ᛋ

Table 1: Anglo-Saxon Runes from *The Hobbit*

The Cirth

In *The Treason of Isengard*, Christopher Tolkien quotes a letter dated 1937 that referred indirectly to the runes of Middle-earth, and adds,

> . . . he was thinking of his own runic alphabets, already at that time highly developed, and not in any way particularly associated with the Dwarves, if associated with them at all. It is conceivable, I think, that it was nonetheless Thror's Map . . . that brought that close association into being . . .

In Appendix E of *The Lord of the Rings*, we are told that runes were first used for inscribing letters in stone and wood by the Grey Elves of Beleriand during the First Age to represent their Sindarin language. A single carved rune was called a *certh*, from a root word meaning 'to cut'[2]; the plural form is *Cirth* (Quenya *certa,certar*).

Daeron, loremaster and minstrel of Doriath, reorganized the primitive Cirth into a more systematic arrangement (under the influence of the Fëanorean letters that we will see later). His alphabet, or *Certhas Daeron* was later extended and somewhat reorganized by the Elves of Eregion, to become the 'long rune-rows', or *Angerthas*. The Dwarves adapted the Angerthas to their own use during the Second Age (mainly due to the friendship of the Dwarves and Elves of Eregion), producing the form of the alphabet known as the Angerthas Moria. Note the distinc-

tion in terminology: the *Cirth* (plural) are the several runes; the *Angerthas* is the runic alphabet.

The development of these runic alphabets, and the phonetic values of each of the Cirth in both the Sindarin and Dwarvish versions, is well summarized in Appendix E of *The Lord of the Rings*. It is interesting to note that in both the 'real world' and the world of Middle-earth, the Dwarves inherited the runes from the Elves for whom they originally were devised. In a late essay[3], Tolkien wrote that by the Third Age, the runes

> . . . were forgotten except the loremasters of Elves and Men. Indeed it was generally supposed by the unlearned that they had been invented by the Dwarves, and they were widely known as 'dwarfletters'.

In fact, Tolkien himself seems to have used the runes very rarely, if at all, to write Sindarin (nor its predecessor version, Noldorin). In one manuscript (apparently dating from just before the writing of *Lord of the Rings*[4]), he wrote that "Owing to the ruin of Beleriand, before the departure of the Noldor to Eressëa, no actual Elvish inscription or book in this script was preserved," perhaps to reflect this fact. However, there are many published examples of Tolkien's use of the Angerthas to write English (representing, in some cases, the Common Speech). In *Lord of the Rings*, the prominent examples are

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[2]compare *Calacirya*, the 'light-cleft' of Valinor

A	B	D	E	F	G	H	I
ᚾ	ᚱ	ᚠ	ᚺ	ᚲ	ᚹᚴ	ᛤ	ᛁ
J	**K**	**L**	**M**	**N**	**O**	**P**	**R**
ᚴ	ᛈ	ᛌ	ᛒ	ᛘ	ᚦ	ᛒ	ᛏ
S	**T**	**U**	**V**	**W**	**Y**	**Z**	**&**
ᚲ	ᚴ	ᚢ	ᛊ	ᛉ	ᚼ	ᛗ	ᛉ
TH	**DH**	**CH**	**SH**	**OO**	**ND**	**NG**	**ə**
ᛃ	ᛃ	ᚴ	ᛃ	ᛘ	ᛝ	ᚷ	ᛁᛃ

Table 2: The Angerthas for English

the title-page inscription and Balin's tomb in Moria: (runes) — "Balin Son of Fundin Lord of Moria". Tolkien also made illustrations of the pages of the Book of Mazarbul that Gandalf reads, but these were unpublished until they appeared in *Pictures by J.R.R. Tolkien*[5] (now out of print) and *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*[6]. To this we can add other examples, such as a 1948 letter to Hugh Brogan[7].

From these examples and the information in the Appendix, we derive Table 2. Comparing these runes to the Anglo-Saxon runes, we see that many of the shapes are the same, but we see that there are more Cirth — a total of 60 are given in the Appendix, compared to 30 in the Anglo-Saxon runic alphabet. The similarity of shapes is explained as being a result of both alphabets being used primarily for carving into stone or wood. The Cirth are a bit more systematic in their shapes. In a 1963 letter [8], Tolkien wrote that "The signs used in the *cirth* are nearly all to be extracted from the basic pattern, (rune)..." There can be seen a certain amount of phonetic relationship between similar letters, such as (rune) (*p*) and (rune) (*b*), or (rune) (*t*) and (rune). This is, as we will see, a result of the influence of the Fëanorean Tengwar on Daeron's organization of the Cirth.

The 'values', or assignments to English letters and sounds, are basically those of the Angerthas Moria, with some adaptations to English. As with the futhark, Tolkien's use is not always consistent, being basically phonetic, with frequent excursions to follow English spelling. For example, in the Book of the Mazarbul, the word 'bridge' is spelled (runes), 'brijə',

with (rune) being used for a silent *e*, but 'j' being used for the *dg* sound. In a letter to Hugh Brogan [7], the name 'Hugh' is spelled '(runes)' even though the rune (rune) represents an aspirated *g* sound (which Tolkien normally writes as 'gh' as in *ghash*, the Orkish word for 'fire'). The symbol for *z* is sometimes used for the plural when it is so pronounced, but we also see the symbol for *s* in the word 'rings' ((runes)) on the title-page inscription. The lesson here is: if you use these runes to write English, don't worry too much about the details; spell the way you think it ought to be spelled, without losing readability.

Some explanation of certain characters may be helpful. Extensive use is made of the runes (rune) and (rune) for the *th* sounds in '**th**e' and '**th**in', respectively (Tolkien indicates the former sound as 'dh' throughout his writings). The schwa (ə) is the unstressed vowel sound that is so common in spoken English, such as the sound of the letter 'e' in 'spoken'. Tolkien uses the symbol (rune) for this sound in words like 'the' ((rune)) on the title-page, but as we have seen, he also uses it for silent *e*. In one place on the title page, this is reduced to a simple stroke in the word 'translated'. The doubled 'o' rune ((rune)) is used for the double-'o' in words like 'book'; in other contexts it represents a long *ó* as in names like Lóni. One interesting use is the addition of the half-rune (rune) to the rune (rune) to produce (rune) for the aspirated-K sound in 'Khazad' but also for initial 'Ch' in the Christmas letter to Hugh Brogan. While the Angerthas Moria rune for 'g' in the Book of Mazarbul is '(rune)', the older and more 'traditional' (rune) is far more recognizable and preferable.

Figure 1: Detail of *Conversation with Smaug*, an illustration by J.R.R. Tolkien for *The Hobbit*. The inscription reads, "Gold Th . . . Thrain. Accursed die the thief."

Finally, it should be noted that these runes, and not the futhark, are used by Iron Crown on the Middle-earth CCG cards. The five Wizards have suitable initial glyphs in the corners (with Radagast using the glyph ᚲ in its old Sindarin value of *r* rather than the Dwarvish use we see above); cards in *Middle-earth: the Dragons* are marked with the 'D'-rune ᚦ, and so on. The glyph ᛪ, which is a long *ú*, appears on each of the Minion Ringwraith cards; it probably refers to *úlairi*, the Quenya name for the Nazgul given in *The Silmarillion*.

Exercise 3 *In an early dust-jacket design for The Fellowship of the Ring [9], Tolkien included the inscription,* ᛁᛦ· ᚻᚱ·ᚠᛀᚾ·ᛚᛆ·ᛒᛀᚱᛈᛆᚳ·ᛩᛁᚻ·ᚻᚱ·ᛒᛜᚱᚲᛆᛏ·ᛦᛁᚼ *Aside from a couple of unusual uses for some of the runic symbols, what is the major error here?*

Exercise 4 *The name of the card 'The Dwarves are Upon You!' is a translation of Dwarvish battle-cry,* **Khazâd Aimênu!**. *Using* ᚾ *for 'â' and* ᚽ *for 'ê', how would you inscribe this name on an even spiffier box for your killer-Dwarf deck?*

Exercise 5 *What does the top half of the Lord of the Rings title-page say?*

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[3] singular *tengwa*, Sindarin *têw* (singular), *tîw*

3 The Tengwar

While the runes can be used to convey some of the (especially Dwarvish) 'flavor' of Tolkien's work, it is the flowing letters of the other Middle-earth writing system, the *Tengwar*, that most people particularly associate with Tolkien's world. The text at the bottom of the *Lord of the Rings* title page, the illustration of the Ring inscription, and the West-gate of Moria — all in different languages and lettering styles — are, for many readers, the strongest and most immediate signs of the richness and depth of Tolkien's world of Middle-earth. Yet the first published appearance of the Tengwar was not in *The Lord of the Rings*, but in an easily missed part of an illustration seen in Figure 1. As we will see, even in this fairly early example, the usage of the Tengwar was very similar to the forms later used in *The Lord of the Rings* and all the Tengwar writings of Tolkien's later career.

The earliest letters used by the Elves of Valinor were the *sarati* of Rúmil, the Sage of Tirion [10]. Little is known about this alphabet, although some fragments written by Tolkien in 1919 are known [11]. Fëanor devised a completely new, and far more systematic arrangement of letters which he named the *Tengwar*[3]. The Tengwar were designed to be use-

ᚾᛗᛈᚾ ᛈᚱᛟᛃᚾᚾ ᚳᛃᚳᚻ ᛒᛈᛃᛃᚳ
Ennyn Durin Aran Moria

ᛈᚾᛈᛞᚳ ᛒᚾᚷᚷᚳᚾ ᚳ ᛗᛃᛗᚳ
Pedo mellon a minno

ᛃᚾ ᚾᚳᛃᛒᛃ ᛚᚳᚾ ᚾᛞᚳᛈ
Im Narvi hain echant

ᚳᚾᚷᚾᛗᛃᛈᚾᛒᚳᛃ ᚳ ᚾᛃᚾᚳᛃᚳᚾ ᛈᚳᛒᚳᛈ ᛃ ᚻᛃᚳ ᛚᛃᚾ
Celebrimbor o Eregion teithant i thiw hin

Figure 2: The West-Gate of Moria

ful for writing the sounds of different languages; for this reason, the table displaying the Tengwar in Appendix E of *Lord of the Rings* does not specify particular equivalents for the symbols; their use — also called their phonetic *values* — when writing Quenya, the language of the Noldor of Valinor, is very different from their use in writing Sindarin, the language of the Grey Elves of Beleriand. Still other values apply when the Tengwar are used to write Westron, the Black Speech of Mordor, or English. Complicated as it sounds, it is really not very different from the Roman alphabet, in which the letters 'll' are pronounced very differently in English, Spanish, and Welsh. The *Tengwar Summary Sheet* gives the Quenya, Sindarin, and Westron (English) values, including many vowel symbols and diacriticals.

Looking over the first six rows, the astute reader will observe how Fëanor arranged the Tengwar into phonetic columns. By doubling the 'bow' portion of a basic letter, 'voicing' is added, changing, for example a *t* to a *d*. By raising the stem, 'aspiration' is added, changing a *p* to an *f*. 'Nasal' consonants are in the rows with no stem. Thus, a whole series of consonant sounds can be generated from a small number of 'basic' sounds.

Besides the varying *values* for each Tengwa, there are also different *modes* or methods of positioning the vowels. Depending on the mode, vowels can appear as either separate letters or as accent-like diacritical marks (known by the Quenya term *tehtar*) that appear over the preceding or following consonant. Tolkien made a great many examples of Tengwar — in English, Sindarin, Quenya, and even Old English — and used all the different vowel modes.

In over to avoid overwhelming the reader, we will touch only briefly on Sindarin, Quenya, and the Black Speech inscription on the Ring, and focus on the use of the Tengwar to write English, in various 'modes'.

Full Modes

The simplest 'mode' for using the Tengwar is the 'full mode', in which each vowel is represented by a separate tengwa, rather than by the tehtar that we will see later. This is exemplified by the Sindarin inscription on the West-Gate of Moria, reproduced in Figure 2 and identified in the text as the Mode of Beleriand. Another example of this mode is seen in the *Road Goes Ever On* songbook[12] in a transcription of *A Elbereth Gilthoniel*, and in Elessar's letter to Sam in the omitted Epilogue to *Lord of the Rings*[13].

Because the language is Sindarin, the values in the lower-right corners on the *Tengwar Summary Sheet*. Note that in Sindarin, *ch* represents the sound in *Bach*, *ng* represents the sound in *sing* (not *finger*), and *y* represents the sound of French *u*. Long vowels are marked with an 'acute accent' mark (e.g. ᛗᛃᛃᚾᚷ (*míriel*), and a bar over a consanant indicates that the consonant is preceded by the appropriate 'nasal' consonants *n* or *m*, as in ᚳᚾᚷᚾᛗᛃᛈᚾᛒᚳᛃ (*Celebrimbor*). Finally, diphthongs are indicated by placing an accent over the vowel: a double-dot for a -y glide (e.g., ᛚᚳᚾ (*hain*)) or a tilde for a -w glide in *-au* (e.g. ᚷᚳ (*lhaw*)).

Tolkien often used a related full mode to write English. It can be seen in Figure 1, and in Tolkien's

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letter to Hugh Brogan [7]. An extensive example appears in the two drafts of Elessar's letter to Sam, and a variant 'Northern' mode is found in Óri's page of the Book of Mazarbul in *Pictures by J.R.R. Tolkien*. While the basic consonant uses are pretty much the same throughout these examples (using the Westron values in the *Tengwar Summary Sheet*), there were several variations. For example, on Thror's jar, the symbol ⟨o⟩ is used for *o*, but in the King's letter it represents the consonant *w*. In the letter to Hugh Brogan, ⟨ɥ⟩ is used for this *w* sound, but in the pages of Elvish script that appeared in *Pictures by J.R.R. Tolkien* (and the 1978 Silmarillion Calendar), the symbol ⟨ɕ⟩ is used in one sample and an inverted version of ⟨ɕ⟩ is used in another. The *Tengwar Summary Sheet* reflects the usages in Elessar's letter. Some notes are in order:

The sound *ch* represents the English sound in *church*; in Hugh Brogan's letter, the *ch* of 'Christmas' is represented by a ⟨ᴄ⟩ with a vertical mark below. Tolkien's dialect of English distinguishes two *r* sounds: the 'strong' (normal American) *r* after a consonant or before a vowel is represented by ⟨ɥ⟩, while the 'weak' sound that sort of disappears when an Englishman speaks a word like *car* is represented by ⟨ɲ⟩. Again, the sound of *th* in '**th**ese' is represented by ⟨ᴙ⟩, a separate sound from the *th* in '**th**in' (⟨ᴃ⟩).

The vowels used in this mode are ⟨ᴖ,ᴧ, ȷ, ᴄ⟩ and ⟨ᴖ⟩ for *a, e, i, o,* and *u* respectively; a consonant *w* is represented by ⟨o⟩. There is no example in the Letter of consonantal 'y'; in Hugh Brogan's letter, ⟨ȷ⟩ is used for this.

Tolkien used several 'abbreviated' forms for English words, notably ⟨ᴙ⟩, ⟨ᴂ⟩, and ⟨ᴆ⟩ for 'the', 'of', and 'of the' respectively; and also ⟨ᴩ⟩ for 'and', which uses the over-bar (or tilde) diacritical nasalization we saw in the Sindarin modes.

Other diacriticals are: a bar below to double a consonant (as in ⟨ᴩᴊᴩȷᴙ⟩, 'Pippin'); a dot below for a silent or unstressed 'e' (as in ⟨ᴧᴣᴃᴑᴩᴄᴙ⟩, 'Elfstone'); the double-dot for diphthongal *y* (as in ⟨ᴙᴄᴅᴃ⟩ 'eighth'); a tilde-like mark for a diphthongal *w* (as in ⟨ᴩᴃᴄᴅᴩᴙ⟩, 'daughter'); and a final hook or flourish for a final 's' (as in ⟨oᴧᴑᴩᴣᴄᴩ⟩, 'westlands').

As with the runes, Tolkien sometimes uses phonetic spelling (as in ⟨ȷᴣ⟩ for 'is' in the Hugh Brogan letter) but at other times conforms more closely to standard English spelling (writing 'his' as ⟨ᴟȷᴣ⟩ in the King's letter). Most people follow suit, using standard English spellings where this is most clear or convenient, but using the available Tengwar like ⟨ᴙ⟩ and Tolkien's English-word abbreviations where appropriate.

Exercise 6 *In the letter to Hugh Brogan, he wrote,* ⟨ȷ ᴧᴄᴩ ȷᴄ ɥᴄᴩ ᴃȷᴩ ᴙᴧᴖᴂ ᴩᴣ ᴄᴄᴩᴣȷᴣᴄᴩᴙ⟩*. Remembering that in this letter, he uses* ⟨ɥ⟩ *for w, what did he say?*

Exercise 7 *At the end of the Book of Mazarbul is written, in the Common Speech, the final entry, "They are coming," using much the same mode. What does it look like?*

Exercise 8 *The Sindarin word for 'and' is 'ar'. For the wrapper for your Elf-themed deck, write "Elros ar Elrohir" in the Mode of Beleriand.*

Tehta Modes

It seems likely that, to most people, the most familiar Tengwar modes are the ones that use diacritical or accent-like marks, known as *tehtar*[4]. It is an accented mode that we see in the Ring inscription (which appears on the cover of some editions of *Lord of the Rings*), and another such mode on the bottom half of the title page of *Lord of the Rings* and (by Christopher Tolkien's hand) on the title pages of *The Silmarillion, Unfinished Tales*, and all twelve volumes of *The History of Middle-earth*. All Quenya inscriptions using the Tengwar use tehtar for the vowels, and a considerable portion of Tolkien's English-language calligraphy and doodling in the Tengwar uses tehta modes.

The basic vowel 'accents' are shown on the *Tengwar Summary Sheet*, placed over a long vertical stroke known as a *carrier*. Depending on the language being represented (which, as we have seen, also affects the symbols used for consonants), the tehta can be placed over the *preceding* vowel (as in

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[4]Singular *tehta*, Sindarin *taith*, possible plural **tīth*

Figure 3: "The letters are Elvish, of an ancient mode ... "

languages like Quenya, in which many words end in vowels) or over the *following* vowel (as in Sindarin, the Black Speech, and Westron/English). When no consonant is available, a carrier can be used. Thus, the Quenya word *malta*, meaning 'gold' (the metal), is written as ᴍ, with the three-dot mark for *a* written over the preceding consonants; a word beginning with a vowel, like *anga* (ᴀ) starts with a 'short carrier' to bear the vowel mark. The letters ᴄ (*s*) and ᴢ (*z* or *r* or *ss*, depending on the language) could be inverted to facilitate vowel placement.

In languages like Sindarin and Quenya that distinguish long and short vowels, carriers are of two lengths (basically, an undotted 'i' or undotted 'j'), to denote vowel length. Hence, we see a long carrier in ᴏ (*óre*); the 'o' and 'u' curls, and sometimes the 'e' accent, could also be doubled to signify a long vowel. The *Road Goes Ever On* songbook contains a fine example of Tolkien's Tengwar calligraphy, a transcription of Galadriel's lament of farewell, *Namarië*, from the chapter *Farewell to Lórien*. The phrase, ᴍ (*yéni únótime ve ramar aldaron*) gives examples of all the vowels, both styles of carriers, and introduces the use of a double-dotted ᴜ to represent *y*.

The Ring inscription, reproduced in Figure 3, shows a very different tehta mode, this time representing Black Speech phrase:

> *Ash nazg durbatulûk, ash nazg gimbatul,*
> *Ash nazg thrakatulûk, agh burzum-ishi krimpatul*

Aside from a very different calligraphic style, we see here that the right-hand curl is used for *u* and not *o* (because the sound *o* was rare in the Black Speech), and is doubled for the long *û*. We also see here that in the Black Speech, the vowels are placed over the following consonant, rather than the preceding one as

in Quenya. We also see here the use of the inverted ᴢ to make the vowel placement easier in ᴍ (*nazg*).

Vowels are also placed over the following letter when writing Sindarin. The third version of Elessar's letter to Sam in *Sauron Defeated* is the only published example of Sindarin written in a tehta mode. This mode differs from the Mode of Beleriand in several respects; generally the use of consonants is the same as the Westron version of the letter, with ᴄ and not ᴋ for *k*, ᴘ representing *r* instead of *n*, and so on. We may conjecture that Aragorn or his scribe, as men of Gondor, used the letters in the way most familiar to them, rather than as the Elves of Beleriand or Eregion had. The vowel symbols used here are the same as in Quenya. As an example, the phrase *i-cherdir Perhael* (Master Samwise) is written as ᴍ ᴘ.

Tolkien often used tehtar for writing English. The most prominent example is on the title-page of *The Lord of the Rings*, reproduced in Figure 4. In Appendix E, Tolkien describes this as

> ...what a man of Gondor might have produced, hesitating between the values of the letters familiar in his 'mode' and the traditional spelling of English.

The vowels in this example are the same as those in the Sindarin and Quenya examples seen earlier; the symbol ᴍ is used for *w*. Aside from the use of the tehtar for vowels, the semi-phonetic nature of the writing resembles the full-mode English examples seen earlier: the use of abbreviations, the distinction of the weak and strong *r* sounds, and so on. Note the use of the letter *z* in the word ᴢ 'as'. The bottom half of the title page reads, phonetically,

> V westmar[ch] bi jhon Ronald Reuel
> tolkien .   heR(e)in iz set for[th] [DH]
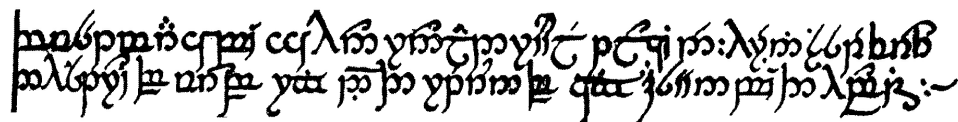
Figure 4: Title page inscription from *The Lord of the Rings*

histoRi [V+] wor [V+] Ri[ng] (a)[nd] [DH] Return [V+] ki[ng] az seen bi [DH] ho[bb]i[ts]

(using 'R' to represent the 'strong r') In plain English,

> of Westmarch by John Ronald Reuel Tolkien. Herein is set forth the history of the War of the Ring and the return of the King as seen by the Hobbits.

Another example of a tehta mode for English appears in the Hugh Brogan letter, in which the accent ´ is used for *i* and the dot · is used for *e*. In the title pages for *The Silmarillion* and the *History of Middle-earth* volumes, Christopher Tolkien also uses the accent for *e* and the dot for *i*; he also adopts a much more fully orthographic mode, in conformance to English spelling, rather than the semiphonetic usage we see in J.R.R. Tolkien's work. For example, the word 'dwarves' is rendered as ꝏ (using ꝏ for a vowel-bearing *s*) with no silent-e dot below, and using an *s* rather than a *z* or following-s hook.

Once again, the application of Tengwar to English is as much art as science; it is not simply an alphabetic cipher. Pick a convention based on the several examples available — either a 'full' mode or a tehta mode — then adhere to that convention consistently.

Exercise 9 *In the transcription of Namarië, there appears the sub-title* ꝏ ꝏ *ꝏ. What does this Quenya description say?*

Exercise 10 *You discover (in the chapter, 'The Field of Cormallen') that the Quenya word for 'ring-bearers' is 'cormacolindor'. The perfect name for your sure-fire One Ring deck! How do you embroider this name on your special silk wrapper for this deck?*

Exercise 11 *In 1960, Tolkien doodled a Tengwar transcription of a newspaper headline on the newspaper. He wrote:* ꝏ ꝏ ꝏ ꝏ ꝏ. *What did the original headline say?*

Exercise 12 *You decide to put up a banner at a gaming convention, announcing 'Middle-earth Tournament Today' in ordinary letters and Tengwar (using tehtar). How does the Tengwar portion look?*

Numerals and Punctuation

No numerals for Cirth nor Tengwar were published in J.R.R. Tolkien's lifetime. Three possible Cirth numerals are in the Book of Mazarbul drawing that appeared in *Pictures by J.R.R. Tolkien*, but while there are very reliable rumors that a complete list of Dwarvish numerals exists in unpublished form, none have yet been seen.

In 1981, Christopher Tolkien presented J.R.R. Tolkien's numerals for use with the Tengwar to the British Tolkien Society; they have been widely circulated an used among enthusiasts since then. These numerals are shown in the *Tengwar Summary Sheet*. There are some important notes on usage:

a. Unlike Arabic numerals, numbers are written with the units digit on the left. So the number 123 would be written ꝏ ꝏ ꝏ.

b. To help distinguish the numerals from the letters, a dot could be written above each digit, or a line drawn above the entire number. For example, 32767 could be written as ꝏ.

c. For lists, series, and the like, the letter Tengwar, numbers 1–24 (see the *Tengwar Summary*

Sheet), could be used, just as we use (a), (b), and so on. In this case, a dot or bar above could be used to mark this usage.

d. There are also symbols for 11 and 12 (ᚦ and ᚦ) for use in a duodecimal system, which was sometimes used by the Elves.

The various long Tengwar samples that have appeared in print show a variety of punctuation. The transcription of *Namarië* uses: a single dot for a comma; a pair of dots (like a colon) for a semicolon; two pairs of dots in a square (⠶) for a period/full stop; a modified vertical stroke ∫ for an exclamation point, and the symbol ϸ for a question mark. On the other hand, the title page ends with a colon-like pair of dots and a tilde-like horizontal stroke, and the West-Gate of Moria uses the colon for a period.

The various version of the King's letter to Sam show still other variations, such as two dots for a pause or comma or three dots in a column for a colon; for a period, we see both three dots in a triangle ∴ and four dots in a diamond pattern (⬧). The different drafts of the King's letter show some variations on ⟦ and ⟧ to represent parentheses. Finally, the beautifully calligraphed Tengwar transcription of 'Tom Bombadil' from *Pictures* uses ordinary European punctuation marks.

Lettering Styles

The Cirth and Tengwar are used by Middle-earth enthusiasts, as they were by Tolkien himself, for the purposes of calligraphic decoration, or for communication between kindred spirits. There is thus a certain incentive to make the Tengwar, at least, look as beautiful as possible. Tolkien himself used a variety of styles at different times in different places: the title-page writing looks very different from the Ring inscription; and both look very different from the writing on the West-Gate of Moria — even the runes look somewhat different on Balin's tomb from their appearance on the title-page.

In Elessar's letter to Sam, the name *Perhael* (Samwise) is 'emboldened' by the use of a thicker pen with angular strokes (much like the computer font that has been used on James Kight's Web page and Newsletter). It is reliably rumored that still other Tolkien experiments in lettering style remain in unpublished form, including a lettering style that one informant described as resembling 'an Elvish computer readout'. Other experiments in style appear in *The Treason of Isengard*, in which a cursive style for the Angerthas is presented.

The point of all this is to encourage the creative reader to experiment with the lettering rather than simply relying on one particular model or computer font for all runic or Tengwar writing. The choice of writing tool — ball-point pen, felt-tip, or calligraphic stylus — and of the exact formation of the letters can create a huge variety in the appearance of the runes or Tengwar.

4   A Final Example

As a final example, we consider one more decorative inscription for a hypothetical deck. Because this deck is based on Faramir and Boromir, Elladan and Elrohir, and Balin and Dwalin, we have decided to call this deck The Six Brothers.

First, we use the Futhark to write this name in English: consulting Table 1, we concoct:

ᚦᛖ ᚻᛁᛉ ᛒᚱᛟᚦᛖᚱᛋ

Remembering that there are special symbols for the unstressed *e* and the voiced *th* in 'the', the same English text using the Angerthas Moria appears as:

ᛝ ᛊᛁᛈᛉ ᚱᛏᛗᛁᚻᛏᛉ

We can also use the Tengwar, either in the adapted Mode of Beleriand or the Westron tehta mode:

ᵗ ᶜᵢᵉ ᵐᵍᶜᵇᵒ
or
ᵗ ᶜᵉ ᵐᵍᶦᵒ

But the truly ambitious Tolkien fan will not settle for mere English text. Consulting the *Etymologies* that appear in *The Lost Road*, and armed with a little knowledge of Elvish linguistics from books like *An Introduction to Elvish*, we can determine that the Quenya for 'The Six Brothers' is *I Enque Torni*; the

Sindarin form is *In Eneg Teryn* or perhaps *I Theryn Eneg.* Thus, we can write the Quenya as:

j ʃɔ̄d pɪɲɪ̀

and render the Sindarin in the 'traditional' Mode of Beleriand:

jɪ ʌɪʌɔq pʌɣɔɪ ɲɪ or j hʌɣɔɪ ʌɪʌɔq

or in the tehta mode seen in the King's Letter:

ɲɪ ɲɔ̄ɗq pɪɲɪ̀ or j hɪɲɪ̀ ɲɔ̄ɗq

We could also get 'cute' and use the numeral 6 (ʤ) in any of these.

Once we have chosen the letters to use, we would then decide how best to write them. A felt-tip calligraphic pen is an easily obtained tool that requires only a little practice to produce satisfying results. For runes, some possible media include wood carving or burning, or ceramic or stone engraving. But if calligraphic tools and skill fail, there are quite a few resources for computer users that can produce fine lettering.

5 Computer Resources

Fonts

Because the Runes, and especially the Tengwar, do not have a straightforward one-to-one mapping into the Roman alphabet, any computer font will have a certain amount of eccentricity or unexpected behavior when using it with some particular piece of software. The author's own Tengwar font for Donald Knuth's TeX system, seen throughout this article, uses the ASCII letter d for pɔ, a bit arbitrarily uses D for hɔ (*dh*), and quite idiosyncratically used octal code 004 (sometimes known as Control-D) for hɔ. Different font authors will have different preferences for which glyph to use for *r*, and so on. And the treatment of the tehtar — are they accents? —

will vary widely from font to font and software platform to software platform. Thus, whenever obtaining a new Tengwar or runic font for your system, it is *very* important to read any accompanying documentation, print out a keyboard map, or do whatever else is needed so that the keys you type produce the letters on the page that you would put there if you were doing the calligraphy yourself. To simply assume that you can switch into your new font and start typing text is a formula for disaster (and one that has claimed more than one unwary victim)!

Incidentally, those who are interested in techie matters may be interested to learn that there are proposals for the assignment of Unicode code points to the Tengwar, so some day there will be an international standard for the use of the Tengwar on computers. But not yet.

Here are a few sources for Cirth and Tengwar typefaces that can be found on the World-Wide Web.

Dan Smith's Fantasy Fonts for Windows[5] contains three very fine Tengwar fonts as well as a good futhark font, with a Cirth font said to be forthcoming. However, the keyboard assignments for the Tengwar mimic the placement on the table, and have no relationship to their Roman-letter equivalents, so be sure to read the accompanying Help file! This page also has good links to other Tolkien font resources and information.

The Yamada Center Tolkien Fonts[6] An assortment of Tolkien fonts, some quite old, for the Macintosh. The 'Tengwar Gandalf' font is the better Tengwar font, but has the ʒ backwards! Macintosh owners may be able to use Windows TrueType fonts after translation through a utility like FontMonger. There are also pointers to Windows fonts here.

CTAN Font Archive[7] The Combined TeX Archive Network; this is one of many mirrors. The subdirectory `tengwar` contains METAFONT source for the Tengwar font used here; the

[5]`http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/4948/index.html`
[6]`http://babel.uoregon.edu/yamada/fonts/tolkien.html`
[7]`ftp://ftp.cdrom.com/pub/tex/ctan/fonts/`

subdirectory `elvish` contains an alternative font by Julian Bradfield. There is a `cirth` font that was, with modfications, used in this article; Julian Bradfield's `elvish` directory has a superior alternative. There is also a `futhark` font. TEX users may also be interested in Ivan Derzhanski's TǵTEX macro package, which greatly facilitates the typesetting of text in either of the Tengwar fonts.

Elvish Linguistics

For those interested in general Elvish linguistics, there are several excellent and comprehensive sites:

Resources for Tolkienian Linguistics[8] Carl Hostetter's extraordinarily comprehensive resource page, with extensive bibliographic information on both paper and electronic resources.

Ardalambion[9] Helge Fauskanger's site contains several assorted pages covering a variety of topics, glossaries, and of course useful links.

Mellonath Daeron[10] The page for the language interest group of the Stockholm Tolkien Society. Has a fine Q&A section, and a very complete index of all the Tengwar and Cirth writings by Tolkien that have so far appeared in print.

Masi's Homepage: The Feanorean Letters[11] Some useful concise Tengwar summary information.

You can also join the `TolkLang` mailing list. It is lightly moderated by Julian Bradford and covers all aspects of Tolkien linguistics. Send mail containing the word `subscribe` or `subscribe digest` to `tolklang-server@dcs.ed.ac.uk` to get onto the list.

6 Further Reading

Readers interested in learning more about Elvish linguistics cannot miss the History of Middle-earth books edited by Christopher Tolkien. While the Elvish languages Tolkien devised before 1920 bear only a rough resemblence to the languages that were made 'canonical' by *The Lord of the Rings*, witnessing the development is fascinating. Someone who wishes to purchase only one or two volumes should buy *Sauron Defeated*, which contains the Epilogue, including the King's Letter to Sam, and *The Lost Road*, which contains the *Etymologies*, a dictionary of the Elvish languages as they existed just prior to the writing of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Jim Allen's *An Introduction to Elvish* [14] was written before *The Silmarillion* saw print, and yet is still the best reference on Tolkien's languages. Long out of print in the U.S., it can nevertheless be ordered as an import through Amazon.com.

Nancy Martsch's book *Basic Quenya* is reputed to be a good introduction to Quenya; this author has not yet seen the book. It can be ordered from the author. Ordering details are on the Tolkienian Linguistics Resources WWW page mentioned above.

Some people will cite Ruth Noel's *The Languages of Tolkien's Middle-earth*, which is still widely available. Unfortunately, the book is filled with errors, and is surprisingly incomplete. People who have been 'doing Elvish' for any length of time regard the book with contempt; people who rely upon it end up getting things wrong.

With the completion of *The History of Middle-earth*, the amateur Elvish-linguistics press has become much more interesting, since it is through these journals that Christopher Tolkien is releasing the still-unpublished Tolkien linguistic materials.

The journal *Parma Eldalamberon* has been around since the early 1970s on an irregular basis. The most recent issue, edited by Christopher Gilson, is #12, containing the *Qenya Lexicon*, the 1920 dictionary of the language that eventually became Quenya. Once again, Carl Hostetter's Tolkienian Linguistics Resource page contains contact information.

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[8] http://www.erols.com/aelfwine/Tolkien/linguistics/resources.html
[9] http://www.uib.no/People/hnohf/index.html
[10] http://www.algonet.se/~arador/md_home.html
[11] http://stud2.tuwien.ac.at/~e9026179/Tolkien/Tengwar/Index.html

Carl Hostetter also edits his own journal, *Vinyar Tengwar*, in which have appeared many useful analyses of Tolkien linguistics, as well as hitherto unpublished material such as Rúmilian letters, a version of the King's Letter, and most recently, an essay by Tolkien on the subject of mind-speech in Middle-earth.

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[11] Smith, A., "The Túrin Prose Fragments: An Analysis of a Rúmilian Document," *Vinyar Tengwar*, Vol. 1, No. 37, 1995.

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[13] Tolkien, C., editor, *Sauron Defeated*, The History of Middle-Earth, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992.

[14] Allen, J., *An Introduction to Elvish*, Bran's Head Books, 1978.

[15] Tolkien, J. R. R. and Carpenter (Ed.), H., *The Letters of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1981.

Answers to the Exercises

1 OF COVRSE I WILL SIGN YOUR COPY OF ÞE HOBIT. ('Of course I will sign your copy of The Hobbit'). Note the use of English-spelling 'OF' rather than phonetic 'OV' here.

2 How about:

3 It basically reads, 'In the land of shadows where the Mordor lie', which exchanges the words 'shadows'

and 'Mordor'. Hey, it was a rough draft.

4 ⟨tengwar⟩, using the same symbol for 'kh' as on Balin's tomb.

5 "The Lord of the Rings translated from the Red Book". The sentence is completed in the Tengwar section on the bottom half.

6 "I hope you won't find them too complicated," referring to his enclosed explanations of the various writings.

7 ⟨tengwar⟩ ; the actual illustration shows an initial 'capitalization' using ⟨tengwar⟩ with a doubled vertical bar.

8 ⟨tengwar⟩ . Did you remember to use the Sindarin values instead of the Westron? It is worth mentioning that the Sindarin version of the King's letter uses ⟨tengwar⟩ for non-final occurrences of *r* rather than the ⟨tengwar⟩ seen in the inscription on the West-Gate, perhaps reflecting a late Third Age usage.

9 *Altariello nainië Lóriendesse*: 'Galadriels lament in Lórien'

10 Remembering that there is no *c* character (use *k* instead): ⟨tengwar⟩

11 "Nationalist Backing for 'New Deal'". The first *a* is written 'inverted', with two dots above one. The placement of the dot over the following consonant in 'backing' is inconsistent with the rest of the doodle. The word 'new' is written with the unusual *ny* character, reflecting Tolkien's pronunciation of that word; he started to write the word with the expected ⟨tengwar⟩, but did not complete it.

12 I would write ⟨tengwar⟩, but there are many other possibilities.

Tengwar Summary Sheet

1 Tinco — t	t	metal — t
2 Parma — p	p	book — p
3 Calma — k	ch	lamp — k
4 Quesse — q	k	feather — —
5 Ando — nd	d	gate — d
6 Umbar — mb	b	fate — b
7 Anga — ng	j	iron — g
8 Ungwe — ngw	g	spider's web — gw
9 Thúle/Súle — th/s	th	spirit — th
10 Formen — f	f,ph	north — f,ph
11 Harma/Aha — h	sh	treasure/rage — ch
12 Hwesta — chw/hw	kh	breeze — —
13 Anto — nt	dh	mouth — dh
14 Ampa — mp	v	hook — v
15 Anca — nc	zh	jaws — gh
16 Unque — nqu	gh	a hollow — —
17 Númen — n	n	west — nn
18 Malta — m	m	gold — mm
19 N(g)oldo — ng/n	ny	of the Noldor — ng
20 N(g)walme — ngw	ng	torment — —
21 Óre — r	r	heart/inner mind — n
22 Vala — v	u/w	angelic power — m
23 Anna — —	y	gift — o
24 Wilya/vilya — v-,w	a	air, sky — w
25 Rómen — r	r	east — r
26 Arda — rd	rh	region — rh
27 Lambe — l	l	tongue — l
28 Alda — ld	lh	tree — lh
29 Silme — s	s	starlight — s
30 S Nuquerna — s	s	S reversed — y
31 Áze/Esse — z/r/ss	z	sunlight/name — ss
32 Z Nuquerna — ss	z	Z reversed — —
33 Hyarmen — hy/h	h	south — h
34 HW Sindarinwa — —	hw	Sindarin HW — hw
35 Yanta — i(y)	i	bridge — e
36 Úre — -u	w/u	heat — u

Numbers

0	1 MINË	2 ATTA	3 NELDE	4 CANTA	5 LEMPE
6 ENQUE	7 OTSO	8 TOLTO	9 NERTE	A	E
I	O	U	Y		

Additional symbols

'of'	'the'	'of, the'	? (question)
∷ .(period)	◆ , (comma)		

KEY

Quenya name — Quenya value
KEY — Westron value
rune(s) *translated name* — Sindarin value

The Role of Dice in MECCG II

Julian Wilson

This article follows on from my previous article on dice in MECCG. In that article I discussed single dice rolls and dice rolls in sequence, with examples drawn from the journeys of Radagast to Bree and Goblin-gate. We left Radagast at Goblin-gate with Gollum and a wounded Beretar. His story will continue below.

Now we turn to simultaneous dice rolls, that is, dice rolls in "parallel". These are situations where both you and your opponent must both make a roll at the same time. For example, you are trying to exceed your opponent's roll when you have a –2 modifier. Computer simulations of dice rolls show that this will only occur about 24% of the time. In about 10% of the time you will tie and in 66% of the time you will get less than your opponent will. Be aware that the outcomes of these parallel rolls are more variable than the outcomes of single rolls where there is only one source of variability, not two. Thus they are more risky if you do not have a high net modifier to your roll. We now return to Radagast…

Risky Blow versus Lucky Strike:

Radagast sets out for Lorien from Goblin-gate. The weather is fine and clear, much to the annoyance of Gollum. However, before the small party has left the High Pass, they are surprised by a Cave-worm that has been burrowing far closer to the surface than is usual for such a creature. The huge beast launches itself at the wounded Beretar, and Radagast bravely leaps in front to defend his companion. Quickly he must decide whether to go for a risky blow or lucky strike. The former will exceed the latter about 63% of the time, but there is the negative to body

to be taken into account. Radagast is quite prepared to sacrifice himself for his friend and chooses a Risky Blow. His prowess is now 11 (recall that he is bearing Glamdring) so he must roll greater than 5 to defeat the Cave-worm's staggering prowess of 16.

Fortunately he manages this and drives Glamdring through the brute's head. Beretar is visibly shaken by the attack, but thanks Radagast for saving his life, and Gollum reappears from behind the rock that he leapt behind at the first sign of danger. The trio ensures that the Cave-worm is really dead and then continue on their way to Lorien.

Now, the perceptive reader may notice that this first example did not appear to include any parallel rolls. The parallel roles were in fact hidden inside the Risky Blow versus Lucky Strike analysis. When using Lucky Strike, the combatant gets to make two rolls and choose which one to use. In almost all cases the roll chosen will be the maximum of the two. Simulations show that Lucky Strike rolls exceed normal rolls about 60% of the time.

On the other hand, Risky Blow gives a guaranteed +3 to the roll, allowing more automatic strike defeats and bringing high prowess strikes within the range of possible defeat. Risky Blow is the superior card to use in the sense that it is probably more important to have a high prowess than a high body. The exception to this is where a character is so important in the long term, that it is better to have him wounded and survive than risk his elimination. I may return to this important point in a future article, but let us now go back to Radagast and company.

Influence:

Radagast, Beretar and Gollum arrive in

Lorien with little further incident, largely thanks to Gollum's assistance in keeping low. Gollum is most uncomfortable during his stay, since he hates all things Elvish, but the other two have a restful time and Beretar completely recovers from his injuries.

While they are there, Saruman arrives on an extremely rare visit to Galadriel and Celeborn, and attempts to persuade Gollum to leave Radagast and come back with him to Isengard. Saruman has +10 to the influence attempt due to his normal unused direct influence, +5 due to his Wizard's Ring and +6 due to his use of Wizard's Voice. He also reveals a Gollum card, thus reducing Gollum's mind attribute to 0. Radagast has 20 unused general influence and 5 unused direct influence. Thus the net modifier to Saruman's roll is –4. His chance of success is approximately 9%. Radagast is unlikely to be deceived this time! [**Editor's note:** While this is a good theoretical example of the mathematics of influence, remember that allies cannot be influenced away from Wizards.]

Saruman's influence attempt fails and he makes the corruption check required by Wizard's Voice. With –3 to his roll and 4 corruption points he is in grave danger of failing his check. Fortunately, he rolls an 8 and remains on the side of good, at least for the time being.

Agent Combat:

Radagast decides to set out for Rhosgobel, his home, to collect some important herbs and other bits and pieces. Beretar and Gollum tag along. Unbeknownst to our trio, the Grimburgoth himself, an important servant of the Necromancer, is lying in wait to ambush the company. He taps

The Role of Dice II (cont.)

to attack during the movement/hazard phase with +2 prowess due to being face down and +2 from his card text. His total prowess is thus 11. Radagast, whose prowess is currently 8 taps to face the strike, but with +1 since Beretar attempts to distract the Grimburgoth. Gollum has meanwhile ducked behind a tree.

Radagast's chance of rolling higher than the Grimburgoth is 24%. His chance of making the strike ineffectual is 10% and his chance of failing is 66%. These odds are not good. Fortunately, even though Radagast had discarded that Lucky Strike from earlier, he has since drawn another Risky Blow. He plays this card, thus changing the odds to 56%, 11% and 33% respectively. He rolls a 6 and the Grimburgoth rolls a 7. The strike is ineffectual and the Grimburgoth

escapes to attempt an ambush another day. Radagast breathes a sigh of relief, thanks Beretar and berates Gollum for his cowardice. It is here that we leave the three. Who knows what may await them at Rhosgobel…?

Those readers with a mathematical bent may wonder how I arrived at the probabilities in the above examples. The answer is that I did not calculate them directly, but instead used short computer programs to simulate many thousands of dice rolls and used these to calculate approximate probability estimates that are more than accurate enough for our purposes. I intend to continue to use such methods for the next article where I will look further into simultaneous rolls in MECCG.
Till then.

Dice Roll Percentage Table	
Roll	*% Chance*
2	2.8
3	5.6
4	8.3
5	11.1
6	13.9
7	16.7
8	13.9
9	11.1
10	8.3
11	5.6
12	2.8

Answers to MECCG Quiz on Page 41

Answers to questions on page 41 (Don't Peek!)

Name the only hoard site that does not allow the play of a major item as printed on the site?
D. Framsburg

Name the only drake keyable to Nurn.
A. Sand-Drake

How many resource cards can be used as sites?
B. 2 (Refuge, Wondrous Maps)

Which hazard card creates another automatic-attack at a ruins & lairs?
D. Incite Denizens

On the card Bairnax Ahunt, the mighty dragon is seen stalking an animal. Which animal is it?
B. Polar Bear

Name the only skill not covered by the characters released in Middle Earth: The Dragons.
B. Scout

On the card *A Short Rest*, Elrond is seen holding a weapon. Which weapon is he holding?
C. Orcrist (note the grip of the sword. Glamdring uses cross-wiring, Orcrist uses a simpler wiring wrap. I used the Orcrist from METW as a reference. Bonus if you knew why.)

Which hoard site's automatic-attack has the highest prowess?
A. Gold Hill

Which of the following cards allows the play of Dragon hazard creatures keyed to Ruins & Lairs?
C. Rumor of Wealth

Name the only non-region type drake keyable to the Elven Shores by name.
C. Ice-Drake

Name the only hazard creature that allows the attacker to choose which item is stolen (discarded) when such an effect is produced by the card.
B. Were-worm

Name the only hazard card that can cancel any ongoing card effect declared earlier in the turn, including back into the organization phase.
D. Searching Eye

Using only cards from the Dragons set, what is the highest possible prowess that can result from a Dragon manifestation attack?
B. 42 (Smaug at Home, 3 Prowess of Age, 3 Prowess of Might)

Using only cards from the Dragons set, what is the highest possible body that can result from a Dragon manifestation attack?
D. 15 (Scatha at Home, 3 Prowess of Might)

Using only cards from the Dragons set, what is the greatest number of strikes that can result from a Dragon manifestation attack?
D. 10 (Scorba Ahunt, 3 Velocity of Haste)

Using only cards from the Dragons set, what is the greatest number of wilderness that can result from movement with Doors of Night in play?
D. 10 (2 Crams, Starter movement either to or from Buhr Widu, and 3 Withered Lands)

Review: *Balrog – Was it Worth the Wait?*

James Kight

The Balrog is Here!

After almost a year of delay, Balrog has shown up quite unexpectedly. I have a feeling that this set will be poured over quite a bit due to the lack of any other new material in almost a year. This article will take a quick look at the new set, and go over some basic and stand-out cards. As a disclaimer, this article is not intended as a full spoiler and card-by-card dissertation. For the spoiler, please visit Iron Crown's website at www.ironcrown.com.

The first thing we need to look at is the Balrog himself. To begin with, the player of the Balrog is a minion player, and any card and rules text applying to a Ringwraith also apply to the Balrog. His text reads:

The Balrog (20 GI)
6DI, Warrior/Ranger Balrog
8/11 prowess/body
Unique. Manifestation of the Balrog of Moria. Discard all other manifestations of Balrog of Moria when this card comes into play. +3 to the roll for his company to move between adjacent Under-deeps sites. The Balrog's prowess is only modified by -1 when not tapping to face a strike. He may not have any followers and may not use region or starter movement.

As you can see, the Balrog is a big, bad dude. Conveniently, he has the ranger skill, which will allow him to move about easier when he pops out of the Under-deeps (as we will see later). Most of the cards in the set revolve around the Balrog, and how he will go about getting items, allies, factions (as if), destroying Dwarf-holds and believe it or not, becoming the new master of the One Ring. The card that allows him to win with the One Ring is called *Challenge the Power*. Depending on the roll, he can be eliminated, Challenge the Power can discard, you can gain 2 points AND the Balrog can use the One Ring (really frightening), or the Balrog can win.

Most of the set deals with the Balrog and the Under-deeps, but there are a few new utility, theme, and character cards. For example, there is a new manifestation of Aragorn II called *Strider*. Mike Reynolds went over this card briefly in Issue 1 (visit www. therealm.org for an online copy, or email me at jameskight@mindspring. com if you'd like a printed copy). The Balrog can only use Orc or Troll characters. All of the new minion characters are either manifestations of unique Troll creatures [*Buthrakaur*, *Umagaur*, previously in Dark Minions], new characters that have been seen and spoken of in and around Moria [*Azog*, *Bolg*], or no-name utility characters [*Crook-Legged Orc*, *Hill-Troll*, *Mountain-Maggot*]. All of them are Balrog specific, which specifically prohibits them from being played by any other alignment. Unfortunately, unless they are Balrog specific, a Balrog player may only use Orcs or Trolls whose minds are less than 9. This means no Lieutenants, but it does mean you can use characters like Snaga, Burat, Tuma & Wuluag.

At first glance, both *Buthrakaur* and *Umagaur* appear to be the characters of choice. Like the Looeys (Lieutenants) they are both leaders, have 9 mind and give 3 MPs. Unlike the Looeys, they both have three skills, not two. *Buthrakaur* is a Warrior/Scout/Ranger Troll and has a prowess and body of 8/9, while *Umagaur* is a Warrior/Diplomat/Sage Troll and has a prowess and body of 7/9. *Azog* and *Bolg* are both leaders as well, have 7 mind and give 2 MPs. *Azog* is a Warrior/Diplomat Orc and has a prowess and body of 6/9, while *Bolg* is a Warrior/Ranger Orc and has a prowess and body of 7/9. In order to get any of these leaders together, you can either play *Orders from Lugburz* from MEAS, or the new card *Orders from the Great Demon*, which is similar in playability, but allows an additional leader to be played who does not count towards the party size maximum.

Concerning resources, there are a few hero resources (6 to be exact) that offer both utility and theme. For

Review: Balrog (cont.)

utility, 4 of the hero resources offer a little bit of everything. *Crept Along Carefully* allows a hero company to reduce their hazard limit by one (to a minimum of two) and to be able to cancel company vs. company combat (by discarding the card). Restrictions include moving a maximum of 3 regions, the inability to use starter movement or to move to an Under-deeps site, and the cancellation requires a successful roll.

For the deck manipulation enthusiasts, *Longbottom Leaf* allows a player to take two resources from the sideboard and place them in his play deck, but he must then remove *Longbottom Leaf* from the game. *Show Things Unbidden* can give Galadriel another boost in the Apossibly playable@ category. It forces your opponent to choose 3 non-environment hazards and put them back into his play deck, or if he doesn't have 3, it allows you to look at your opponents hand and then he must place whatever non-environment hazards he has into his play deck. *Rumours of Rings* allows you to place up to two ring special items off to the side under it, and to be able to play either of those items as if they were in your hand. You can even start with *Rumours of Rings* in lieu of playing a minor item.

The two theme cards really give promise to storyline decks. *Elven*

Rope is a minor item that allows a ranger bearer to tap and allow his company to move an additional region. In addition, instead of eliminating a creature that the bearers company has defeated (with normal prowess less than 11), you can place the creature card with *Elven Rope* (similar to Sam using the rope on Gollum). You can then store the rope and the creature together for 3 miscellaneous MPs. If the bearer of the Rope is ever wounded, you must discard the creature captured. And finally, there is *To Fealty Sworn*, one of the best theme cards yet, and according to all the local players I have spoken with, their new favorite card. *To Fealty Sworn* is playable on a Hobbit in the same company as Return of the King or during the same site phase that his company plays a unique hero faction at a free-hold (besides Bag-End). Examples: Blue Mountain Dwarves, Riders of Rohan, Ents of Fangorn, etc. The affected Hobbit receives +2 prowess and +5 direct influence against the Hobbits faction and characters with Bag End as a home site. It cannot be duplicated on a given Hobbit. Just imagine Bilbo and Frodo playing the Ents, an Ent-Draught, and then two of these cards. Uber-Hobbits!

For the Minions, there are a plethora of new cards to use, both generic and Balrog specific. I'll go over briefly each type of resource.

There is only one new faction to speak

of, *A Few Recruits*. Non-unique and worth one point, it is playable at a tapped or untapped non-dragon's lair Dark-hold, Shadow-hold or Ruins & Lairs, as long as it is not an Under-deeps site or a surface site thereof. Well, even considering the number of Under-deeps sites these days, there are quite a few sites where this faction can be played:

Amon Hen, Bandit Lair, Barrow-downs, Buhr Widu, Cirith Ungol, Dead Marshes, Dimrill Dale, Ettenmoors, Framsburg, Geann a-Lisch, Gladden Fields, Haudh-in-Gwanur, Hermit=s Hill, Himring, Isengard, Isles of the Dead That Live, Lossadan Cairn, Minas Morgul, Mount Doom, Nurniag Camp, Ost-in-Edhil, Ruined Signal Tower, Sarn Goriwing, Shelob's Lair, Stone-circle, Tharbad, The Stones, The Worthy Hills, The White Towers, Tolfalas, Urlurtsu Nurn and Weathertop.

The trick is getting up above the Under-deeps and traversing the regions to bring the faction in. Dimrill Dale is a good candidate since it is in the same region as Moria.

There are four allies in MEBA, and all of them are solid. *Cave Troll* (non-unique, 1MP, 4/8, +1 to controller's movement in Under-deeps, and NOT Balrog specific), *Evil Things Lingering* (unique, Balrog specific,

Review: *Balrog (cont.)*

2MPs, a 9/9 sage!), *Great Troll* (non-unique, Balrog specific, 1MP, you can assign strikes to him like a noble hound for The Balrog, 6/8), and *Nasty Slimy Thing* (unique, Balrog specific, 1MP, tap to cancel a Drake attack, 4/9). All of them are playable in the Under-deeps.

There are only two new items in the set, and both of them are specifically for The Balrog. Both *Stabbing Tongue of Fire* and *Whip of Many Thongs* are playable by The Balrog, and both at a tapped or untapped non-Darkhaven Under-deeps site. *Stabbing Tongue of Fire* gives +1 prowess to The Balrog when he taps to face a strike, as does *Whip of Many Thongs*, but *Stabbing Tongue* gives +1 to all body checks for failed strikes against the Balrog and for body checks to defending characters when the Balrog successfully attacks in company vs. company combat. *Whip of Many Thongs* can be tapped in company vs. company combat to cancel all effects of one weapon of your choice in an opponent's company until the end of the combat (though it does not discard the affected weapon).

Most of the other various marshalling point sources scattered throughout the set are from permanent-events designed around the siege of various border and free-holds, including the two Dwarf-holds, Blue Mountain and Iron Hill Dwarf-holds. Re-creating the

disaster of Moria, the Balrog continues his desecration of the Dwarves by tunneling up from below the two Dwarf-holds. He can begin his grievous siege of the Dwarves with the play of *Breach the Hold*, which allows The Balrog to move to the surface site with ease (after facing a few big attacks naturally). The set has introduced a few new Under-deeps sites, including the Drowning-Deeps and the Rusted-Deeps, which are the Under-deeps sites for the Blue Mountain Dwarf Hold and the Iron Hill Dwarf Hold respectively.

After playing *Breach the Hold* (2MPs), The Balrog can then turn that Under-deeps site into a Darkhaven with the play of *Roots of the Earth* (1MP or 3MPs if played on the same site as *Breach the Hold*). The Balrog can then travel up to the Dwarf-hold (either one) and after facing a large number of attacks, play *Invade Their Domain*, which discards all unique factions playable there and gives another 3MPs. Finally, The Balrog can play *Lord and Usurper*, which not only gives 5 big MPs, but again, discards all unique factions playable at the site. The site then becomes a Shadow-hold, loses all Dwarf auto-attacks, and cannot have any factions playable there. All other versions then gain the following automatic attack: Orcs, 4 strikes at 7 prowess. Wow! Talk about cleaning house!

The other resource events vary from utility cards to theme cards, and basically promote the theme that the Balrog is a big, bad dude who's apparently got something to prove. A few interesting cards worth mentioning: *Prone to Violence*, which allows any minion company without a Ringwraith to attack another minion company without a Ringwraith (and the attacking company may contain the Balrog); *Whispers of Rings*, which is a minion copy of Rumours of Rings (see above); *Sauron*, basically another version of *The Lidless Eye* with the following changes: +10 instead of +7 GI, you cannot look at another player's hand, and there is no limit to the number of characters you may bring into play; *Ancient Secrets*, a fun card that can allow you to tap a Ringwraith/Balrog to discard one hazard permanent-event (note: this INCLUDES environment permanent-events) or you can tap your Ringwraith/Balrog to take up to two resources from your discard pile and place them in your deck.

Finally there are the Demon Fana cards for the Balrog, Flame of Udun, Great Shadow, and Strangling Coils. For purposes of play, they work very similar to Radagast's Shapeshifter cards from the White Hand. Flame of Udun gives the Balrog +3 to prowess, -2 to DI, and +1 to all body checks resulting from failed strikes

Review: Balrog (cont.)

(Continued from page 35)

against the Balrog, and for opponent's body checks when the Balrog is attacking in company vs. company combat. Great Shadow gives +6 DI, -2 prowess and -1 body, the scout skill, and allows the Balrog to have followers. During the end-of-turn phase, you may also take one non-short-event resource or character from your discard pile and shuffle it into your play deck. In addition, the Balrog may tap to cancel and attack against his company. Strangling Coils give +3 DI, -1 body, gives the Balrog the diplomat skill (imagine that) and allows him to have followers. It also allows you to: once during the movement/hazard phase, you may untap all tapped character in the Balrog's company, then you must tap the Balrog if he is untapped.

For the hazards, there are a few interesting new creatures, one of my favorites being Carrion Feeders. Playable in wilderness, shadow-lands, ruins & lairs and shadow-holds, Carrion Feeders give each unwounded character in the company a strike at 9 prowess, and all body checks resulting from successful strikes are at +1. Each untapped character in the company may tap to cancel a strike against a wounded character. With the number of animal enhancers floating around, this can get really ugly. Like most hazards, their effectiveness relies on impeccable timing. Wake of War, Full of Froth and Rage and Shelob

(now a Spawn) gives these big bats a total prowess of 13. Definitely time for a can of Raid™.

Thanks to Craig AIchabod@ O'Brien, we also now have bear creatures in the game. *Beorning Skin-Changers* are *animals*, *men* and *bears*. Actually, it's a fairly useable creature. Against minions, it's a creature with two strikes at 10, keyable to double wilderness, Anduin Vales, Western Mirkwood, Wold & Foothills, and to sites in those regions. Against a moving hero company, it's playable as a short-event. Unless that company contains Beorn or an untapped warrior with prowess greater than 4, it must return to it's site of origin. Hobbit roadblock anyone?

Perpetuating the theme of the set, there are a few Spawn hazards as well: *Monstrosity of Diverse Shape, Spawn of Ungoliant, Ungoliant's Foul Issue, & Ungoliant's Progeny*. Each of them act as permanent-events that add fairly nasty automatic-attacks to various Under-deeps sites, as well as provide a separate hazard effect. Thankfully all of these Spawn are unique. *Monstrosity of Diverse Shape* gives the Drowning-Deeps and the Remains of Thangorodrim and addition automatic-attack of: Spawn - 2 strikes with 15/9 prowess/body. Additionally, once per turn the hazard player may use one against the hazard limit to play a Wolf or Animal hazard creature from his discard pile. This card must have already attacked the company this turn.

Which, as I am sure you have just realized, begs a question...exactly how does this card remember attacks? Since *Beorning Skin-Changers* is both an animal attack and short-event, would *Monstrosity* remember that *Skin-Changers* couldn't be brought back against a hero company (of course, if it worked the first time, there'd be no need, but still, it's the principle), or would it specifically have to have actually *attacked* the company in question, regardless of alignment or effect otherwise? Something to think about. I'll ask Craig.

Spawn of Ungoliant gives the Pukel-deeps and the Gem-deeps an additional automatic-attack of: Spawn - 3 strikes of 15/8 prowess/body. In addition, +1 to all body checks for Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits, Dunedain, and Men resulting from Spider attacks. Hey, that makes Giant Spiders even more gruesome. Used to be, all you had to do was tie the body of the affected character to discard them, but with this effect, you can even roll 1 <u>less</u> than the body to discard them. *Ungoliant's Foul Issue* gives Ancient Deep-hold an additional automatic-attack of: Spawn - 2 strikes of 17/7 prowess/body. In addition, non-unique Spider creatures can be keyed to Under-deeps Ruins & Lairs and Under-deeps Shadow-holds. *Ungoliant's Progeny* gives The Wind-

Review: *Balrog (cont.)*

deeps and The Rusted-deeps and additional automatic-attack of: Spawn - 2 strikes with 16/8 prowess/body. In addition, for each Spider attack your opponent faces, you can choose for it to be at +1 prowess and detainment.

Continuing the spider deluge, we have *Shelob's Brood*, which is a Spider attack, with 4 strikes at 8 prowess, keyable to an Under-deeps site or a surface site thereof. *Unabated in Malice* is playable on an automatic-attack or an attack from Shelob, doesn't count against the hazard limit, gives the attack +1 strike/+1 prowess/-2 body, and the first attempt to cancel the attack cancels this cards effect. Needless to say, I don't think I need to tell anyone what type of hazard strategy to play against the Balrog.

The last few hazards that I will mention revolve around the various Spawn cards being in play, of which there are currently 8: Shelob, Spider of the Morlat, Balrog of Moria, Nasty Slimy Thing, Monstrosity of Diverse Shape, Spawn of Ungoliant, Ungoliant's Foul Issue, and Ungoliant's Progeny. *Darkness Made By Malice* is a short-event playable on a company at or moving to a Ruins & Lairs or Under-deeps site, if there are more Spawn cards in play than the number of characters in the company. The company must do nothing during

it's site phase. *Desire All for Thy Belly* is playable if you discard a Spawn card from your hand (and, unfortunately, all of the Spawn are unique). You reveal to yourself a number of cards from the top of your opponent's deck equal to the number of Spawn cards in play. Choose one of those cards, reveal it to your opponent, who must then decide either to remove that card from the game or decrease the number of cards he can hold in his hand by one for the rest of the game. You then shuffle the revealed cards and place them back on the top of his deck, and remove *Desire All for Thy Belly* from the game. *The Reek* is playable on a company at or moving to a Ruins & Lairs or Under-deeps site if you discard an animal or spider creature from your hand. Tap all untapped characters in the company with a mind less than 2 plus the number of Spawn cards in play. Does not affect Wizards or Ringwraiths (or Balrog, remember). With only 8 Spawn cards possible, the highest mind affected by this card is 9, which is everyone but Elrond. With all of the above 3 cards, eliminated Spawn do not count towards the number of Spawn cards in play. Right now my favorite of these is *Desire All for Thy Belly*. The ability to make an opponent choose is hard to resist.

In summary, the entire Balrog set adds not only another alignment, but another entirely different feel to the game. It will be interesting to see how this new alignment factors into an already complex game.

Until next time!

Tournament Formats: *Booster Draft*

Jason Klank

I want to pass the booster draft format we've come up with and played in the past. Many people who were at nationals played in my "get it together" booster drafts and had a blast.

Here are the basics:

1. First, you must decide if you'll be playing Wizard or Minion. It's near impossible to run both at the same time due to the drafting rules.

2. Once decided, determine which type of boosters you will draft. Everyone buys those boosters and a starter (of the correct alignment).

3. Everyone opens up their starters and tosses their wizards/Ringwraiths into a "pool". Roll dice - highest roller gets to pick a wizard/RW first. Continue, going from highest roll to lowest roll until all players have drafted 1 wizard/RW. After the first pass, roll again and repeat. Everyone will end up with 2 wizards/RW.

4. Everyone keeps their fixed packs. Pull out any sites that you may have in the rest of your starter and set them aside.

5. Determine which direction you will "pass". Usually rolling dice (evens=right, odds=left or whatever).

6. Each player drafts 2 cards from their starter (sans the fixed pack). Once everyone has done so, pass the cards in the direction you determined in #5.

7. This continues until all the cards in all the starters are gone. It's possible, due to the different numbers of sites in the starters, that everyone will have a different amount of cards they drafted.

8. Once done, open a booster (everyone opens the same type of booster). Again, remove any sites/region cards from the booster and set them aside.

9. Everyone will draft *1* card from their booster and pass in the OPPOSITE direction from the way you drafted the starter (i.e. if you passed right with the starter, you will pass left with the first booster).

10. Once all the cards are drafted, open the next booster of the same type, pull out the sites/regions, draft *1* card and pass the opposite direction (basically, you will alternate directions between each passing of the boosters).

11. Continue 8-10 above until all the boosters are gone.

12. Each player then builds their decks according to sealed deck rules.

Expect the draft to take approximately an hour or so for 8 players with 1 starter/3 boosters. Longer for more or for those unfamiliar with the cards. In a tourney setting, there needs to be a set amount of time you have to draft the card and be ready to pass.

Strategy is very important here. Remember, with your fixed pack, you'll have a few characters, a couple of factions, and a couple other things. Characters and Items are at a premium in Booster Draft, and are usually drafted first. Also remember, you need to draft enough creatures to be able to have enough for your hazard portion of your deck.

Give it a try sometime and let me know what you think!

Thanks,
Jason Klank
_____

Note from the Editor:

Having played in a number of booster draft tournaments in Magic, I am familiar with these basics. I agree with Jason that characters and items will be at a premium.

Also the number of allies available will also be less than usual. This has been a major problem with some of the Sealed Deck tournaments I have attended. Usually, whoever gets the ally first most likely has those points doubled. The Dragons boosters will only give you one ally (Nenselde the Wingild), and she's rare. The Dark Minions boosters are only going to give you Lindion the Oronin and the Noble Hound. Not bad allies, but hard to keep alive in the Sealed Deck/Booster Draft formats.

Factions are usually not that much of a problem with the fixed packs, but keep in mind that other people might have gotten the same fixed pack. Try to keep an eye on solid characters.

Combat enhancers are also something to think about, depending on the boosters provided. With Dragons, expect a few drakes floating around.

When you draft for creatures, see if you can put together a strategy; maybe orcs, drakes, men or whatever presents itself. Don't be prejudice against any style...take what you can get.

Anyway, it's not a bad format; Sealed Deck with a little twist. Give it a try!

Deck Tip: *Capture Cards: A New Beginning*

Oskar Silow

When MEDM was released I was thrilled. All these capture cards really made me excited. Unfortunately, they were not as good and useful as expected. Let's take *To Get You Away* for example: Tap an agent at target company's new site. [Agent attacks.] A successful strike does not wound the defending character, instead he is taken prisoner. [The character taken prisoner are dragged to one of the agent's homesites. To rescue the imprisoned character, you face first any auto-attack, then face 3 strikes at 8 at that homesite].

I don't think this card is very useful. It is definitely one of the cooler cards in the set, but not good enough to include in many decks. First of all, playing with agents demands some setup. This is not a card you play the first turn on your opponent.

Second, once you get it in play it only requires a *Marvels Told* or *The Cock Crows* to get rid of it. The worst thing that can happen is that you have to spend one turn on rescuing the captured characters. The advantage of this card is that it allows more than one character to be captured, as every

successful strike takes a prisoner.

Flies and Spiders is, as the name suggests, the prisoner card for spider decks. One of the good things about the card, and an advantage compared to *To Get You Away*, is that it is easy to play. *Giant Spiders* are playable in two Wildernesses and at certain sites in certain regions. *Lesser Spiders* is playable in a single Wilderness, Shadowland or Ruins and Lairs. A *Giant Spiders* boosted by *Full of Froth and Rage* and maybe even *Shelob* and *Spider of Morlat* makes the card really dangerous. The lower body the captured character has the better. For a

character with the average body of eight, a roll of eight or more is necessary for the character to release himself. Even a character like Galadriel with a body of ten needs to roll a six or better to release herself. That the character can release himself is definitely compensated by the modified body check the character has in each untap phase.

MELE was a "bad" expansion in that it didn't give us any new capture cards. However, it made the earlier capture cards more playable. *Spells from the Barrow-Wights* has shown to be quite useful against minions, especially the

squatters. Undead creatures are usually very playable against minion decks. Most undead creatures are playable in Shadowlands or Shadowholds and Dark Domains or Dark holds and some are even playable in Wilderness and Ruins and Lairs.

Most undead creatures are detainment against minions. Combined with *Spells of the Barrow-Wights* the attacks of the undead creatures are suddenly very dangerous, as a character is exposed to the danger of being captured. Additionally the forced body check is even more effective against minions, as many minions can be discarded if the body check equals a certain number. Another good effect is that a captured character is captured at another site than target site. In order to rescue the character the company has to move which they might not be prepared for.

Troll Purse is another card that is good against minion players. The card forces a company to face the automatic-attack(s) again, if they play an item at target site. Target site must have an orc or troll automatic-attack. Many sites have orc automatic attacks and with a little help of *Redoubled*

Deck Tip: *Capture Cards: A New Beginning (cont.)*

Force or *Minions Stir* your opponent will think twice before entering the site and playing an item there. The disadvantage of the card is that the character(s) are taken prisoner at the current site.

The play of *Waylaid, Wounded and Orc-Dragged* is very limited. It is only playable against hobbits facing a strike from an orc attack. The advantage of the card is that it may force the discard of a ring. It might be a surprise to many ring decks, so if you are playing orcs as a hazard strategy you might want to think about putting this card in your sideboard.

MEAS introduced capturing as a resource strategy. At once, my favorite capture card became *Sack over the Head.* All capture cards from MEDM were hazards. *Sack over the Head* opened a new door, allowing trolls to capture dwarfs and hobbits, toss them in their sack and beat on them until they die. The idea of the card is awesome, and it works too! It's usually not a card you have in your deck, but it has a reserved spot in my sideboard when playing with troll minions. Since it is a resource card, it is harder to remove than the hazard permanent events. In order to get rid of the card

you have to wound the target troll, which is easier said than done.

MEWH did not introduce any new capture cards; however, it did introduce a great new play idea. Having three different alignments opens up new possibilities for cool capture missions. Since I am a big fan of capture cards, and ICE hasn't offered any new ones, I thought it was time to give them a hand.

Brought Back Alive
(Stage resource, permanent event.) *Saruman specific.* Playable during the

organization phase on an overt company if your opponent is a non-minion. There is no limit of how many orcs the company may contain. All successful strikes against your opponent's characters do not wound. Instead, they and all non-follower cards they control are placed "off to the side" under this card. When target company is at Isengard it may place all cards worth marshalling points placed under this card in his marshalling point pile giving one MP for each such card stored. For each character placed under this card the hazard limit against the company is increased by one. If two or more characters in the company are removed from the company for ANY reason OR if a character in the

company is wounded in *company versus company combat*, the characters placed under this card build a new company at their current site.

"....they are to be brought back alive as quickly as possible." -LotRIII

"I hereby transfer to ICE all my rights and interests in the card idea stated above entitled *Brought Back Alive*, for no consideration."

Generally capture cards are good as they surprise your opponent, and he might have to go to a site he didn't intend to visit. When building a capture deck consider putting in cards that can be played to prevent any rescue attempts, e.g. creatures playable at the site where the character is imprisoned. Additionally, the loss of a character, and his non-follower cards, usually interfere with a player's plans.

When playing a capture deck you might realize that the hazard limit disappears very quickly. You probably want to include cards that increase the hazard limit such as *Two or Three Tribes Present* or *Daelomin at Home*.

Cards that does not count against the hazard limit and affect the strikes,

Deck Tip: *Capture Cards: A New Beginning (cont.)*

attacks or capturing effect in any way is also a good compliment to the deck. As an example *Pieced by Many Wounds* can make the strike against the character that are targeted by a capture card very dangerous.

Another important and good thing about capturing a character is that your opponent receives negative MP for the captured characters.

Let us all hope that the Balrog set releases some new interesting capturing cards. Comments, ideas, and criticism are welcome.

[special thanks to Charles E. Bouldin, Esq.]

[Editor's Note: There are indeed two new cards in the Balrog set that remove a character "off to the side", but neither one are specifically "capture cards" in the sense Oskar means: *Imprisoned and Mocked*, and *Press Gang*. I will get Oskar to review these in a future issue.]

Next Issue: Getting those magic cards to work for you. The Magic of Spell Decks!

MECCG Quiz: How well do you know the MECCG cards?

James Kight

More Middle Earth CCG Quiz questions!. This issue will be questions related to the Dragons set, next issue will be Dark Minions, etc. Feel free to write and contribute your own quiz questions!

*Therefore the answers for this issue's quiz are specifically restricted to **Middle Earth: The Dragons** only. Answers on page 32.*

Name the only hoard site that does not allow the play of a major item as printed on the site.
A. Ovir Hollow
B. Tharbad
C. Buhr Widu
D. Framsburg

Name the only Drake keyable to Nurn.
A. Sand-Drake
B. Wild Fell Beast
C. Sea Serpent
D. Marsh-Drake

How many resource cards can be used as sites?
A. 3
B. 2
C. 4
D. 1

Which hazard card creates another automatic-attack at a ruins and lairs?
A. Awaken Denizens
B. Incite Minions
C. Rouse Minions
D. Incite Denizens

On the card Bairnax Ahunt, the mighty dragon is seen stalking an animal. Which animal is it?
A. Tiger
B. Polar Bear
C. Horse
D. Mountain Goat

Name the only skill not covered by characters released in Middle Earth: The Dragons.
A. Sage
B. Scout
C. Diplomat
D. Ranger

On the card A Short Rest, Elrond is seen holding a weapon; which weapon is it?
A. Anduril
B. Glamdring
C. Orcrist
D. Wormsbane

Which hoard site's automatic-attack has the highest prowess?
A. Gold Hill
B. The Lonely Mountain
C. Gondmaeglom
D. Isle of the Ulond

Which of the following cards allows the play of Dragon hazard creatures keyed to Ruins & Lairs?
A. Fever of Unrest
B. Frenzy of Madness
C. Rumor of Wealth
D. Deftness of Agility

Name the only non-region type drake keyable to Elven Shores by name.
A. True Cold-Drake
B. Sea Serpent
C. Ice Drake
D. Winged Cold-Drake

Name the only hazard creature that allows the attacker to choose which item is stolen (when such an effect is produced by the creature).
A. Thief
B. Were-Worm
C. Pick-Pocket
D. Morgul-Rats

Name the only hazard card that can cancel any ongoing card effect declared earlier in the turn, including back into the organization phase?
A. Many Sorrows Befall
B. Stormcrow
C. Memories Stolen
D. Searching Eye

Using only cards from the Dragons set, what is the highest possible prowess that can result from a Dragon manifestation attack (although not very probable)?
A. 35
B. 42
C. 32
D. 45

Using only cards from the Dragons set, what is the highest possible body that can result from a Dragon manifestation attack (although not very probable)?
A. 12
B. 13
C. 16
D. 15

Using only cards from the Dragons set, what is the greatest number of strikes that can result from a Dragon manifestation attack (although not very probable)?
A. 8
B. 6
C. 12
D. 10

Using only cards from the Dragons set, what is the greatest number of wilderness that can result from movement (with only 1 movement/hazard phase) if Doors of Night is in play?
A. 6
B. 4
C. 8
D. 10

Ruminations: *Cheaters Anonymous (US Nationals)*

James Kight

Last issue I briefly went over the topic of cheating, and for the most part it was directed at what I perceived as a growing trend for players to "misplay" cards, especially where it related to playing against some of the newer players. Little did I know how close to the flame I went.

The US Nationals was held in Toledo, Ohio, and while I enjoyed meeting most of the players I knew before as well as some fabulous new ones, the weekend was not what I had quite expected.

Now, before I get too deep into this subject, let me first let everyone know that I will not mention any names, as I think this has been done enough, nor will I complain overmuch about cheating. That doesn't mean I will avoid the subject or why people cheat.
Having said that, I will continue.

Prior to the Nationals, I attended Origins, also held in Ohio. A great time was held by all for the most part, but there were a few instances of misunderstanding of the rules and misplaying of cards. I myself was one of the players who faced this ripple. My opponent decided to show up using decks of both alignments. I was playing hero, and he was playing minion. Now, I had no problem with the game itself. If he had played minion the entire time, nothing would have been said. As far as our game went, I was beaten fair and square. However, the power of being able to change decks mid-tournament cannot be ignored. He had a <u>definite</u> advantage. That was the problem I had with his play.

As it came out, I kept my loss, and he was ejected from the tournament. Not the best of rulings as far as I was concerned. All of us thought he should be allowed to play, but with a match loss to me, and having to stick with the deck he began the tournament with.

Another player whom I observed was playing the draw/discard rule incorrectly (as well as a few others). Although it was the last game and I was not directly involved, I felt it was my duty to inform him of his mistake, which I did. I also made sure the tournament coordinator was aware of the error. So, as far as I was concerned, the case was over.

The reason why I bring this up is because of the events that came about at the US Nationals. The same player I had spoken to about the draw/discard rule was repeating his mistakes in the Nationals. Why was this error that big of a deal? Well, with his style of deck, card advantage was <u>key</u>. I should know, I played the deck for two years. Once again, no one had noticed it until the last round.

Another player was warned for an error, then was found to have been repeating the same error game after game. The first time the error was caught, he was given a match loss and was allowed to remain in the tournament where he, as I have just stated, repeated his errors. No further judgement was made.

As you can see, the rulings at Origins were vastly different than the Nationals. My only wish is that the rulings remain consistent. I could go much more in depth about who was cheating, how, etc. etc., but I think that it would not solve anything.

What I would like to do instead is to make each and everyone of you aware of what some opponents do. Believe it or not, people cheat in Middle Earth. And for everyone caught, there are 5 who aren't caught, I guarantee it. I hope there aren't those out there who are naïve enough to believe everyone plays by the rules, flimsy as they are.

So how do you protect yourself? If you've gone through all the effort to make your deck, tweak out all the weak spots, test it over and over again, why let someone weasel their way to a victory instead of beating you fair and square? Here are some tips and ideas to think about:

Keep Track of Hand Size:
One of the easiest way to help your game, keeping more cards in your hand than your hand size allows is too often overlooked. Does your opponent have Emerald of the Mariner in play? Has Pallando hit the table? Is Elrond in Rivendell?

There are plenty of opponents who simply forget to discard when the rules dictate. Many keep their hand sizes through all movement/hazard phases, and forget that you are to return to hand size at the end of <u>every</u> movement/hazard phase.

I have seen some players draw back to hand size before the movement/hazard phase. If you've played any cards during your organization phase, you don't get to draw until you move, and you are to return to hand size only at the end of your first movement/hazard phase at least.

Being able to keep cards in your hand is definite card advantage, which translates directly to overall game advantage. The more cards you can keep in your hand, the more freedom you have to decide what to keep and what to discard. The tighter the deck, the more this advantage will come into play. It's important that no one has an unfair advantage.

How many hazards or resources has he or she played? By keeping track of card play, you can keep a careful eye on both your opponent's cards and the theme of his deck. Watching your op-

Ruminations: *Cheaters Anonymous (cont.)*

ponent's hand and card play can give you a strategic advantage as well.

Keep track of card piles:
Has your opponent delineated for you which is his draw deck and which is his discard pile? Is he drawing from the wrong pile? How about his sideboard?

If your opponent looks through his sideboard or discard pile often, watch where he puts them, and pay attention to where he draws from. Don't be afraid to ask your opponent which pile is which. For your own sake, it's good to know how much of his deck your opponent has gone through. I myself delineate the different piles by physically separating my sideboard from my deck, and turning my discard pile perpendicular to my deck.

How many times has your opponent brought cards in from his sideboard? Once? Twice? Ask him to count his sideboard. If it doesn't seem like the right number, don't be afraid to ask him to go over with you what transpired. Many times, players just forget how the cards were played.

Does your opponent's deck seem to remain the same size? Watch where he discards. Look for the same card to be played multiple times in short order. Is it because of a legitimate mechanic, or does it seem too good to be true? Luck does indeed play a big part in these games, but luck isn't everything. Ask any magician what they think about the advantages of forcing the deck and see what he says. That's all part of the magic.

Keep track of cards in play:
This is more of a "pay attention" type of guideline. More times than you'd care to admit I'd be willing to bet you have forgotten a card on the table. Which cards are in play? Is that an

agent card or an on-guard card? Try to keep track of how those cards are being played.

Before you exit your organization phase, be sure to examine the table and look at which cards are in play. If there are cards that appear to be off to the side, ask your opponent if it is indeed in play, and if so, if he wouldn't mind moving it closer to the cards in play.

Pay attention to the cards on both yours and your opponent's characters. Many times players place cards underneath their characters, and then promptly forget them. Forgetting to make a corruption check as a result of it being triggered can make a big difference in the game. This means that you need to keep track of the cards that <u>you</u> play as well.

Pay attention to the movements:
I have seen way too many opponent's conduct illegal moves, only to have them missed by their opponent. Ever see an opponent move from Lorien to the Southron Oasis? It's just a bit too far out of the way without some extra cards involved.

If your opponent is playing minions, does he have two leaders in the same company? If so, is it legal? If not, be sure to point it out. Also remember that Elves and Dunedan are not allowed to travel with Orcs and Trolls. Try to catch this faux pas before the movement has taken place. Also check the map to make sure the movement is legal. There is nothing wrong with double-checking your opponent's movement. Is he moving with region movement or starter movement? It can make a difference. If you don't know, ask.

Other miscellaneous things:
Keep track of your opponent's GI. Make sure he doesn't begin the game over the 20 mind limit, and be sure that he stays within his limits. There are reasons for these limits.

Make sure the cards played are played legally. Is Doors of Night in play? Have you already passed the long-event phase? Are the card requirements being met? Don't be afraid to pick up the card and examine it for yourself.

Another rule of thumb: Once you or your opponent makes a die roll or completes an action that has an effect on the game, you should not be allowed to backtrack unless it is to correct an illegal situation. Rolling to rid a character of a corruption card and then asking if you can tap instead is bad manners. It's your job to remember to do that to begin with. That's what makes the great players great.

Summary:
All of these things serve more than one purpose. They allow you to keep better track of your opponent's play, better track of the game itself, you pay more attention to the style of your opponent's deck, and you can prevent some game-affecting mistakes that often creep into those all-important games.

Don't ever be afraid to question anything. You've played enough games to know how most games are going to go. Ask questions. Keep your eyes open. Never ever take anything for granted. And finally, if you aren't sure, ask the judge to examine the situation. It could make all the difference.

Tournament Report: *US Nationals*

Oskar Silow

Hi ME players!

First of all I'd like to thank James for the excellent work with this very informative and entertaining newsletter.

I've only been to USA since the 5th of August. I moved here from Sweden where Middle Earth is dying because its lack of a council and nonexistent prize support. The organization is poor and I haven't even heard about a national qualifier for the worlds this year. I was afraid that I was never going to play my favorite card game again.

I was wrong. After arriving here I finally got my e-mail and sent an e-mail to Chris Cable. He gave me the address to a local dealer, which I contacted and got information about New Jersey's Crown's Guard, Steve Hess. I contacted him and he told me about some tourneys that were coming up.

A few weeks later I took my car and drove over the river to Cherry Hill, NJ, where ShoreCon was being held, to play two tournaments in one day. The first one had "Gates of Morning" permanently in play and the other one "Doors of Night". About ten persons played each tournament. I did pretty good and had lots of fun. When I was there somebody told me about the nationals in Toledo, OH and I was very tempted....

After having terrorized Chris Cable for a week about information (thanks Chris for putting up with me), I finally decided to go. This was only a week before the event, so I realized I had to make some arrangements. I booked my plane ticket on Thursday, exact one week before I was supposed to leave for Toledo.

I arrived at the Radisson Hotel around midnight the following Thursday. I went to the front desk and had them call Chris for me and he told me his room number. I went up to his room and walked into a room filled with strangers. I got introduced to everybody before I had put my bags down, then I sat down and made my decks for the Open Tournament. Since I only been here two months I hadn't had time to qualify before.

Around one o'clock I was done. Steve Kontoulis then asked me if I wanted to play, and since everybody else was playing in the room in which I was supposed to sleep, I thought why not. I'm sure he regrets that we played (don't you Steve?). I went to bed around 3.30 in the morning and fell asleep just a few minutes before it was time to get up and get some breakfast. At least it felt that way.

The open tournament was a struggle. After the first two rounds I had 11 Tournament Points and was very satisfied with my gaming so far. The third round I played Mike Yates who had dunked the ring in his first two games. I knew that this was a very important game if I wanted to advance to the semi finals on Saturday. I did what I had to do. With help from Radagast and Rolled Down By the Sea, the speed of my deck and the discarding of his rings was to much for the little hobbits.

In my last game I had a comfortable lead and had to lose 1-5 to not have a chance to advance. Behind me was, among others, Mike Yates who had to dunk for 21 Tournament Points and a place in the semi-finals. He dunked, and I knew I had to win at least by 4-2 to win the tournament. I did, and was rewarded with a complete set of Lidless Eye, and most important, a place in the semi-finals.

I had reached my goal. I was in the semi-finals. The following morning lots of Middle Earth players gathered in the gaming room. I knew most people by name from trading over the net, and it was very nice to put a face to the names. 36 players showed up to play the six rounds of the semi-finals, in which I didn't do very good. Lack of sleep combined with unconcentrated play and a hazard deck against minions that sucked, was too much against the skilled players of this event. I placed myself 17th.

For the weekend in general I have to say that: I won't go to Toledo again on vacation. The city sucked! "Subway" had a great weekend. I can't believe what you folks have for breakfast.

I also want to say that I got to play lots of good players, got interesting ideas for deck-building, and had lots of fun, thanks to all the GREAT people I met. Even though I didn't make it to Paris I'm very happy with my weekend. Thank you all for helping me enjoy my weekend to the fullest. I'm sure you'll never forget my RED socks.

Oskar Silow (Sweden)

[Editor's Note: Oskar DID make it to the World Championships in Paris, where he placed 4th, and he will be submitting an article about the world championships for the next issue. See you then!]

Pictures: *US Nationals and Around the US*

Although this isn't the clearest of pictures, the involved parties are: Myself in the white shirt, Mike Twitchell to the right (hand on ear) and in a surprise cameo, Terry Eldred (under the arrow) of Thunder Castle Games (Higlander Card Game). This is sometime between rounds.

Not sure who these players are. Anyone have an idea?

Another cameo, this time by ICE employee and now MECCG Series Editor, Craig "Ichabod" O'Brien (see the arrow).

This one is easy. Eric Silverman from Maryland is the player on the left, and Ed Mineman originally based in England now in Texas on the right. In my opinion, two of the nicest players anyone could play. Ed especially retains a particularly rabid love for the game. Looks like Ed has a dead character.

Note the dealer's room in the back.

Pictures: *US Nationals and Around the US (cont.)*

Outside the hotel room in Toledo at the US Nationals. Taken from the room of Chris Cable.

Chowing down at the local Subway. This was the only place with food worth eating. The convention center was charging way too much to eat.

This is the North Carolina Crew. From the left: Brian Satterley, James Kight and Spencer Carney.

Two versions of the "Lidless Eye" Pumpkin submitted by Oskar Silow.

Oskar wins the Coolest-Crossover-Into-the-Normal-World award.

Pictures: *US Nationals and Around the US (cont.)*

Here's a hint...don't try to cram 3 big guys into the back of a compact car. The rental agency probably frowns when the car doors are dented outwards.

Occupants are: Me on the left, Jason Klank in the middle, and Mike Twitchell on the right. Present but not seen in the front are: Oskar Silow (photographer), Jeff Cox, and driver Brian Wong from Canada. Hope they didn't give you a hard time, Brian!

Pictures of tournaments in the Jersey area. In the picture to the left, Sandy Hess is on the right, and an unknown player in blue to the left. The gentleman in the picture to the right is Steve Hess. Without a doubt, Steve and Sandy are the Dynamic Duo of the Crown's Guard. Their love for the game has translated into top-notch and tireless efforts to promote the game. Both are great fun to play, and live by the ultimate rule in gaming: Just Have Fun! You won't meet a nicer pair. Steve is also heavily involved in the *Run Out the Guns!* campaign adventure from ICE. Ask him about his "Hey, Stumpy!" dwarf adventure sometime. Hats off to the both of them.

If any of you folks have pictures of tournaments or players or anything related to MECCG, feel free to send them to me. Original photos will do fine, or you can email them to me electronically. Be sure to let me know who is who, and the date. If possible, please also provide the event type. See page 2 for contact information. Thanks to Oskar Silow for providing the bulk of these pictures.

Alternate Tournament Scenario: *A Call to Arms*

Randy Kintner

"A Call To Arms"
a MECCG Resource-Character Scenario for all alignments

This scenario is based on the "Friends in a Time of Need" and "Preparing to Deliver the Blow" scenarios from The Wizard's Companion and The Lidless Eye Companion.

Goal of this Scenario
Players have the goal of marshaling the human, demi-human, and animate non-human resources to wage the upcoming war. Characters and allies must be recruited at their home locations and characters must be equipped with an item to further the cause.

Deck size minimum is 30/30, with the standard 30 card sideboard, plus 10 if opponent is a Fallen-Wizard. Hazard portions are tournament standard, 12 creature minimum. Other than the standard exceptions for Wizards and Ringwraiths, there are no exceptions to the usual 1 of each unique card and 3 of each non-unique rule.

Characters (including Wizards and Ringwraiths) may only be brought in at their home site, and the standard rules requiring the presence of a Wizard or Ringwraith (if revealed) to bring in a character under GI apply.

Victory Conditions
After exhausting your play deck once, you automatically make a bid for the win at the end of your turn (opponent does not get another turn) if you have 18 or more Marshaling Points worth of Characters and Allies and every character that is being counted for MPs is equipped with an item. No more than 9 of these MPs may be from non-unique allies.

If the victory conditions are reached, all of the calling player's characters must make a corruption check. Following this, if s/he still has 15 MPs of characters with items and allies in play, s/he is declared the winner (Rank 5 victory). Otherwise, the opponent takes her/his next turn and play continues.

At the call of time (1:20, like a standard 2 deck game), when both players have an equal number of turns, all characters must make a corruption

check (as per standard CoL rules) and the following ranks are assigned. Item points do not count, but characters must be carrying an item to count. Allies always count.

Ragged Muster (Rank 1) - 8 MPs of characters (with items) and allies

Minor Muster (Rank 2) - 11 MPs of characters (with items) and allies

Major Muster (Rank 3) - 14 MPs of characters (with items) and allies

Great Muster (Rank 4) - 17 MPs of characters (with items) and allies

Tournament points assigned as follows: equal rank is a 3:3 tie, difference of 1 rank is 4:2, difference of 2 ranks is 5:1, and difference of 3 ranks or more is 6:0. Achieving the victory conditions before time is called is considered a Rank 5 victory.

Thanks to Randy for his contribution! Feel free to send me your ideas for other tournament scenarios!

Card Idea: *Helm Clove Asunder*

Andrew McAllister

Helm Clove Asunder
hero short-event

Playable after a successful strike by one of your characters in CvCC. Make a roll for each weapon, shield, helm or armor borne by the recipient of the strike. Add one if your character bears a weapon, add a further one if the weapon is unique. If the result is above 9, discard opponent's item.

May be played during your opponents turn.

I thought about adding: Opponent's character is not wounded by the strike but it seemed to me if you manage to split someone's helm their head generally goes as well.

I hereby transfer to ICE all my rights and interests in the card idea stated above entitled *Helm Clove Asunder*, for no consideration.

[Editor's Note: This is reminiscent of the effect of the items in Talisman, a popular game by Games Workshop based in the UK. This seems similar, but a bit over-powerful. I would say that only one such item of your opponent's character is effected (opponent's choice). After all, you can only strike one area at a time.

Send in your card idea!]

The World of MECCG: *MECCG Overseas*

Daniel Spronk – Netherlands

Hello from the Netherlands!

We're pretty well represented in the Netmeccg league, with 3 players, being me (Daniel Spronk, the Reigning Champion *grin*), Stefan Fountain and Martijn Steultjens (Cotd'er). A couple more subscribe to the metw list. Martijn is a better writer than me but I'll try my best to inform you as well as I can.

There are about 10 people in Holland who are pretty actively involved in the MECCG scene here. They are the people who organize tournaments and keep the fire burning.

The tournament scene began about two years ago, started out by two brothers who organized tournaments and formed the "council body" here. Through their enthusiasm other people started to organize tournaments as well, and a well organized & advertised tournament would usually attract between 20 and 30 players.

At the end of last year we had about 100 people on the ranking list, which was solely derived from constructed deck tournaments. Last year we had our first nationals and we had 24 players if I remember correctly. There was fierce competition between the top 10, the rest having bad decks or being inferior players. We sent two people to Worlds and the European championship, where we did extremely well.

This year started out pretty well and tournaments flourished in abundance till the summer. Finally a few of us have decided we need an official council with support of the distributer that imports MECCG for Holland.

Its proving extremely difficult but the council is now in its last stages hoping to be there in a few weeks. (I am the only one in the Council who is involved in the ME Internet scene, sadly.) Setting up a council is such a tremendous effort, you wouldn't believe it!

But its worth it. We have very ambitios ideas for next year and we all hope that this game will become very popular with the coming of the Movie and all the attention Tolkien will get.

Tournaments:

About 20ish; 35 people visit a tournament here in the Netherlands. We mostly run two tournaments at a time, a Sealed Deck plus Constructed or a Duo-Quad plus Constructed.

The tournament scene has been pretty dead here now for a couple of months, and finally we have another one coming up on November the 7th. Dutch Nationals will be a week, or two later (date is not final yet) and I'll be glad to send you reports of both if you want.

Decks in General

Resources:

I never imagined that every country would have a different style of playing. While playing Netmeccg I found out that on the other side of the Atlantic different style decks and combo's are played. The most striking instance was when I played Fifteen Birds in Five Firtrees on a Assassin, a popular canceller here in Holland. I believe it was Chris Cable, who remarked: "Wow, that's a cool combo. I've never seen it before." Resource strategies are pretty much the same. The most popular decks would be hobbits-spelunking-in-underdeeps, classic Gondor decks, minion dragon factions and one ring decks, both minion and hero and last but not least Fallen Wizards.

Hazards:

Hazard decks we have seen lately are Undead(-prisoner), Memories Stolen-Dragons, Agents Chilled and of course the old boring Corruption hazard strategies. The more experienced players have been digging; the White Hand and has resulted in 3 victories for the FW alignment in the last 4 tourneys. The other tourney two One Ring decks ended 1st and 2nd. Very interesting.

I have the opinion that the FW and One Ring decks are the strongest and yes, Nationals here in Europe and overseas have confirmed this. I am anticipating that the Dutch Nationals will confirm this too. The best players are usually the ones who get to play ME more than others and we've seen this in the rankings too. There's a town in Holland with 50,000 inhabitants where there's a strong ME scene and is reflected by its presence in the rankings, 2 players being in top 4.

There is a Dutch Version of ME, but it doesn't seem to go so well, the translation being very poor (very old fashioned).

Good luck with your newsletter! I have seen players become quite apathetic with Middle Earth, regaining interest again after reading your newsletters! I enjoy them a lot and hope they keep getting better and better :) Looking forward to #4! Daniel Spronk
_____

Gary Devouges – Canada

I live in Montreal, Canada, not really 'overseas' but still far from you: we

The World of MECCG: *MECCG Overseas*

have 1 tournament a month, except during the summer time. Usually 8 - 14 people are there and we play 4 rounds. Ringwraiths players usually get the crap beaten out of them, except when we had a MELE sealed deck tourney.

Most people are in the 25-35 age group, except for me, the old guy at 48. Corruption is the favorite hazard strategy. One play played a FW once and lost all rounds. I will be playing a minion deck this weekend. Statistics say I will lose..... but as long as I have fun, I win !

_____

Csongor Kubany – Hungary

In Hungary, there is one club run by myself and my friend) and some "independent" player. The real players concentrating in the capital, Budapest. I know some rural fans, but they're not more than 10 people. In Budapest,there are 20+ players.

Most of them are members of the club, although I know about 5 collectors. So we're approx. 40 MECCG fans in our country (out of 9.5 million). We arrange an unofficial tournament in every month (with strictly the CoL rules). We are planning to make our club official, but I don't know how can we do it.

There are 15-25 competitors in every tournament. We advertise our club in a newspaper, and the Hungarian RPG fan's webpage. We have our own webpage (First Hungarian MECCG page at http://members.tripod.com/~metwinfo/index.html   It's still under construction, but we are developing at full speed.

About the members: There are 8 "older" player (age between 20-45), 6

players between 16-20, the rest are below 16. We have a 8 year old player, too!!! Of course his playing skill is not too good, but he enjoys the game (and enjoys putting nasty dragons on your company)!

_____

Stefan Weiss – Germany

In Germany we had a huge Tournament scene until recently. I will come back to that later on. Since January last year you can take part in tournaments nearly every weekend, sometimes there are more than one to choose from. Information about the whole scene, including rankings with nearly 400 players you will find at http://www.aix.de/jc/engl/ in english.

This boom was produced by the support of Queen Games the German distributor for every official tournament at the different councils. Additionally there were more than 20 qualifiers for the German Nationals, which were on October 3rd. All qualifiers and the Nationals were one-deck games with some special German rules. I am sure you have heard about the loss of the game after your wizard was killed on the mailing list.

Yesterday all Councils got the official info, that there will be no support by Queen Games anymore. In my opinion this will kill these large scenes, we have. The boss of Queen Games only has dollars in his eyes and does not see that this decision might kill the game. Now the hardcore players are thinking about using the English rules and only buying English cards now. I hope, that all councils in Germany (as I know 34 different ones) will write an open letter to Queen Games together, that they think about their decision.

If you need further information please contact me or the Council of Minas

Arthor at the address above. This page is the central page in Germany for METW. If you can read German, you will find more info at the German version of the page http://www.aix.de/jc/ .

Maybe ICE will be interested in our actual problems and will support us. They will get a huge tournemant scene in Germany.

You are doing an excellent job with your Newsletter. I read Issues 1 and 2 as PDF from Jason's page, just getting Issue 3 for the underground tonight.

Looking forward to hearing from you!

Stefan Weiss (alias Radagast)

Mische Dich nie in Angelegenheiten von Zauberern, sie sind unergründlich und meistens gefährlich!

_____

Andrew McAllister – UK

Our distributor, Hobby Games, pulled out of organizing the event about two weeks before GENCON UK at which the UK Nats were due to be held after doing very little all year except losing the tourney standings, so the Nats were an open format. The fact that there was an event at all was down to the work of one guy, Tommo, who deserves great praise for actually managing to get an event at all.

Tommo spoke at great length to ICE and is now the Council of Bree the new UK governing body.

The participants, all 12 of us, were informed by word of mouth and there was no way of informing people other than those we knew of the event.

The World of MECCG: *MECCG Overseas (cont.)*

Tommo scrounged us a corner of the MTG tent to set up in.

Thursday - planned intro day to capture any passing trade.

Tommo and I sat at the 'stall' from about 10:00 til 17:00 and no one seemed interested. About 01:30 couple of guys wandered passed and they eventually were talked into the Sealed Deck on Sunday.

Friday - visit the trade hall and try and grab people to play on sat and Sun. Several people walked by and said "Middle Earth, If I'd known I'd have brought my cards."

Much grumbling about Hobby Games' uselessness.

Saturday - Qualifier

Tent leaked, play moved to another venue.

12 players, 2 minion 2 fallen.

I can't remember very much about the decks and games except that either a good friend or myself were due to come in last and I had the most enjoyable game trying to get a 4 - 2 win so that I would come second to last and win the wooden spoon.(Not given to last place as it is to easy to come last.)

The winning deck was a Lucky Search at Mount Doom for the scroll and a ring then dunk it.

Top four play a round robin final on Sunday.

Sunday - Finals

The top four played each other. The rest of us and some other interested people played a sealed deck tourney. I came in third.

The top deck for Saturday and Sunday are on the Council of Bree page at: http://freespace.virgin.net/paul.loakes/council_of_bree/council.htm under Rangers of the North or something similar.

All in all the Convention was pretty good, it was my first games con; not really what I expected but then what ever really is. It was held on Loughbrough University campus, so there was never very far to travel to an event, or the bar. :)

At the moment I have a fledgling play group which with any luck should soon number about six. I shall try to send tourney reports as and when they happen.
_____

Thanks to everyone overseas for their submissions! Keep them coming!

Art by Christina Wald

Gleaming Gold Ring
illus by Christina Wald © 1997 ICE

Pilfer Anything Unwatched
illus. By Christina Wald © 1997 ICE

Padding Feet
illus by Christina Wald © 1997 ICE

Fori the Beardless
illus. By Christina Wald © 1996 ICE

Moon Letters

Test of Lore by Donato Giancola © 1995 Tolkien Enterprises

Hi James,

Just thought I'd send a quick note to say thanks very much for the newsletters. I'm going to get together with my play group this weekend and I'll be spreading the three issues you sent around and I've got a feeling they will be studied fanatically. Please let me know how much a 6-month subscription will be. Do you plan on keeping up the artist interviews? I hope so and I'm looking forward to Ted Nasmith and Angus McBride. The artist interviews have been really great and I would be quite content if you just asked the same questions you have. But, I remember seeing sketches done by Tolkien of Rivendell and Bag End and I would be interested to know how much the artists were guided by these original sketches (or were they in fact included in ICE's briefs to the artists ?). On that point I'd be interested to know what the guidelines were that ICE gave to the artists (if any?). I'd be interested to know how much there was an attempt to maintain some consistency of the images over different artists.

One more piece of feedback - the articles on specific cards and deck-building are excellent and I particularly like the fact that they are not written for any specific level of player and both beginner and advanced player can take something away from them.

All the best,
Darren Green

Thanks Darren. You are more than welcome to make as many copies as you like, as long as the issue is copied in its entirety. The artist interviews are still going strong, and I am working as hard as ever to get the ones everyone has asked for, although getting in touch with Angus has proven to be a handful.
_____

James,

Read Issue 3 over the weekend and I must say that the articles were very well done. Charles review of NetMECCG was very good. Mike has done a great job with the program and I'm sure many people are able to keep up with their game through this media. I personally use it to try out different strategies playing in solitaire mode using the most deadly hazards possible for the deck. {Must ask Mike how to play agents properly when in solitaire mode someday! :-) } Its difficult to find players here except for tournaments which happen about monthly. Our Crown Guard, Tom Henderson, does a fine job covering three cities while working full time and studying for his Masters.

Please continue with the card review. Its an education to see how some nuances are available with certain cards. Also you often clarify when they resolve in the chain of effects so we can all have less chance of misinterpreting them the next time we use the card. With the decline of the Card of the Day review this article is a must. I particularly liked the review on Rolled Down to the Sea, a great card even against a none ring deck unless your opponent is packing a Will Shaken. Always nice to see what might hit you next or where your opponent is heading.

Maybe you could continue to cover other ICE products like Warlords and what ever happened to Elrond's House?

Keep up the good work!
Dan
Fredericton, Canada

Dan, thanks for the kind words. I really do enjoy doing the Card Reviews, as more often than not I myself learn something as I write. This issue I am reviewing Settlers of Catan. As for Elrond's House, my guess is that it is suspended indefinitely. However, look out soon for Orcs and Trolls!
_____

James,
Congratulations on gaining official status as the MECCG Newsletter. One hopes this will open the door for more useful and interesting information on our favorite CCG. Once again you've done a very nice job of pulling together a collection of entertaining and informative articles that I enjoyed from the first read and put to practical use in my gaming.

I found Mr. Bouldin's interview with Mike Collins especially interesting and timely. Having just installed a new home PC, I was beginning to wonder what I would need to do to get started with NetMCCG. Now I have the

software and am working to learn how to use it in my few spare moments. The next step will be to acquire an ICQ number and hunt down an especially patient player or two who are willing to show a newbie the ropes.

The article on effective sideboard use was informative though I think there must be as many different sideboard strategies as players. For example, it's been my experience that I'm going to get only about 5 or 6 hazards and resources each into the game from the sideboard during any one game. So, I have begun breaking my sideboard into five-card chunks, each hazard chunk tailored to meet a different resource strategy. I also do something similar with the resources to meet different hazard strategies and to reserve resources critical to my strategy in the latter part of a game. Breaking the sideboard up like this has made it's management easier for me. Doubtless, other players have other strategies that work better for them. Nevertheless, your article supplied me with some fresh ideas.

As for new card ideas, I have a few, who doesn't? At one time, I kept a notepad handy while reading through LOTR, The Hobbit and The Silmarillion and jotted down ideas as they presented themselves in the text. It didn't take long to come up with many. Winnowing them down to a few that might actually prove useful has proven a little more difficult. However, there was one that I thought interesting enough to share. The intent of this card is to make the play of prisoner cards (e.g. To Get You Away) a little more interesting and to give the play of Agents a little boost. The last time I shared this with the world at large, it went over like a lead balloon. Nonetheless, here it is again for your enjoyment:

Under His Dominion – Hazard:Permanent-event
Playable on a character taken prisoner at a dark hold. Make a roll (or draw a #) and subtract the character's mind: if the result plus the character's corruption points is greater than 6, the character becomes playable as a minion agent by the hazard player until this card is discarded. Discard all other hazard permanent-events on the character. Cannot be duplicated on a character. Discard if the character is eliminated. During the organization phase, a sage at the same site as the character (other than the character) may tap to attempt to remove this card. Make a roll (or draw a #): if the result plus the character's mind is greater than 7, discard this card. For each additional sage or diplomat in the company that taps, add 1 to the roll.

Moon Letters (cont.)

By the way, thanks again for the Fluxx review in issue #1. I found a pack and intoduced the game to my family soon after reading the article. We all enjoy the game. One of the best aspects of the game is how well it levels the playing field. Anyone can win! Now we're debating what we should do with that blank card. How about "Scramble Hands" or "Divine Intervention" (cancel and discard the last card played, may be played at any time whether it's your turn or not).

Thanks again for your tireless efforts. Keep the Newsletter coming!

Bob Moss

Always good to hear from you, Bob. Interesting card idea! Different than corruption or capture cards, and it has an interesting effect! Imagine Glorfindel hunting down his buddies!
_____

Hello James.

First, a letter, then, a card idea.

Dear James

Your newsletter is great and a real service to the game. I'm getting some newbies into the game and giving them copies of your newsletter. It helps give them some perspective on the game, but also gives the game credibility. To see a quality publication about a game makes it seem like a game that's exciting and on the move. Heck, it helps me feel that way.

I was thinking about putting this idea on the mailing list, but I figured it'd be cool to unveil it in your newsletter. If you're not going to use it, let me know so I can post it on the mailing list:

Lure of Complacency – Hazard Perm-Event
Corruption 2CPs.
Target character makes a corruption check at the end of every movement/hazard phase when there are not at least 2 regions in the site path. Cannot be duplicated on a given character. During his organization phase, a character with this card may tap to attemp to remove it. Make a roll (or draw a #): if this result is greater than 6, discard this card. An attempt can also be made during the movement/hazard without tapping if the site path contains at least 3 regions.

I don't believe this card is overly powerful. In fact, if you're moving, you can even attempt to

remove it the turn it's played without tapping, and it won't trigger a check anyway if you fail. And if you aren't moving, it still only triggers 1 check, unlike Lure of Nature or Alone and Unadvised (another ballancing card). Considering the limited threat of the card, I don't think the "greater than 6" to remove is unreasonable.

This card would add a little something for a squatter to worry about, just like AaU added a little something for small parties (and hence small hazard limits) to worry about. It certainly wouldn't end squatting decks, nor should it. Some might say that being able to stay in one place is one of the advantages that Minions and Fallen Wizard's have to offset their disadvantages. Probably true, but playing against squatting decks all the time, and being able to do very little against them other than hope their MP accumulation doesn't go to quickly, is not so fun. If, at the same time this cards comes out, there is a minion resource giving minions (and hence Fallen Wizards) some other advantage, great. Someone has already told me that to remove the card, especially since you might get two chances a turn, should be "greater than 7." We'll leave that to the play-testers.

As for simulation, of the three wizards we know a lot about, two stayed put, and one moved around a lot. Which two were corrupted? So far there's nothing in the game that reflects this.

I hereby give ICE the right to use this idea and any of the text, yada, yada, yada, etc.

-Patrick Karcher

Hah! Finally something to think about to counter those pesky squatter decks! And as with all card ideas, playtesting should indeed bring out some of the weaknesses. I like it anyway. Thanks for the compliments!
_____

James,

The Call to Arms Scenario Tournament this weekend went extremely well! I had 8 players and all had a great time. I received many compliments about the scenario and the "difference from the same old game". There were a few grumbles that it couldn't be sanctioned, but I told them that it just wasn't possible.

Here's a run down:

Distribution:

Hero 2
Minion 2
Fallen Radagast 2
Fallen Saruman 2

Player 1 (Ren the Ringwraith, Drake Hazards)
Player 2 (Radagast or Pallando, Nazgul Machine + Orc/Troll, elf vs. minion)
Player 3 (Fallen Saruman, Man Hazards, Maia vs minion)
Player 4 (Lidless Eye, Man Hazards, Adunaphel + Undead vs minion)
Player 5 (Gandalf, Drake hazards)
Player 6 (Fallen Radagast, animal hazards)
Player 7 (Fallen Saruman, wolf/animal hazards)
Player 8 (Fallen Saruman, drake hazards)

After a great tournament with lots of great competition, here are the final results:

Final Ranking

Player	Tournament Points	Alignment
4	17	Minion
2	11	Hero
1	10	Minion
3	10	Fallen Saruman
5	8	Hero
6	7	Fallen Radagast
7	5	Fallen Saruman
8	4	Fallen Radagast

I managed to avoid pairing the same Fallen Wizards against each other until the last round, even with 4 FW in an 8 player field. I like this system of giving increasing win points for increasing margin of victory better than that listed in the Council of Lorien guidelines. It does a much better job of spreading out the field. I hope this playtest information is useful for considering this as a good general opponent scenario, suitable for sanctioning.

This was the first time playing Fallen Wizards for at least 3 of the 4 players, and I think that lack of experience became apparent as the day went on. The most experienced finished tied for 3rd. All-in-all, I think the alignments were quite well balanced. The man hazard strategies appeared to fare the best, though most players were packing plenty of cancellation. The Nazgul machine, using Khamul's hand dumping ability, also did well, and a chilled Elf-Lord, with Hoarmurath of Dir to add an extra strike, was not appreciated by the minion target.

Resource strategies that concentrated on being able to easily bring in items (Cup of Farewell, The Forge Master, Old Cache) and play allies at tapped sites held the day. A Reluctant Final

The Final Word

James Kight

Thank heavens this issue is finally in the can. After a few months of delay (Balrog, anyone?) and hemming and hawing, it is finally done.

My sincere apologies to everyone for the delay. I hope the wait has been worth it, though I would not have released it if I thought it was not my best effort.

As far as MECCG, the future is somewhat smoky. The Balrog is a step in the right direction, as I think it adds enough of a new twist to the game to make things interesting. We will see how the new cards work their way into tournament play as well as into the hero and minion decks. Hopefully all the bugs have been worked out. God knows they've had enough time for that.

Even though I've played this game since it's beginning, I am truly looking forward to the new revision of MECCG titled LORE CG (Lord Of the Rings Expandable Card Game). Hopefully the ideas that ICE has are sound enough to be worth trying.

To be honest, I really think that most of the problems stem from lack of a solid hero expansion for so long. Minions have had it solid since the summer of '97, and it looks like it will be a long while before the good guys gain the upper hand again. The dark cloud of Mordor has its grip on Middle Earth again! Not to mention the foul self-serving grip of the Fallen-Wizards.
I know that there isn't a soul here who

isn't frustrated by the prevalent squatter decks. It seems as if the term "cheesy" has been taken to a new level. Not that I'm complaining. I just think that people should try to play the game with fun in mind.

With the coming of the live-action movies in 2000 (and beyond), MECCG and LORE look to break into the mainstream. Are we ready for that? Can we release our baby into the rest of the world? Hopefully we can resist hoarding our ideas of how it should be, and simply enjoy the game and possibility of new players at the cost of being nit-picky.

Final Words for this Issue:
Bring on the Real World!