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OTHER HANDS  
Attn: Chris Seeman  
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# EDITORIAL: Introducing Other Hands

*Other Hands* is an international gaming journal devoted to fantasy role-playing set in J.R.R. Tolkien's secondary world of Middle-earth. It is a quarterly, non-profit publication welcoming submissions dealing with any aspect of gaming in the context of Tolkien's world: scenario ideas, rule suggestions, gaming product reviews, gamemastering aids, bibliographic resources, essays on Middle-earth, and whatever else our readership would like to see in print. In a word, *Other Hands* aims to be the definitive Tolkien-related gaming journal for a world-wide role-playing community.

How did *Other Hands* come to be? The need for this journal derives in part from the particular licensing arrangement existing between the Tolkien Estate and Iron Crown Enterprises (the gaming company responsible for producing and marketing the *Middle-earth Role Playing* system). The license to publish Tolkien-related role-playing products is a world-wide license held exclusively by Iron Crown. This means, in effect, that anyone wishing their Middle-earth gaming materials to see print must go through Iron Crown. This places certain inherent limitations upon the prospective author.

To begin with, it means that the writer must utilize the official game mechanics of *Middle-earth Role Playing*, even if he or she prefers a different game system. There are also certain restrictions built into Iron Crown's contract with Tolkien Enterprises stipulating that no materials set in the

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First or Second Ages of Middle-earth may be published. Finally, a prospective author writing on a region previously described in an earlier Iron Crown module is constrained to conform his or her own ideas to what someone else has written.

None of these limitations imply anything positive or negative about the quality of Iron Crown's products; they are simply inevitable consequences of the legal arrangements described above. In the past, this problem was overcome by publishing one's material in a gaming magazine (e.g. *White Dwarf*). Today, however, no major English-language gaming journal exists that is interested in publishing Tolkien-related material (most are now devoted to a particular game company's products). Hence, there is a gap which needs to be filled for Middle-earth gamers—*Other Hands* seeks to fill that gap.

Within the pages of *Other Hands* the interested gamer may publish materials with reference to any game mechanics he or she chooses (including *Rolemaster* and *Middle-earth*





*Role Playing*). Such gaming material may deal with any time period of Tolkien's world, and need not be bound to what has already seen print in Iron Crown's modules. *Other Hands* provides this freedom because it is a non-profit publication. It is our hope, then, that this journal will provide an open forum for all Middle-earth gamers to communicate freely and to exchange their ideas with one another in the common enthusiasm which they share for exploring Tolkien's world through role-playing.

Why call this journal "Other Hands?" In 1951 Tolkien wrote a letter to a prospective publisher, explaining the genesis and growth of his "Mythology for England." In this letter, he writes:

*Once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend... I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama (Letters: 144-145).*

With this inaugural issue of *Other Hands* we are pleased to add the category of "role-playing" to Tolkien's vision.

It had been our hope to release this issue on the first of January, so that our quarterly publishing schedule would have an annual reference point. Unfortunately, our arrangement with Tolkien Enterprises was held up by ongoing deliberations between them and Iron Crown Enterprises concerning the latter's Middle-earth license; consequently, our spring issue is a bit late. We intend, however, to keep *Other Hands* on schedule, and aim to publish subsequent issues on the first of July, October, January, and April of each year.

We would also like to apologize to our overseas subscribers for the rather steep subscription price. At present, this is the bare cost of printing and mailing (if anyone has an idea of how to make distribution less expensive, we are all ears). In the meantime, our goal is to make *Other Hands* worth every bit you have paid, and to make each issue at least thirty pages in length (this, however, means that we will need your submissions). We will also strive to make each issue as diverse as possible, so that it contains as wide a range of material as can be managed. ■

*Chris Seeman, 24 April, 1993*



## Contributors

*Anders Blixt*

*Pete Fenlon; ICE*

*Chris Phelby*

*Chris Seeman*

*Panel discussion participants:*

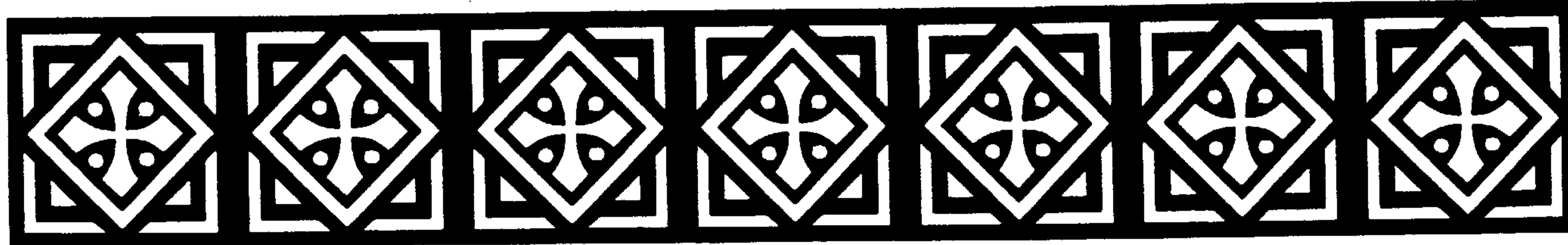
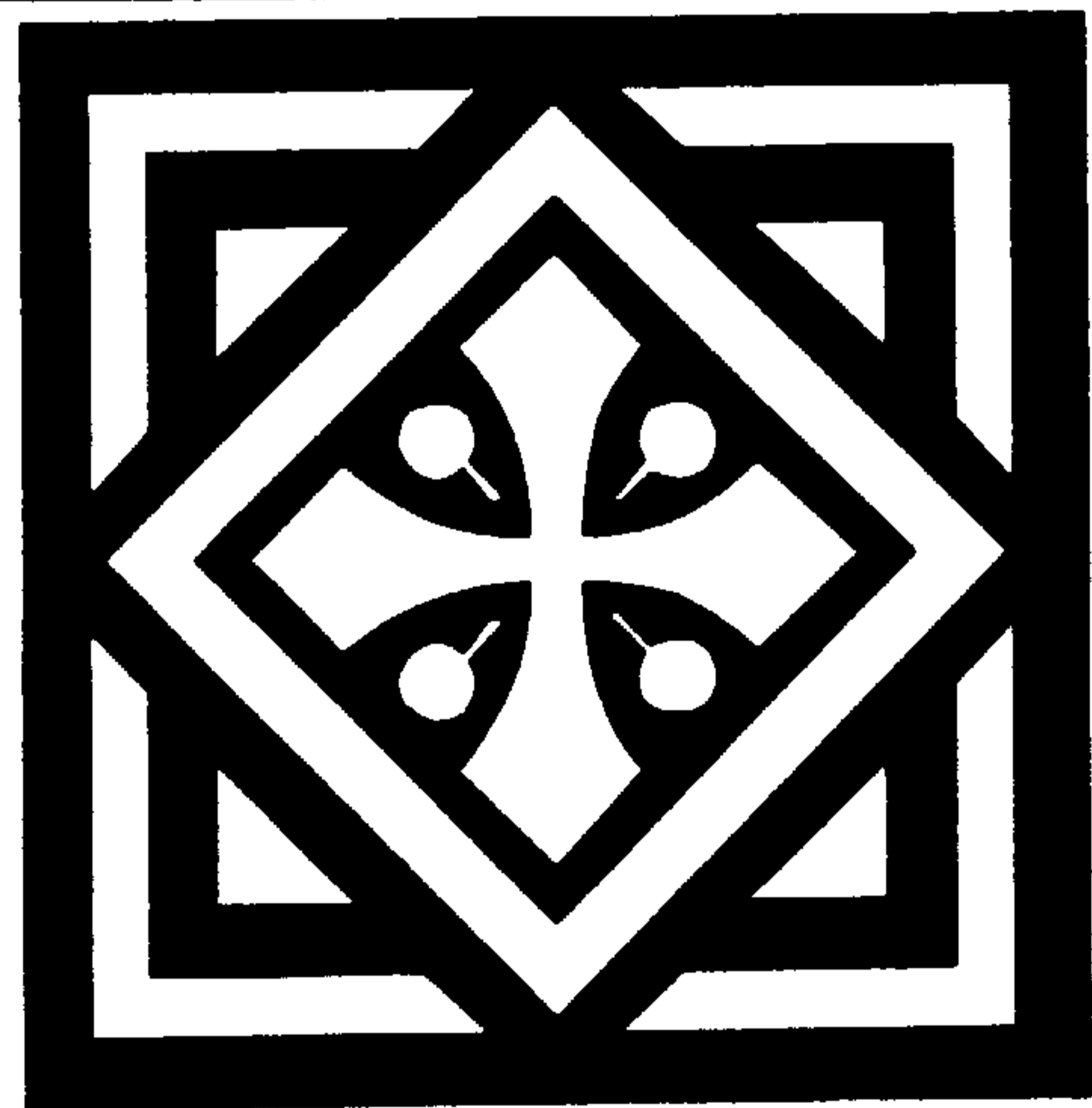
*Andrew Butler*

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*Chris Seeman*





# ICE's open letter to Subscribers of "Other Hands"

For ICE. Peter Fenlon

## *Dear Folks,*

This is an open letter to anyone who might be perusing "Other Hands." It embodies a few thoughts that the crew at Iron Crown Enterprises (ICE) want to impart to people who are interested in gaming in Middle-earth. We hope to shed some light on our publishing program and invite some constructive discussion about our future plans.

As you may already know, ICE holds the exclusive, worldwide license to produce adventure games based on J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. We acquired these very special rights in 1982. It took us two years to convince Tolkien Enterprises and the Estate of J.R.R. Tolkien that we were a worthy choice, and it has taken us another ten years to reach the stage where we are ready to revise and relaunch what has become our most notable product line.



## WHERE WE'RE COMING FROM...



Before talking about ICE's plans, however, we think it is important that you know where we are and where we have been. In this context, chew on the following:

### **General Philosophy**

ICE cares about "what gets written" as much, or more, than "what gets sold."

While we have failed on occasion to produce an excellent (or even tolerable) work, ICE believes that quality is much more important than quantity. Well researched, well written, and well presented material makes us feel better about ourselves and our careers. Of course, about our work, it also makes commercial sense. Quality products generally perform better, especially in the "long run."

### **Commitment**

ICE has always tended to look at matters in terms of the "long run." (Having started with very little capital, we had no other choice.) This perspective can be dangerous, in that it creates a rationale or pretext for some unhealthy delays; however, it has also enabled us to build a company and learn a craft in the face of some very daunting obstacles. Patience and commitment form the foundation of ICE's strategy.

ICE treats the Middle-earth license as a fundamental part of our publishing program. We will remain commit-

ted to the property forever. What we have published so far is only a beginning. ICE intends to keep laboring and tinkering until we get things "just right" —which means we will persist in our quest until we perish. This open-ended commitment is not unlike Professor Tolkien's own creative journey.

### **Creative Philosophy**

ICE's crew is trained in cartography, history, architecture, and (perhaps most importantly) anthropology. We care about these, and numerous other, disciplines which impact on the sort of creative and interpretive work



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fundamental to the study of Middle-earth. We try as much as possible to employ the same techniques employed by Professor Tolkien, and we share his broad, interdisciplinary approach (with special emphasis on land and language) to every aspect of our research. The idea is to create "seamless" works.

ICE pays more attention to, and takes greater care with, this subject matter than any other potential licensee. The point is to combine "real world" experience with "fresh fantasy." For example, when we do a piece on barrow-downs, we travel to Europe and actually visit similar round-barrows, long-barrows, and the like. When we endeavor to create proper names in the Variag tongue (Varadja), we study Russian (which Tolkien alluded to as an analogous language). At the same time, we do not rely on tired and mundane fantasy formulas (e.g., simply plugging in "Chinese-like" peoples and cultures in "the East.")

#### Form

ICE long ago dedicated itself to producing both outstanding maps and fine linguistic-based, interpretive fantasy, staying true to the methods employed in the creation of J.R.R. Tolkien's works. We have always tried to employ good cartography, solid graphics, and compelling artwork in our publications. In most cases, we have succeeded. Nonetheless, we feel that there is a lot of room for im-

provement. If nothing else, our past offerings have often been too uneven in quality and a little too "text heavy."

#### Plotlines

ICE does not design products that simply retell tales already well-told; rather, we provide consumers with adventure and mystery in a wonderful setting borne out of those tales. This approach is in the best interest of all parties concerned with quality gaming. We do not dilute the tales, nor do we demean them.

#### Rules Philosophy

ICE originally designed the *Middle-earth Role Playing (MERP)* game in 1982. We wanted to provide consumers with a set of solid game mechanics with which to adventure in Endor. We tried to avoid grafting Tolkien's world onto an existing game system (as is the case with most other licensed adventure games). While we accomplished one of these two goals (*MERP* is a good set of adventure game guidelines), we fell short of effectively achieving the other goal.

Unfortunately, ICE's presentation of the *MERP* rules left much to be desired. We often created a sense of confusion and complexity, even where the guidelines were conceptually simple. In some cases (e.g., with the magic and character creation rules) ICE also failed to create a feeling that *MERP* was designed around the setting. We failed to create the feeling that the

rules were uniquely well-suited to the world of Middle-earth. So, while our Middle-earth products are generally very well received, and while the vast majority of our fan mail is extremely positive, there is a lot of room for design improvement.

Much of the problem can be attributed to the fact that ICE wanted the supplements, not the rules, to tell the tale of Middle-earth. This enabled us to reach more consumers, for we knew that many gamers would prefer to play another game or even make up their own rules. We suspect that, to this day, a large portion of the folk adventuring in Endor use TSR's *Dungeons & Dragons* or *AD&D* rules, even though they employ our Middle-earth supplements. This philosophy, however, has "diluted the line." We plan to address this problem in our forthcoming revision program (see below).

There is little doubt, though, that *MERP* has been a commercial success. Besides selling over 300,000 English-language copies, ICE has generated one of the best foreign-language translation and distribution ever seen in our industry. Middle-earth products are now available in nine different languages. Three more translations are currently in progress.





# WHERE WE'RE GOING...



While quite profitable, ICE has spent the last three years focusing on the elimination of its large and old external debt load. This necessarily affected our Middle-earth-related publication, sales, and marketing programs. We curtailed production, advertising, printing, and focused our efforts on clearing out our old inventory and laying the groundwork for what amounted to a hoped-for revision and renewal program. Now that we are once again healthy (more so than ever), we are launching what amounts to a rebirth of our line. The plan involves a four-part strategy:

- (1) the completion of the Lord of the Rings Adventure Game subseries;
- (2) the revision of the entire Middle-earth Role Playing game line;
- (3) the debut of the "three dimensional" Middle-earth Adventures series of gamettes; and
- (4) the development and announcement of a Middle-earth board-game (slated for release in 1994).

A few specific thoughts about our future plans follow:

## 1) *The Lord of the Rings Adventure Game*

First, ICE hopes to continue publishing supplemental adventures for its introductory *Lord of the Rings Adventure Game*. This game and its associated sub-series provides ICE with the perfect vehicle to reach new markets, novice gamers, and anyone interested in exploring the idea of gaming in Middle-earth without a lot of rules.

## 2) *Middle-earth Role Playing*

Second, ICE hopes to thoroughly revise and repackage its eight-year old *Middle-earth Role Playing* game (*MERP*), releasing the very new 2nd edition for Christmas 1993. *2nd Edition MERP* will retain the current rules; however, it will incorporate a wholly new layout and presentation. ICE will revise, rewrite, and/or re-edit the entire product. We will add new cover art, interior art, and new play aides (e.g., a full color mapboard-style intro adventure). It will look and read as well as, or better than, any adventure game product ever produced.

Substantively speaking, the newer material will include guidelines to inject a more "Middle-earthian" flavor into the character creation process. Fully illustrated and predesigned "Character Templates" will enable both novices and *Lord of the Rings Adventure Game* aficionados to start playing without having to wade through new rules. A special section dealing with the problems of magic in Middle-earth should satisfy anyone's concerns about rampant spell use in *MERP*. This section will address key concepts such as "magic and the Balance of Things," "magic and religion," "magic and the sources of power," and "magic and the nature of evil."

We will also add a section dealing with how to use introductory *Lord of the Rings Adventure Game* adventures with the *MERP* rules.

In accord with the rules revision, ICE will be revising its entire Middle-

earth line. Besides insuring that the new interior and trade dress are compatible with *2nd Edition MERP*, the new trademark, and the new packaging, ICE will be reorganizing its entire approach to the subject of Endor. None of the current Middle-earth titles will ever be published (as they are) again. Instead, ICE will be publishing fewer but larger titles like *Armor* (the first of the *Realms Campaign Atlases*). The races outlined in *Lords of Middle-earth*, for instance, will each be given their own separate, expanded work (e.g., "Elves" or "Orcs" in the new *Peoples* subseries. Much of the old material will find its way back into print as part of the new titles (e.g., *Most of Sea-lords of Gondor* and *Havens of Gondor* will appear in the new "Gondor" product, and *Gorgoroth* will be incorporated into a future "Mordor" piece), but we will be taking great care to reedit and improve all the old prose. Each of the new titles will focus more on the later years of the Third Age and the early part of the Fourth Age.

## 3) *Middle-earth Adventures*

Third, ICE plans to launch a series of "three dimensional" adventure game products called "Middle-earth Adventures" sometime in 1994. A line of self-contained boardgame-like adventures, they will contain simple guidelines providing consumers with three options: (1) for use as a board-game using a simple rules system common to all the games; (2) for use as a *Lord of the Rings Adventure Game* adventure; and (3) for use as a *MERP* adven-



ture. In other words, these products will serve both as stand alone games using a standardized set of rules and as programmed adventure supplements for both *Lord of the Rings Adventure Game* and *MERP* players. In the latter context, the series will replace ICE's old *Adventure Modules* and *Ready-to-Run Modules*.

Each *Middle-earth Adventure* (e.g., "The Mines of Moria") will be boxed and will contain full color cardboard playing pieces, plastic playing pieces, linkable full color cardboard playing surfaces, dice, full color creature and character templates, and a booklet covering both the adventure plotline and the associated guidelines. Playable in an evening, each adventure will serve as both an entertaining boardgame or as highly visual role playing game supplement. They will be the perfect link between traditional boardgames and more advanced games.

#### 4) *Middle-earth Boardgames*

Fourth, ICE hopes to finally produce a mass market strategy boardgame that captures the drama and flavor of Middle-earth at the time of the War of the Ring. We have three solid designs to work with, and we have finally located cost-effective sources for all of the components necessary to produce an affordable, first-class boardgame offering. The product will contain plastic playing pieces, a mounted mapboard, and beautiful cards. Targeted at consumers aged 13 and older, it will provide both introductory and intermediate level rules.

Should the 3D *Middle-earth Adventures* series appear successful, we hope to produce full-blown boardgames based on the same game rules.

## Closing Thoughts...

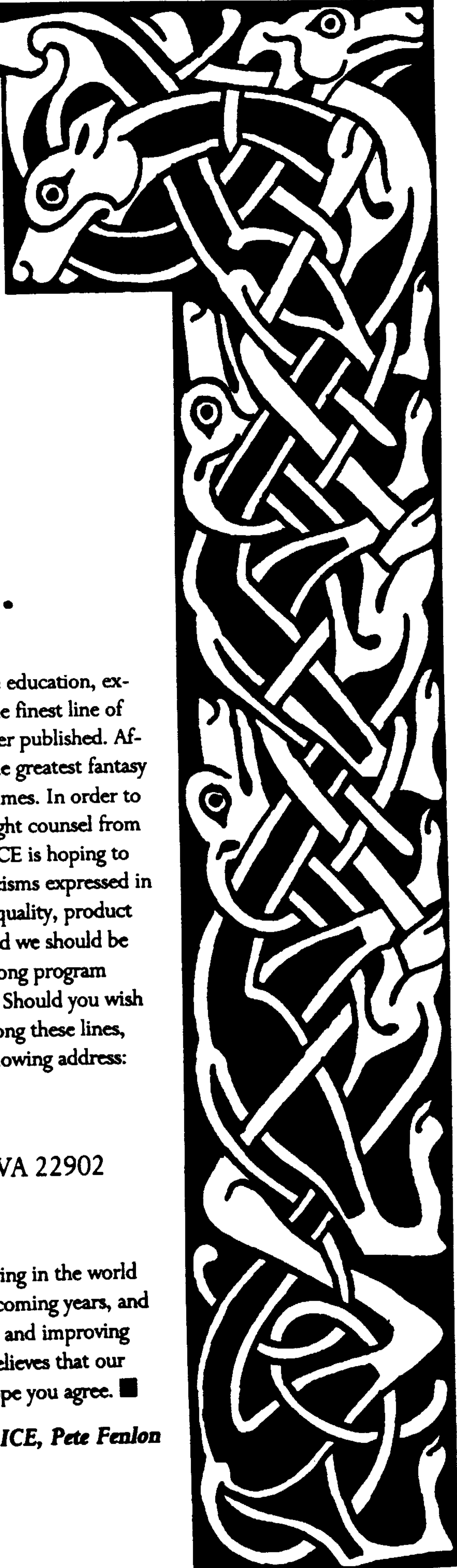
ICE believes that it has the education, experience, and skill to create the finest line of adventure gaming products ever published. After all, we are working with the greatest fantasy setting published in modern times. In order to achieve this goal, we have sought counsel from a host of interested sources. ICE is hoping to address all of the critical criticisms expressed in the past—including product quality, product format and revenue flow—and we should be able to build an extremely strong program upon the current foundation. Should you wish to contribute any thoughts along these lines, feel free to write us at the following address:

ICE  
P.O. Box 1605  
Charlottesville, VA 22902  
USA

Attention: Pete

We look forward to laboring in the world we love so dearly during the coming years, and we hope to continue refining and improving our work. Ultimately, ICE believes that our labors will be fruitful. We hope you agree. ■

*For ICE, Pete Fenlon*





# Beyond the Third Age: Role-playing in all ages of Arda

Anders Blixt: Hågervägen 16, 122 39 Enskede, Sweden  
(with assistance from Kathrin Vestergren)

*Due to the strict restraints delineated by the Middle-earth gaming license, Iron Crown Enterprises has thus far published role-playing material set only in the Third Age of Arda. Moreover, their modules have almost exclusively emphasized the period of the 1640s, despite the great gaming opportunities to be found at other moments in Tolkien's invented history.*

*This article attempts to remedy that situation: to show how an enterprising gamemaster might make use of the First, Second and Fourth Ages as settings for role-playing. Each section begins with a general description of the situation in the "known world" during the given time period, followed by one or more adventure ideas (including suggestions for player-character backgrounds). This material may then be utilized as a starting point for developing a campaign beyond the usual fare.*

## I. In Angband's Shadow: Beleriand in the First Age

*"Oderint dum metuant"*  
— Caligula

The most suitable setting for role-playing in the First Age is Beleriand as narrated in *Quenta Silmarillion*, during which time the Noldor return to Middle-earth to reclaim the Silmarils from Morgoth. This period begins with Morgoth's attack on the realm of Thingol, just prior to the coming of the Sun and Moon, and ends with the War of Wrath some six hundred years later.

### The World

Beleriand suffers from a merciless struggle between Morgoth the Black Enemy and a fragile alliance of Men and Elves. The moral dispositions of the latter range from purest white (e.g. Tuor, Melian, Beren, and Lúthien) to grey-black (Fëanor's seven sons). There is no room for negotiation or

compromise with Morgoth; the conflict must continue until one side has perished. Those who collaborate with the forces of Angband will be betrayed (like Gorlim), or fail and perish from other causes (like Maeglin). The world is painted in strong colors and is peopled with heroic individuals who fight for no petty cause—the struggle is about power, glory and incredible treasures; hence it is suggested that money not exist in the campaign (there are no indications of the presence of coins in Beleriand).

### Morgoth et Consortes

Between the time of the first sunrise and the War of Wrath, Morgoth dwells in his subterranean fortress of Angband far to the north, and passes its gates only when challenged by Fin-



golfin. His servants who openly or clandestinely fight for his cause in Beleriand and in other parts of Middle-earth are many and diverse; some are described only as "fell beasts" (leaving the gamemaster free to invent his or her own terrible creatures). Tolkien mentions such minions as Balrogs (who wield magical power over fire), werewolves (who apparently do not shapeshift), vampires, wingless dragons, and phantoms with Mannish or Elven guises. Such creatures are usually evil spirits given shape by Morgoth's fell arts, and have powers and senses that far excel those of Men and occasionally even of Elves. Orcs and Trolls form the common soldiery of Angband [Note that, while these seemingly do not differ from their later antecedents, Uruk-hai and Olog-hai do not yet exist, being bred by Sauron only in the late Third Age.]

Following the Dagor Bragollach in 455, Morgoth acquires many Elven and Mannish prisoners, some of whom have their wills crushed by his power and are transformed into obedient servants. Occasionally he sends such individuals back to their homelands to spy or spread lies. Only a hero like Húrin Thalion is able to resist such power (but even he is spiritually injured by his many years in captivity).

Sauron participates personally in the wars of Beleriand, possessing the fana of a fair Elf. He is often surrounded by werewolves, especially during his rule of Tol-in-Gaurhoth (457-467). Lúthien is the only one among the Free Peoples able to successfully confront him (even a hero like Finrod cannot overcome Sauron's mighty magic).

## The Noldor

The Noldor of Beleriand have all come from Aman against the explicit will of the Valar and are subject to the Doom of Mandos for the fell deeds committed during their journey. This curse manifests itself through deep distrust among their princes, and is frequently punctuated by conflict between the sons of Fëanor and other Noldorin leaders, climaxing with the sack of Menegroth and the killing of Dior and Nimloth.

## The Seven Sons of Fëanor

Caranthir, Curufin, Celegorm, Maedhros, Maglor, Amrod, and Amras differ considerably in their dispositions; the first three are the most ruthless and brutal; Maedhros and Maglor are more sensible and try to mediate between their brothers and other leaders; Amrod and Amras are not particularly active in these internal struggles. Together with their father, all have sworn a terrible and irrevocable oath: to slay any who seek to deprive them of a Silmaril. This oath is their eventual undoing, since it brings them into conflict not only with Morgoth, but also Thingol, Beren, Lúthien, Dior, and others who struggle against the shadow of Angband. The brothers participate in the Kin-slaying at Alqualondë, conspire against both Finrod and Orodreth, and kidnap Lúthien (no wonder that the other Elven princes do not dare to trust them!). In the end, the oath causes the death of six of the brothers, only Maglor surviving to the end of the First Age.

## The Princes of the Noldor

Fingolfin, Fingon, and Finrod Felagund lead many of the Noldor in Beleriand in the struggle against Morgoth, but are not bound by Fëanor's oath. Most have high ideals and are little corrupted by the war. Finrod Felagund is even prepared to abandon his realm in order to assist Beren in his quest. The Noldor are foremost warriors and reside in fortresses at strategic locations along Beleriand's northern border. Their principal occupations are hunting (there are no hints that the Noldor practiced agriculture), weapon-making, and preparation for war (in which they appear as the only warriors who fight from horseback).

## The Sindar

The Sindar (Grey-elves) are those who remained in Beleriand and chose not to cross Belegaer to the Undying Lands. They are not as powerful as the Noldor, but know their land and deeply love it. They prefer to dwell in forests (principally in Doriath within the Girdle of Melian). Their King, Elu Thingol, resides there with Melian his queen in the Caves of Menegroth. He is nominally the overlord of all of Beleriand. The Sindar fight mainly with spears and bows and, at first, encountered great difficulty when confronted with Morgoth's Orcs. Later they seem to have obtained superior weapons from their Noldorin relatives. The Laiquendi (Green-elves), who are closely related to the Sindar, dwell in the forests of Ossiriand as hunters and gatherers.



## The Avari

Those Elves who remained in Cuiviénen and refused to join the migration westwards are known as the Avari. They have never been subject to the influence of the Valar and, so, differ considerably from the Elves of Beleriand. During the years between the kindling of the stars and the first sunrise, they spread over most of Middle-earth. The Sindar of Beleriand suspect that there are Avari east of the Ered Luin. [These, however, are never described in Tolkien's works apart from the reference that the Sindar believed that the Avari might have become like the wild animals of the forests. If you wish to introduce Avari in your campaign, there is great freedom to define them as you wish. They have likely diversified into tribes sundered from one other since the time of the Awakening.]

## Men

The three Houses of the Edain reach Beleriand around 310, befriend- ing its Elven princes and joining the war against Melkor. The closely related Houses of Bëor and Hador are tall and skilful warriors—the ancestors of the Númenóreans. The Haladin are shorter and prefer to dwell in isolated forest settlements. This tribe does not survive the First Age, since it is completely defeated by Morgoth's forces in 496. The few survivors are absorbed by the two other tribes. These Edain appear to possess a level of technology comparable to that of the Vikings or the Iron Ages Germanic tribes, subsisting on agriculture and hunting, and living in small villages or farms. Many of the Edain are renowned warriors, some of whom are almost as skilful as

their Elven contemporaries. They eventually paid a terrible price for their fidelity to the Noldor with the destruction or enslavement of their villages at the hands of Morgoth's servants.

Various Easterling tribes arrive in Beleriand during the 5th century, some of which ally themselves with the Noldor, while others join the ranks of Angband. [Most likely these are not related to the Easterlings that harass the realm of Gondor during the Third Age.] A few Drughu inhabit the wilds of Beleriand, preferring a withdrawn life (though they are sworn enemies of Angband and will gladly slay Orcs).

## Dwarves

Dwarves seem to be of little importance to the affairs of Beleriand. Their two major settlements, the mining cities of Nogrod and Belegost, are located in Ered Luin on the border of Eriador. Occasionally, Dwarven artisans and warriors enter Beleriand. These are Morgoth's implacable foes, but not necessarily friends of the Elves. Possession of a Silmaril leads to Thingol's death and the first sack of Doriath at their hands. The Dwarves are the best makers of weapons and armor in Middle-earth, and their own works can endure even the heat of dragon fire.

## Other Races

Some Ents and Entwives live in Ossiriand but, as always, prefer to stay out of the affairs of Men and Elves (with one or two exceptions). The majority of their numbers appear to have remained east of Beleriand among the vast forests between Ered Luin and the Misty Mountains. Eagles who serve



Manwë live in the mountain peaks which surround the hidden vale of Gondolin, and keep watch on Beleriand for the Valar. Occasionally, they intervene to assist the Elves (e.g. the rescue of Maedhros). Skinchangers (like the Beornings of the Third Age) may also have existed among the Free Peoples of Beleriand. [The gamemaster is free to introduce beings suitable to the mood of *The Silmarillion*, keeping in mind that some animals are associ-



ated with the forces of good, such as eagles and bears, while others, like wolves and bats, typically serve Angband.]

## Magic

The use of magic affects the senses and alters perceptions, affording powerful disguises or illusions (cf. "Of Beren and Lúthien" in *Quenta Silmarillion*). While common to Beleriand, it is only exercised by a few, very powerful individuals. Apart from the Valar and the Maiar, only some of Morgoth's evil spirits (e.g. Thuringwethil and the Balrogs) and some Noldor (e.g. Finrod Felagund) seem to be spell-casters. Neither Men nor Dwarves have access to such power. [Magical artifacts (such as swords) are quite common, but there are no references to magical gadgets that are common in fantasy role-playing games (e.g. rings of flying or cloaks of invisibility). The gamemaster must be careful so as not to destroy the mood by introducing unsuitable artifacts.]

## Languages

The main language in Beleriand is Sindarin, the native tongue of the Sindar and the Laiquendi. The Noldor originally spoke Quenya, but its use has been prohibited by Thingol. Some Noldor surely know Telerin and Valinorean. Dwarves speak the secretive Khuzdul among themselves, but use Sindarin with outsiders. The Ents have their fantastic tongue which no other race can be taught. The Houses of Bëor and Hador speak similar dialects which form the roots of Adûnaic, the tongue of the later Dúnedain. The Haladin and Easterlings speak their own language. [What language the servants of Angband use is not clear; but

it is certainly not the later Black Speech, since that was invented by Sauron during the Second Age. Morgoth may have devised a tongue for his servants.]

## Player-character Backgrounds

The heroes of the First Age are of a far greater stature than those found in later ages. But while player-characters may possess truly heroic qualities, these should not approach the level of one like Beren or Finrod, such that they might alter the basic fabric of Beleriand's history (though they may well be far better than anything found in a Third Age campaign). They should also be well-equipped from the start of the campaign in order to be properly prepared for the struggle against Angband.

## Campaign Themes

The world of *Quenta Silmarillion* is replete with grandiose deeds, heart-rending tragedy and dramatic atmosphere (in addition to ignoble betrayal and a good dose of horror). A campaign set in Beleriand should therefore offer more than the conventional "monster hunt." Happy endings are rare under Angband's shadow, and when someone succeeds in an heroic action, a bitter price must often be paid. Moral flaws (most often pride) and ill-judgment typically result in disaster.

## The Watchful Peace

A suitable campaign setting might be the period between the arrival of the Edain and the Dagor Bragollach (310–455), during which time there is comparative peace in Beleriand as

the protagonists prepare themselves for the war which they know will come soon enough. Morgoth attempts to divide the Eldarin princes by sowing discord and suspicion. Fëanor's sons conspire to achieve their private goals; Caranthir, Celegorm, and Curufin are even ready to confront Beren and Lúthien. In such a setting it is often difficult to determine who is your friend and who is only feigning. Player-characters might belong to the household of a Noldorin prince (e.g. Orodreth at Minas Tirith). Both Sauron and Fëanor's sons actively conspire against their lord and try to infiltrate his fortress with their agents in order to strengthen their positions.

## The Wanderings of the Haladin

During the 360s, Haleth leads her people on a long and strenuous migration from Estolad to Talath Dirnen and Brethil, searching for an area where the Haladin can lead their traditionally independent lives. It is possible to run this "long march" as a campaign in which player-characters are Haladin leaders—perhaps advisers or commanders—under Haleth, whose role is to plan and execute various tasks (such as reconnaissance, transportation, or military strikes that will facilitate the progress of the migration). Haleth herself might actually be run as a player-character—a truly charismatic leader comparable to Napoleon, Mao Zedong or Alexander the Great.



## The Evil Years

After Dagor Bragollach in 455, the Elves and Edain are gradually pushed southwards from Dorthonion. Their defenses collapse completely at Nirnaeth Arnoediad in 473 and Angband's armies pour into Beleriand. In 496, Nargothrond is sacked by Glaurung. At about the same time, the Haladin are crushed and a few survivors scattered. Mene-groth is sacked in 505 and 510, and in 511 Gondolin itself is destroyed. Only the Elven settlements on Balar survive unscathed, being under the protection of Ulmo. During these chaotic and evil years, many hardy guerilla bands (such as those led by Barahir, Beren, or Túrin) carry on a desperate struggle against the servants of Angband.

## A Brief Chronology of Beleriand during the First Age

This timeline covers the years between the arrival of the Noldor and the War of Wrath (compiled with help from Robert Foster *The Complete Guide to Middle-earth* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1978) and Paul Kocher *A Reader's Guide to Silmarillion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980). Regrettably, there are few dates referred to in the tales; hence it is often impossible to locate events exactly.

- 1 The Sun and Moon rise for the first time. Fingolfin reaches Middle-earth and is named High-king of the Noldor.
- 1-20 Thingol grants the Noldor leave to settle and defend the unpopulated regions of northern Beleriand, but exercises little control over the Noldo princes.
- 51 Finrod Felagund begins the building of Nargothrond.
- 52 Turgon discovers Tumladen and begins the building of Gondolin.
- c. 60 Dagor Aglareb, the Third Battle. An Orc attack on Dorthonion is repulsed by the hosts of Fingolfin and Maedhros.
- c. 100 Gondolin completed.
- 155 An Orc attack on Hithlum is repulsed by Fingon's host.
- 255 Glaurung emerges for the first time, but is routed in a battle on Ard-galen. The Dragons do not appear again for a long time.
- c. 306 Maeglin is born.
- c. 310 The three Houses of Edain reach Beleriand from the southeast. Bëor's House arrives first and is guided by Finrod to Estolad, where it settles. The next folk, the Haladin, remain in Thargelion. During the following year, the House of Hador arrives and migrates to Estolad. After some wandering, Bëor's

Morgoth's commanders expend great efforts to capture these freedom fighters, and in the most difficult cases Sauron himself participates (as when Barahir's band is destroyed).

A campaign with this theme would place heavy emphasis on wilderness survival (the antagonist being not only Orcs and Easterlings, but also the merciless climate). Characters must find food, water, and lodgings in order to survive the harsh winters of northern Beleriand. Occasionally, they may get assistance from the Edain villages that have been enslaved by the Easterlings, but such actions may be perilous; the servants of Angband ruthlessly use any deceptions to capture or kill guerilla warriors.

Just prior to the first Year of the Sun and the coming of the Noldor, Morgoth's armies engage the Sindar in the First Battle of Beleriand. The victory of Angband leads Melian to set the girdle of her protection upon Doriath. The Second Battle, Dagor-nuin-Giliath, is fought upon the arrival of Fëanor's people. He falls, but Morgoth's hosts are driven back to Angband.

folk settle in Dorthonion and allies itself with Finrod of Nargothrond. Hador's people settle in Hithlum and Ered Wethrin. After some years the Haladin are driven out of Thargelion by Orcs. They move to Estolad and, after some years, Haleth leads her people westwards through Nan Dungortheb to Brethil and Talath Dirnen. Many other Men from the three Houses remain in Estolad until Nirnaeth Arnoediad.

- c. 330 Maeglin arrives in Gondolin. Eol and Aredhel die.
- c. 370 The Haladin settle in Brethil.
- c. 425 Hador's House settles in Dor-lómin.
- c. 441 Húrin is born.
- c. 444 Huor is born.
- 455 Dagor Bragollach, the Fourth Battle. Ard-galen is devastated by rivers of fire from Angband. During the winter, the March of Maedhros and Dorthonion are conquered by Morgoth's hosts. Fingolfin is killed by Morgoth at the gates of Angband. Fingon becomes King of the Noldor.
- 457 Sauron captures Tol Sirion and changes it to Tol-in-Gauroth (Isle of the Werewolves). Bëor's tribe flee from Dorthonion to Hithlum; only Barahir's outlaws remain. The Easterlings arrive in Beleriand and settle in its eastern parts.



- 460 Barahir and his men die. Only Beren survives.
- 462 An Orc attack on Hithlum is repulsed. Húrin becomes chief-tain of the House of Hador in Dor-lómin.
- 465 Túrin is born.
- 466-468 The adventures of Beren and Lúthien, during which Finrod, Huan and Carcharoth die. Sauron is expelled from Tol-in-Gaurhoth by Lúthien and his tower is destroyed. A Silmaril is wrested from Morgoth and given to Thingol. Beren and Lúthien settle in Tol Galen.
- 473 Nirnaeth Arnoediad, the Fifth Battle. The hosts of the Eldar and the Edain are utterly crushed by Morgoth's forces. Hithlum is settled by the Easterlings. Tuor is born.
- 474 The Falas is ravaged by Orcs. Círdan's people flee to Balar the mouth of the Sirion.
- 482-501 Túrin's tragic adventures, well described in *Narn i Hîn Húrin*. They are too extensive to be summarized here.
- 496 The Haladin are defeated and withdraw into the forests. Nargothrond is conquered by Glaurung and Orcs.
- 502 Húrin dies.
- 503 Tuor and Idril marry.
- 505 Dwarves from Nogrod slay Thingol in Menegroth and steal the Silmaril, but are themselves slain during their escape. The jewel is brought back to Menegroth. Melian departs Middle-earth. A Dwarven army sacks Menegroth and captures the Silmaril. During their return march Beren kills them and recovers the jewel, which is worn by Lúthien for some years.
- 509 Beren and Lúthien die. Dior is King of Doriath and wears the Silmaril.
- 510 Fëanor's sons attack Menegroth to capture the Silmaril. Caranthir, Celegorm, Curufin, Dior, and Nimloth are slain, while Elwing escapes to Sirion with the Silmaril.
- 511 The Sack of Gondolin. Turgon and Maeglin die. Tuor and Idril flee to the Mouths of Sirion. Ereinion Gil-galad is King of the Noldor.
- c. 520 Fëanor's four surviving sons attack the Elven settlement at the mouth of Sirion in search of the Silmaril, but fail to capture it. Amrod and Amras fall in the fight. Some decades later, Eärendil reaches Aman and appeals to the Valar. The Hosts of Valinor go to Middle-earth and the War of Wrath is fought. The First Age comes to an end.

## II. Yôzâyan über alles: the Second Age

*"Rule Yôzâyan, Yôzâyan rules the waves.*

*Edain always are a master-race"*

*— Adûnaic hymn, c. SA 3100*

Less source material exists for the Second Age than for other periods in the history of Middle-earth. Appendix B (*RotK*), *Akallbêth*, and a section in *Unfinished Tales* make up the bulk of the available data. In this Age the Dúnedain realm of Númenor rises from its humble birth, reaches its peak of glory, and plummets into darkest evil, while Sauron builds his first empire in Middle-earth, deceives the Noldor of Eregion, fashions the One Ring, and finally brings about the destruction of Westernesse. Hence, the Second Age has great potential for gamemasters seeking freedom to design their own campaign.

### The World

#### Aman

The Undying Lands have not changed since the First Age, but play no active role in the Second. The Elves continue to sail there and, at times, Teleri from Tol Eressëa voyage to Elenna or Endor. In the 34th century Ar-Pharazôn's armament causes Aman to be removed from the Circles of the World.

#### Númenor (Yôzâyan)

Elenna is a star-shaped isle with an area of about 171,000 square miles [Its geography is well described in *Unfinished Tales*]. It is exclusively populated by the Dúnedain, descendants of the three Houses of the Edain who were allied to the Elves during the First Age. It seems to have had a pleasant climate, perhaps comparable to that of northern California. The soil is good and there are no reports of bad harvests or famine among its population. A



voyage from Elenna to Aman takes 5–6 weeks, and to Middle-earth 7–8 weeks. The native tongue of Númenor is Adûnaic, a derivative of the languages spoken by the Houses of Bëor and Hador in Beleriand. Sindarin and Quenya are also used for solemn occasions.

The Númenóreans are aware of their superiority over other Men and of their inferiority to the Elves. Initially accepting this situation gracefully, they respect the Elves, and seek to transmit their culture to the lesser Men of Middle-earth; but from 1800 onwards pride overcomes the Númenórean heart, and they gradually abandon their traditional ideals and turn to evil ways. Their friendship with the peoples of Middle-earth turns to conquest, colonization, and suppression, while their attitude towards the Eldar becomes envious. During the 23rd century Tar-Atanamir is warned about this development by emissaries of the Valar, but the king and his followers pay no heed. A small group of Dúnedain, who call themselves the Faithful, retain the old ideals. For this they are ostracized, and towards the end of the Age are subject to outright persecution. In order to survive many of them settle in Middle-earth, and at the end of the Age this group survives the Downfall and establishes the realms of Gondor and Arnor.

## Northwestern Endor

[Northwestern Middle-earth suffered great destruction at the end of the First Age, but from the Second Age onward its geography seems to have remained stable. Hence, one can easily use the extensive, published map material for the Third Age by adjusting its settlements and political borders.] The Second Age is considered a dark time for the peoples of Middle-earth. It seems likely that they live at the same level of technology and social organization as the Edain of the First Age, and are probably based on clans and tribes, centered around agricultural villages in the extensive forests. Some of the peoples of Eriador were distant relatives of the Númenóreans and spoke languages similar to Adûnaic (see footnote 3 from “Aldarion and Erendis” in *Unfinished Tales*). There is some migration into this region. For instance, during the reign of Tar-Aldarion, Easterlings serving Sauron entered Eriador.

The Elves live mostly in Lindon, ruled by Gil-galad, and in Lothlórien. The latter are mostly Silvan, as are the Elves of the Greenwood. Apart from the Noldor in Eregion, the Elves of Eriador are Sindar. Gil-galad seems to have gained significant influence in all of Eriador as the years passed, and his realm is essential to the resistance against Sauron. Eregion constitutes the

third major Elven settlement in northwestern Middle-earth, but is destroyed by Sauron’s armies in 1697. After this event, Imladris is established by Elrond as a refuge. Others include the Nandor settlement of Edhellond in Belfalas.

The cities of Belegost and Nogrod were destroyed in the War of Wrath, but the Dwarves soon built new mansions elsewhere in the Ered Luin. Khazad-dûm survived into the Second Age unscathed, and grew to become the greatest of Dwarven cities in Middle-earth. The Ents have withdrawn into Fangorn, whereas the Entwives live in the fertile lands on the other side of the Anduin. They disappear at the end of the Second Age when the area is ravaged by war.

It seems that Hobbits only reach northwestern Middle-earth during the Third Age. Where they lived during the Second Age is not mentioned in any source.

## The Númenórean Presence

The Men of Númenor spend the early years of the Age building their home on Elenna. They return to Middle-earth in 600 when a ship voyages to Lindon. Soon thereafter, they encounter Edain living around Lake Evendim in Eriador. During the 9th century, they build the port of Lond Daer (Vinyalondë) at the mouth of the River Gwathló in order to facilitate the exploitation of Eriador’s vast forests.

In the 1690s, Yôzâyan sends an army to oppose Sauron in Eriador. The Faithful establish Pelargir in 2350





as a foothold on the continent. Many settle in Belfalas, Lebennin, Anórien, Calenardhon, and around Evendim, regions under Elvish influence and hence shunned by the King's Men.

## Sauron's First Empire

During his sojourn in Eregion (1200–1590) Sauron wears a fair semblance (most likely the fana of an Elf) such that he is able to persuade many Noldor that he really is an emissary from the Valar (which must be quite a feat!). Around the year one thousand he establishes the realm of Mordor, and in 1600 fashions the One Ring in preparation for war against the Eldar. In the ensuing conflict (1693–1701) his hosts raze Celebrimbor's realm, but are unable to conquer either Lindon or Khazad-dûm. When Númenor sends its army to the aid of Gil-galad, Sauron's armies are crushed and forced to retreat back to Mordor.

Sauron then bides his time in Barad-dûr (being immortal, he is in no hurry). He expands his realm eastwards and subjugates many peoples but, at the last, surrenders to Númenor in 3261. Yet, in humbling himself, Sauron achieves his ultimate goal: the destruction of Númenor.

## The Rest of Middle-earth

Very little is written about the rest of Endor during the Second Age. Hence, a gamemaster has great freedom of design. There are, however, certain facts in the primary sources which must be taken into account. According to *The Silmarillion* there are Avari, Men, and probably also Dwarves in other parts of Middle-earth.

From the reign of Tar-Aldarion onwards the Men of Númenor explore the coasts of Endor; but nowhere do they encounter any culture as highly developed as their own, nor any sailors of equal skill. Around 2200 the Númenórean attitude changes and they begin to establish colonies along the

coasts. The natives are subjugated and forced to serve Dúnedain masters who demand heavy tribute. Umbar is the focal point of the Númenórean dominion in Endor and becomes a vast fortress. The King's Men mainly colonize the region south of this port. (Several of these colonies survive the Atalantë and their evil inhabitants become implacable enemies of Gondor during the first millennium of the Third Age.) During Ar-Pharazôn's reign, the Númenóreans become rapacious conquerors who enslave whole populations and sacrifice enemies to the cult of Melkor.

But the Númenóreans are never so many that they can evict a native population from its homeland; instead, they become a ruling class that administers and exploits the natives. They build forts, roads, bridges, and establish garrisons in order to ensure their rule. A colony is partially ruled by Númenórean law, in which Dúnedain have many privileges. Their armies are partially recruited from the natives but have exclusively Númenórean officers. Preferably, soldiers are stationed in an area whose language they do not speak. [The colonial policies of the Roman empire may be the best comparable example from our own age.]

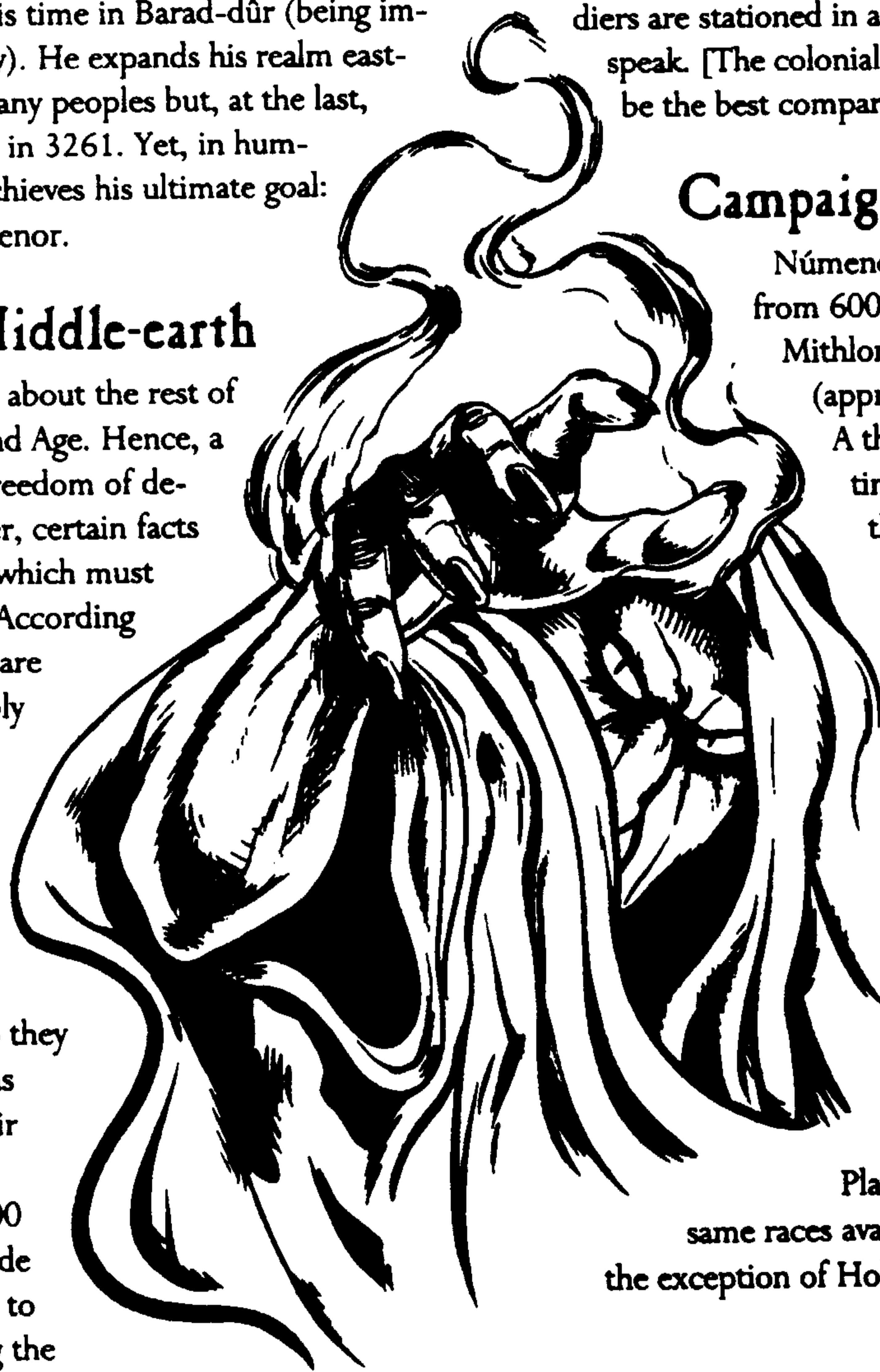
## Campaign Themes

Númenor plays an active role in Endor from 600, when the Entulesse sails into Mithlond's harbor, to its downfall in 3319 (approximately twenty-seven centuries). A thousand years pass between the time of Tar-Atanamir's reign, when the Númenóreans left the path of the Valar, and Atalantë. When one considers all that has happened in our own age over a comparable period of time, the vast temporal scope open to the gamemaster becomes apparent.

## Player-characters

The fact that the Second Age saw no great heroes to match those of Beleriand should be kept in mind when scaling the relative power level of player-characters.

Players should be able to choose the same races available in a Third Age campaign with the exception of Hobbits.







## For Númenóreans



### The Enterprising Sea-farers

Tar-Aldarion establishes the Guild of Venturers in 750 and its members embark on expeditions of discovery and trade around the continent of Endor. They visit unknown lands and learn about the conditions there, while simultaneously spreading the knowledge of Númenor. Player-characters could man on one such ship and encounter fantastic adventures in exotic lands.

### The Spies

As the conflict between the Eldar and Sauron escalates during the 17th century, the king of Númenor seeks intelligence concerning Sauron's empire (anticipating Dúnedain involvement in the near future). For this he sends the player-characters as spies to Endor in order to ascertain the might of Sauron. There are maps in Númenor of the lands east of the Misty Mountains, but these only contain topographical details and have no information on settlements, fortifications or borders. Hence, characters will be journeying through partially unknown territory.

### The Warriors

Players who are interested in wargaming might have characters participate in the extensive campaigns in Eriador in 1695–1701, perhaps commanding smaller units on independent, secondary missions.

### The Conquerors

During Tar-Atanamir's reign, Númenor begins the subjugation of the native peoples along Endor's southern coasts and establishes colonial domains there (perhaps in the same manner as the Europeans did in Africa at the end of the 19th century). Players wishing to have more or less ruthless characters may participate in such projects as leaders or officers. The Númenóreans have superior weapons and training and are generally able to defeat the native armies, but these can strike back with guerilla tactics since they know their country and can hide among their compatriots.

### The Conspirators

One option is to run an Elenna-based campaign. When the Númenóreans leave the path of wisdom around 2200 they acquire the habit of plotting and scheming. Power struggles increase with time as the Nú-

menóreans become more and more corrupt. Occasionally there are revolts and civil wars. A campaign based on these political developments might be designed in which player-characters belong to one or more noble families who scheme against their real or perceived political enemies. It is an evil and selfish time and it is hard to know whom to trust. [Númenor's political structure during these days is not described, but it might be inspired by some comparable civilization of our own age. The European Middle Ages is not a good choice, since Númenor was far more advanced. Rather, 9th–10th century Byzantium, Diocletian Rome, and perhaps classical China, would be better sources.]

### The Resisters

When Númenor turns to evil ways there are some who resist these changes, both in Elenna and in the Endor colonies. This could be the foundation for a campaign inspired by the tales of Robin Hood or the feats of Lawrence of Arabia. Brave individuals who try to save the natives from the brutal suppression of foreign masters.



## For Non-Númenóreans



Player-characters need not be Númenóreans; instead, they could be natives of Middle-earth who perceive the Dúnedain as enemies and must defend themselves from the conquerors from over the sea.

### The Resistance Fighters

Player-characters belong to a native people that has been conquered by the Númenóreans, just as Asian or African people were occupied by European armies during the Victorian age.

They initiate political struggle and lead guerilla resistance to liberate their compatriots from the Númenórean yoke. [Historical parallels include: the American war of Independence (1770s), China's struggles against the Europeans during the 19th century, the Polish rebellion (1830s), and the



Vietnam wars (1945–1975).] While the characters strive for these goals Sauron's emissaries work in secret to infiltrate and establish their own position, which will be used to give them the real power in the end. The characters actually have to fight at two fronts simultaneously.

## The Elven Diplomats

When the Shadow falls over Númenor, many Eldar in Middle-earth become worried and act to protect their interests and the Free Peoples from Yôzâyan's rule. In such a campaign characters could be Elven diplomats with human assistants, sent to a distant

land by Gil-galad to actively intervene in a succession conflict. A ruler is dying and his heirs vie for the throne. One is supported by Númenor, and Sauron has sent secret emissaries with the task of discrediting those involved and to cause a civil war.

## Atalantë's Aftermath

When Elenna perishes in 3319 a new era begins. Elendil and his followers reach the shores of Middle-earth, unite the Elf-friends there, and establish Gondor and Arnor. Many Númenórean colonies survive, and Umbar remains a stronghold for the evil Yôzâyan culture; but the King's Men have lost their cohesion and spend

much time fighting each other while the oppressed people rebel against them. Sauron returns to Mordor and continues his relentless war against the Dúnedain. The two final decades of the Second Age are a chaotic time of much war, espionage, and scheming in which the Last Alliance besieges Mordor itself. In this setting characters might serve Elendil in various capacities.

The Age ends with the death of Elendil, Gil-galad, and Sauron's fall. Isildur seizes the One Ring, and a new era arrives with hopes of better future. But that, as they say, is a completely different story.

# III. Return of the Shadow: the Fourth Age

*"History has no happy endings—just crises that come and go"*  
— Isaac Asimov

During the War of the Ring, Gandalf predicted that there would come new threats to the Free Peoples after Sauron, but he could not see anything further—he affirmed that one must confront the evils of one's own generation, and leave the defense of the future to others. After the fall of Sauron the reunited Kingdom of Gondor and Arnor faces the future without help from the Istari or the Eldar. The Age of Men has arrived and supernatural forces gradually fade away. The Elves voyage to Aman or disappear into the deep forests and shun Men. Tolkien

wrote very little of this era. In the Appendices it is said that Elessar and Éomer fought the remnants of Sauron's minions wherever they appeared. Their armies went to war east and south of Gondor. The Orcs are not yet exterminated, and ravage the Misty Mountains and the Greenwood for another century or so.

One advantage of a Fourth Age campaign is that player-characters have much greater scope for influencing the course of history, which is more limited in previous ages. Characters have

opportunities to make their own fortunes or, perhaps, even to rule their own realms. [I have been told that Tolkien once began writing a novel set in Gondor during the Fourth Age. Being dissatisfied with it, he never completed it. I was told that the basic idea was that evil again infiltrated Gondor and made some people serve a Dark religion. These hints inspired my friend Kathrin Vestergren and I to outline the following campaign for Gondor several decades after King Elessar's death in 120, emphasizing politics and intrigue.]





# The World



## The Lands of Men

The Fourth Age is the era in which the realms of Men assume control of northwestern Endor, Gondor and Arnor controlling the lands between the Misty Mountains, the Ered Luin, Forochel, Mordor, and Umbar. Rohan and The Shire preserve their ancient autonomy within this reunited kingdom while retaining close allegiance to the Dúnedain. Mordor has been taken over by the former slave population which inhabits the fertile area around the lake of Nurn, and is allied with Gondor. In Rhûn and Harad little has changed. The old realms remain, albeit liberated from the Shadow, and their inhabitants are probably not too keen on Gondorian hegemony in the region. Many of these have long traditions of resisting the Dúnedain, and such cultural memories will linger on for many centuries.

## Elves and Dwarves

The Elves are gradually departing Middle-earth, though a significant Silvan population remains in Lórien and the Greenwood for many centuries into the Fourth Age. Some Sindar also stay for a long time in the Grey Havens, having the responsibility of providing ships to those that depart to Aman. Few bother with the affairs of Men in Middle-earth. Much of their power has waned since the destruction of the One Ring and the departure of their mightiest Lords. They all realize that their prime has passed and that

the dominion of the continent has finally passed to mortals.

Dwarvenkind enjoys a brief renaissance once their principal enemies—orcs and dragons—have been decimated or exterminated. Khazad-dûm is once again retaken by the Naugrim and its ores are exploited for new wealth. The Dwarves, however, are destined for a slow decline



and eventual extinction (due to demographic factors). Their outlying settlements in Ered Luin and elsewhere are gradually abandoned as the Age progresses and the Dwarves withdraw to Khazad-dûm.

## Sauron's Heir

Ancient legends speak of how Sauron deceived Celebrimbor and the Elven-smiths in Hollin during the Second Age. He came to them as Annatar, Lord of the Gifts, claiming to be an emissary of the Valar—many believed him. One of these was Celebrimbor's sister Ariel, who was seduced by Annatar. Soon after he had left Hollin for good she gave birth to a daughter, Aelindur. Ariel died from birth complications and the child was brought up by her uncle.

When Sauron's armies crushed Hollin they captured Aelindur and brought her to Mordor. What then became of her is not clear. There are tales of a golden-haired maiden living in a mansion at the shore of Núrn. There Aelindur had a garden in which she grew evil herbs. When Sauron perished at the end of the Second Age, she escaped in the ensuing chaos and sought refuge somewhere in the east.

## Aelindur's Fourth Age Plans

In time Aelindur has become almost as evil as her father, though not as powerful. She can be portrayed as a kind of fallen Galadriel (read the sequence when Frodo offers Galadriel the Ruling Ring in Lórien). Being part-Noldo, she is bound to her physical body. Aelindur has great knowledge of magic and possesses much more talent than any other Elf (save perhaps Lúthien, another Maia-Noldo child). Only an Istar can match her in magic. According to the essay on the Istari (*Unfinished Tales*), Radagast, Alatar and Pallando remain in Middle-earth during the early Fourth Age and may enter



the plot as Aelindur's foes for reasons ranging from helpfulness to the desire to remove a potentially troublesome competitor.

When Sauron's domain collapsed after the War of the Ring, Aelindur realized that this would be her big opportunity. Both the most powerful Elves (Galadriel and Elrond) and Gandalf departed from Middle-earth at the end of the Third Age. The only potential rivals remaining are the three Wizards, but of these only Radagast resides in northwestern Endor, and his interest does not lie in power over Men. Pallando and Alatar have long since departed for eastern lands.

Aelindur's goals are simple: vengeance and power. She wants to throw the Dúnedain realms into chaos and assume control over the remnants, using discontented Haradaic and Gondorian noblemen as her primary tools. Unlike her father she does not rule a state, nor does she have any hosts at her direct command; instead, she relies on her black arts and cunning to achieve her ambitions. She will infuse evil and egotistical thoughts into the minds of powerful individuals, remolding them to suit her purposes. When the Men of Harad revolt against Gondor under her servants' leadership, many Dúnedain nobles will rebel against their own King and a new Kin-

strife will ensue. Then Aelindur intends to reveal herself as the "savior" of the realm, and with the help of her minions and her great powers usurp the throne of Gondor, initiating a dark reign that may last for centuries.

Aelindur has great patience as she is not subject to mortality. She is also very careful, preferring to work her will through intermediaries without being seen. Whenever she comes out into the open, she is incognito, claiming to be an Elda who has not yet gone West. If her true identity should be revealed, her plans might fail.

## The Ballad of Aelindur

*On the southern shore of Nurn you find  
Aelindur's misty flower field  
with her magic roses, black and white.  
In the hour of midnight  
she is dancing right across the field  
weaving signs of magic, runes of might.  
And she sings: "Burzum ûk,"  
chanting words of power, Sauron's child.  
And then the swaying magic roses  
growing in the field obey,  
sending streams of evil, pale as death.  
For though each rose is graceful, it is  
filled with Mordor's baleful breath  
used by Aelindur Elvenmaid.*

*And when the Moon is rising,  
then an evil eye looks down on you,  
sending forth her powers to your mind.  
You wake up to the sound of chanting;  
Aelindur comes to you  
weaving words of magic, words to bind:  
"Be my slave, be my slave!"  
Then you must surrender, and you do.  
Thus you are, thus you are  
bound with words of chaining, thus you are.*



## The Conspiracy Tools

Aelindur has many means to further her plots. She has established a variant of the old cult of Melkor in Gondor, whose clandestine priests preach the coming of a Dark Queen who will save the Dúnedain from their current decadent ways and re-establish their ancient power and might (The cult should be utilized in style reminiscent of H.P. Lovecraft: dark rites in the moonlight and strange societies conspiring against the realm).

Another variant of the cult has been created for the Southron peoples. There her servants preach resistance to Dúnedain dominion and the recovery of traditional Southron virtues. The goal should be to "break the shackles of the Northmen under the leadership of the freedom-giving Great Queen" and regain what was lost in the War of the Ring. The cult is successful among discontented nobles and merchants.

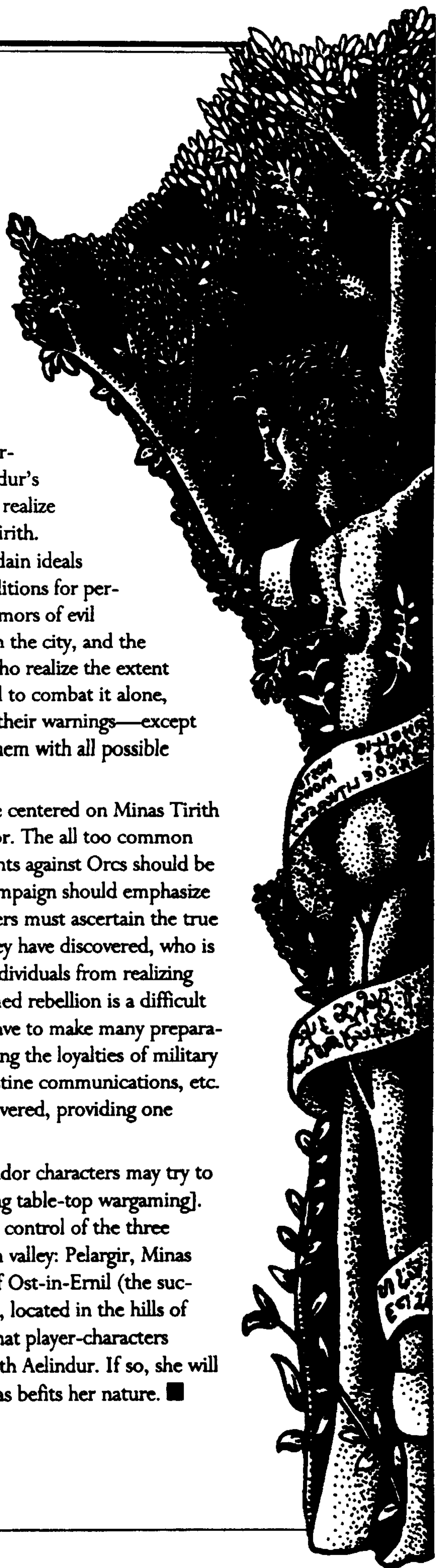
Rohan is a serious obstacle to Aelindur's plans since its éoherè is the most powerful military unit in north-western Middle-earth, and the kings of Harad can never field a matching cavalry force. Aelindur pursues two strategies to achieve this. One is to develop a horse plague to kill off a large percentage of Rohan's herds. The other strategy is political: enticing the Dunlendings to once again strike the western Riddermark to regain their ancient possessions. Arnor is still so sparsely populated that it lacks strength enough to successfully intervene in a Gondorian civil war. Also, a northern host must march through Dunlending territory before reaching Gondor, which should delay it significantly.

## Player-characters

There are many ways for player-characters to get involved in Aelindur's conspiracies. They might come to realize that something is awry in Minas Tirith. People are denying the true Dúnedain ideals and breaking old customs and traditions for personal gain. There are persistent rumors of evil forces secretly gaining adherents in the city, and the characters may be the only ones who realize the extent of the threat. They are then forced to combat it alone, while their compatriots disregard their warnings—except for Aelindur's allies who oppose them with all possible means.

Such a campaign might well be centered on Minas Tirith and be flavored by a tinge of horror. The all too common expeditions into dungeons and fights against Orcs should be completely absent. Instead, the campaign should emphasize investigative role-playing. Characters must ascertain the true nature of the evil machinations they have discovered, who is involved, and how to stop these individuals from realizing Aelindur's plans. Preparing an armed rebellion is a difficult task and the conspirators would have to make many preparations: finding suitable allies, securing the loyalties of military units, establishing efficient clandestine communications, etc. Such activities can usually be discovered, providing one knows what to look for.

If a civil war breaks out in Gondor characters may try to change its course [perhaps involving table-top wargaming]. Many battles will be fought for the control of the three strategic cities of the lower Anduin valley: Pelargir, Minas Tirith, and Ithilien's new capital of Ost-in-Ernil (the successor of the ruined Minas Morgul, located in the hills of Eryn Arnem). It is even possible that player-characters might choose to ally themselves with Aelindur. If so, she will most like betray them in the end, as befits her nature. ■





# Corruption in Middle-Earth: A look at the use and consequences of power

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*The Lord of the Rings is founded upon the premise that the search for power and knowledge contains within itself the possibility of corruption, and throughout Tolkien's writings these themes are closely intertwined. The imaginary races of Middle-earth are each defined in terms of their susceptibility to corruption as well as their capacity for resisting the lure of power. A gamemaster who seeks to incorporate this "nobility of resistance" into the realm of game mechanics may wish to consider the following rule suggestion for a statistic embracing the quality of "fortitude," designed for use with the Middle-earth Role Playing and Rolemaster rule systems.*

As with the doctrine of Original Sin, the potential for corruption in Tolkien's world inheres within a person's created nature; hence, noble actions and a desire to do good may work to offset the corrupting influence of power—on the other hand, such efforts may paradoxically lead one down the path of evil. It is worth considering the corrupting consequences of power in Middle-earth since, in a role-playing context, the pursuit and acquisition of power in its various forms is a common orientation of player-characters.

## Exemplars of Corruption and the Races of Middle-earth

Examples of the self-undoing and ultimately self-destructive nature of the will to power abound in Tolkien's writings. The discord introduced by Melkor into the Music of the Ainur locates the primal Fall before the creation of the world and sets the pattern for those who are to follow. Among the ranks of the Maiar, the figures of Sauron and Saruman are exemplary of two different paths of corruption. Sauron's conscious allegiance to Melkor from the beginning, and his unchallenged inheritance of his master's dominion which in turn led to his own overthrow, may be contrasted to the more complex character of the wizard Saruman, who began with a desire for good but whose attempts to fight the Enemy with his own weapons resulted in his metamorphosis into that Enemy. Significantly, this fall from grace was accompanied by the acquisition and creation of powerful artifacts and the knowledge of their use. Interestingly, both Sauron

and Saruman in their origins were of Aulë's people, whose characteristic desire to make in the fashion of their Creator was fraught with the ambiguities of sub-creative power. Other examples of betrayal and self-deception brought about through the promise of power include Ar-Pharazôn, the Nazgûl, the Dead Men of Dunharrow, and the Haradrim.

Individual propensities for corruption and resistance are to be situated within a larger context of racial and cultural characteristics. Men as a race are extremely diverse and, as such, are subject to varying degrees of corruption and corruptibility. Lesser Men, such as the Easterlings or the Haradrim, are highly susceptible to the lies of the Enemy; by contrast, the Edain, blessed by Ilúvatar with heightened faculties of discernment and fortitude, are paradoxically more vulnerable to the fear of Death and the desire for deathlessness within the Circles of the World. The Northman ancestors of the Dúnedain share many of the weaknesses of Lesser Men but are set apart from the latter by their enduring ties with the West.



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As a subset of Men, Hobbits represent something of an anomaly within Tolkien's world. Their absence from the recorded history of Middle-earth is used by Tolkien to amplify certain qualities which make them distinctive in their ability to resist corruption and domination; namely, their lack of *desire* for power. Most Hobbits have neither the will nor the need to go out of their way to obtain power; instead, their activities are oriented toward contentment. The whole idea of "adventure"—at least at the time of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*—is unpalatable to their sensibilities. This general avoidance, however, does not erase diversity among the different branches of Hobbit-folk.

Dwarves are characterized by an uneasy coexistence of intense loyalty and honor on the one hand, and a potentially amoral vanity and greed on the other. The former positive qualities are most forcibly presented in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, while in *The Silmarillion* their less admirable qualities are more often emphasized (though this impression may be, in part, a result of the implied Elven perspective of Tolkien's narrative of the events of the First Age).

Of the kindreds of the Elves, the Noldor exhibit the greatest similarities to the Dwarves and, as such, often share in the unstable affinity between nobility and corruption. As a whole, however, the Eldar are to be distinguished from all other races with respect to power and corruption because of their deathless nature. Because of their unalterable connection to the life-span of the world itself, Elves lack to a certain extent the drive for temporal power that characterizes mortals. This quality, however, is balanced off

by their closer connection to the sub-creative process, which leaves them prey to all the temptations associated with such power. As Time wears on, the Eldar become both less motivated to actively strive for power and more keenly aware of the Enemy's machinations—hence, in the Third Age Sauron was no longer able to deceive the Elves or to cajole them into his service. This generalization, however, may not technically apply in the same degree to Avari Elves dwelling in places other than north western Middle-earth.

## Artifacts of Power

Iron Crown's *Middle-earth Role Playing* products often leave one with the impression that Tolkien's world is overflowing with "magic items;" but scarcity (rather than abundance) would better characterize magical artifacts within Tolkien's sub-creation. Those few that are mentioned tend to carry with them a weight of doom and history which often has a great deal to do with defining their use and personal consequences. Most artifacts enhance some faculty or capacity of their user, often bestowing power in direct proportion to his or her own inherent power or capabilities. This progressive increase of power, however, may be accompanied by a corresponding, corrupting influence over the user. Moreover, the full potential of an artifact is often only realized or understood as it extends control over its user. In this respect Tolkien and Lovecraft share a similar view of the transgressive effects of power and knowledge on the self. This contradictory dynamic requires a corresponding game mechanic in order for it to be evoked effectively in the course of play. The concept of a "fortitude scale" is introduced to serve this function.

## Fortitude

The Fortitude Scale (FS) is measure of a character's natural leaning towards good or evil. It bears some resemblance to the traditional concept of "alignment," but is dealt with differently. Proximity to and/or use of power beyond one's measure may diminish one's Fortitude score. Fortitude may be maintained or regained through resistance to the temptation of corrupting power, or by the performance of certain actions defined by the gamemaster as being in opposition to or in rejection of the corrupting evil. The maximum Fortitude attainable is defined by the level of one's natural or inherent power. A character whose Fortitude score has fallen to zero or below has become irrevocably corrupted and effectively leaves the control of its player at the gamemaster's discretion.

Two possible methods are here presented for generating Fortitude: 1) 1D100 roll; reroll any score below the character's Intuition statistic, 2) Fortitude = lowest prime statistic of the character, and may not exceed Intuition score by more than 15 points. Either method is valid. Note that the second method tends to generate a higher score. If neither the *MERP* nor *Rolemaster* systems are being used, the easiest method for generating the Fortitude Scale statistic is to convert two appropriate statistics to percentile scores and use them as described above. ■



## Race Modifiers

DWARVES	+5
UMLI	+4
ELVES	
Vanyar	+20
Noldor	+10
Teleri	+5
Avari	0
Half-Elves	+5
HOBBITS	
Fallohides	+10
Harfoots	+15
Stoors	+15
MEN	
Beornings	+5
Black Númenoreans	-10
Corsairs	-5
Dorwinrim	0
Dúnedain	+5
Dunlendings	-5
Easterlings	-5
Haradrim	-5
Lossoth	0
Rohirrim	0
Rural Men	0
Urban Men	0
Variags	-10
Woodmen	0
Woses	+15
ORCS	
Uruk-Hai	-15
Common Orcs	-10
Half Orcs	-10
TROLLS	
Olog-Hai	-20
Normal Trolls	-10
Half Trolls	-15

## Using Fortitude

The FS statistic may be used in a variety of situations. All players are required to make a successful FS role (as a percentage) whenever their characters gain a level of experience. A failed role results in a loss of FS equal to the number of the new level. This simulates the potential for corruption occasioned by the new level of mastery. This does not imply that the character is becoming evil; it simply means that if a situation emerged in which that character were required to resist the lure of corruptive power, his or her claim to greater mastery would prove to be one more disadvantage. An FS roll may be required if a character initiates combat against an opponent of lesser level than him or herself. A failed roll results in the loss of a single FS point. An FS roll may also be required whenever a character makes use of magical power not otherwise inherent to his or her own being (i.e. any kind of magic that is "acquired"). A failed roll results in a loss of two FS

points. These examples are intended to be illustrative of how the FS statistic might be creatively used at the discretion of a gamemaster. Similar circumstances may be designated as opportunities to increase or award FS points.

Fortitude may be deployed in several contexts outside of combat. Examples include knowledge-focused research (e.g. spells), mid-level increases for certain skills, and so on. "Role-playing based" examples are more difficult to offer generalized guidelines for, but could incorporate mundane forms of "corruption" (e.g. dishonesty, bribes, treachery, vice, etc.) as well as magically-charged events such as oathbreaking or crossing purity boundaries. Once again, FS rolls should be made at the GM's discretion. The use of artifacts may require an FS roll modified by the Will of the artifact (1-20). A failed roll results in FS loss appropriate to the magnitude of the artifact's Will, or by some other criterion. ■





# Beyond Anduin: Rhovanyon as the northern frontier of Gondor

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*This essay inaugurates what I hope will become a regular feature of Other Hands: informed discussion of various aspects or themes of Middle-earth which will fully take into account what Tolkien himself has written or said about them. As role-players it is our job to be sub-creators—that is, to make Middle-earth our own by inventing something new, rather than limiting ourselves to the printed page; and as each reader of The Lord of the Rings will have his or her own unique picture of what Middle-earth is like, so too each gamemaster will create an idiosyncratic version of its history and of the events which take place within that setting.*

*Tolkien's annalistic histories of the Third Age (as found in the infamous Appendix A) lend themselves to such diversity. They are painted in broad strokes and leave many blank spaces to be interpreted and explored by the enterprising gamemaster. There is, in fact, a long tradition of 'mock history' among Tolkien fans—of pretending to write about Middle-earth as if it were the real world (i.e. applying principles of 'real world' historiography to Tolkien's imaginary history in the hopes of achieving a supposedly more 'objective' or less idiosyncratic version of the 'gaps' left by Tolkien's writings).*

*These mock histories of Middle-earth provide an abundant resource for role-players seeking creative ideas to incorporate into their own games, and are therefore usually worth a read (they are an endemic feature of most Tolkien fanzines). They also have a tendency to be frustrating if one already has a highly opinionated view on things Tolkien (as do I). This is partly due to their inevitable idiosyncrasy, but often they lack any discernible rhyme or reason whatsoever. This, in turn, is usually the result of a certain morbidity that must accompany any attempt to write a mock history of a fictional world for the hell of it. This morbidity (I use the term jokingly) is less characteristic of the role-player, for whom the desire to contemplate the secondary world is closely linked to a practical goal: the need to create a richly-detailed background in which to set a game. In other words, mock history conjured up by the role-player is usually more interesting than that of the pure Tolkien junkie since the former intends to do something with it.*

*But while the will to game is perhaps an important ingredient to more consistent mock history writing, it does not wholly erase conflicting interpretations of Tolkien's world. This section of Other Hands will be devoted to such history writing; and to open further debate and interchange among role-players regarding different possible ways of reading "the evidence." I want to emphasize in closing that the goal of this section, as with everything else in Other Hands, is to further enjoyment of Middle-earth as a setting for fantasy role-playing. We welcome submissions which invent new material out of whole cloth, but the focus of this particular section will be on what Tolkien has actually written (i.e. the published works to which we all have access) and how it might best be interpreted and used creatively.*



## Rhovanion and the Realm of Gondor

The lands described by Tolkien as "Rhovanion" (Wilderland) have been the subject of a number of Iron Crown publications, beginning with *Southern Mirkwood* in 1983. In these modules, the view has been advanced that during the Third Age the Dúnadain realm of Gondor formally occupied and administered the wide plains south and east of Greenwood the Great, giving to them the name "Dor Rhúnen" (cf. *Mirkwood: The Wilds of Rhovanion*, 1988:46–47). The scenario proposed, then, is of a territory controlled directly as a military border-march. Tolkien, however, seems to suggest a rather different picture of the relationship between the South-kingdom and the plains of Rhovanion. What I want to argue, on the basis of the information provided in "Gondor and the Heirs of Anárion" (*RoTK*:324–337), is that Rhovanion is better understood as a *frontier* than as a border-march. Rhovanion, I suggest, was never occupied by the men of Gondor as portrayed in the ICE modules. The Sindarin designation "Dor Rhúnen" is therefore inappropriate.

### Rhovanion as a Frontier

The view that the Dúnadain occupied the plains of Rhovanion derives from Tolkien's statement that during the reign of Hyarmendacil I (1015–1149) the realm of Gondor extended "east to the inland Sea of Rhûn" (ibid:325). This is accounted for by the reference to the ninth king Turambar (541–667), who avenged his father's death at the hands of the

Easterlings "and won much territory eastwards" (ibid:324). This view is most likely correct, since there are no further references to Rhovanion until the time of Hyarmendacil; however, this does not imply direct occupation or even formal claim to the territory on the part of Gondor, for at a later point in the narrative we are told that the kings *gave* the Northmen of Rhovanion "wide lands beyond Anduin south of Greenwood the Great, to be a defence against the men of the East" (ibid:326).

This suggests two things. Firstly, it appears that the intention of this "grant" of land was to create a frontier or buffer-zone against Gondor's enemies by delegating the burden of military defense such that the Dúnadain would not have to occupy the region themselves. Secondly, while the kings of Gondor are represented as "giving" these lands to the Northmen (thus implying some kind of proprietary claim) it seems unlikely that the Dúnadain perceived Rhovanion as "belonging" to the territory of Gondor.

Other information would seem to corroborate this view. That Rómendacil II would have shown "especial favour" to a man who named himself "King of Rhovanion" (ibid:326) implies a recognition of autonomous rule. Whatever the reality of the political situation in 1248 may have been, it would appear that Gondor made no formal claim over Rhovanion in the same way that it claimed possession (for instance) of Harondor. On the other hand, if Vidugavia had been the first Northman to claim royal prerogative over Rhovanion, then previous to him Gondor may have advanced a nominal claim to the lands "east to the inland Sea;" but it seems highly un-

likely that such a claim would involve any kind of enactment on the part of Gondor. Moreover, the recognition of Vidugavia's kingship and the absence of any evidence to suggest a change in affairs until the invasion of the Wainriders points to a strengthening of Northman autonomy as it becomes more and more oriented towards Gondor.

In the first Wainrider assault upon Gondor in 1856, we are told that: "The people of eastern and southern Rhovanion [presumably the Northmen] were enslaved; and the frontiers of Gondor were for that time withdrawn to the Anduin and the Eryn Muil" (ibid:329). Here Rhovanion is called the frontier of Gondor, and this function is linked to the freedom or enslavement of the Northmen. If this can be taken as a model, then we would suspect that Rhovanion emerged in this capacity with Turambar's initial "grant" of the plains to the Northmen in 541, that it reached its culmination in the time of Vidugavia and his descendants, and that some four hundred years later it ceased to be a defensible frontier. We are given no positive evidence that it ever recovered this role.

Thus it seems that Rhovanion functioned as a frontier of Gondor for approximately one thousand-three hundred and fifteen years of the Third Age. It exercised military autonomy throughout the period of its settlement by the Northmen, and at least in the time of Vidugavia (1250–?) it enjoyed formally recognized political autonomy as a kingdom in its own right. This frontier autonomy and the absence of any enduring contact with Dúnadain is reflected by the fact that in 1250 Rómendacil had no knowl-



edge of the “language, manners, and policies of the Northmen” (ibid:326). Finally, there is no evidence that the frontier ever received a Sindarin name (as would have the case if Dúnedain had settled there or had laid formal claim to the territory). Hence it is likely that its original name “Rhovanion” was retained because it was never occupied by the men of Gondor. Finally, the realm of Vidugavia was regarded by the high men of Gondor to be “an alien country” (ibid).

## The Kings of Gondor and the Northmen

We return now to the problem of the exact nature of the relationship between the kings and their Northman allies, investigating the development of this relationship from the perspective of the emergence and decline of Rhovanion as a frontier. The basis for the grant of Rhovanion to the Northmen was their supposed ethnic ties: “they were the nearest in kin of lesser Men to the Dúnedain (being for the most part descendants of those peoples from whom the Edain of old had come)” (ibid). The “favour” shown them in the grant was therefore probably couched in the idiom of kinship, and most likely lacked any formal character.

The undefined nature of this alliance is made manifest by the fact that Rómendacil found it necessary “to strengthen the bond between Gondor and the Northmen” (ibid) as a result of uncertain loyalties on the part of the latter during the second wave of Easterling invasions: “the Northmen did not always remain true to Gondor, and some would join forces with the Easterlings, either out of greed for spoil, or

in the furtherance of feuds among their princes” (ibid). Earlier we are told that the numbers of the Northmen “had increased greatly in the peace brought by the power of Gondor” (ibid)—most likely this refers to Turambar’s route of the Easterlings in 541. It is therefore probable that these “princes” emerged as a result of the expansion of the Northman population and territory from Turambar to the time of Rómendacil. If this is the case, then we can ascribe the cause of the eventual weakening of Northman loyalty to the kings in part to these internal conflicts. At least one characteristic which defined the nature of these “princes” was the fact that each controlled a separate “realm” (e.g. Vidugavia). Land and booty, then, were apparently the most important elements in establishing ascendancy over competing princedoms.

Rómendacil had two strategies for dealing with this situation, both of which involved co-opting the struggle of the princes for the interests of the ruling house of Gondor. His solution was partially motivated by the external threat of the Easterlings; but perhaps more fundamental to his reasoning was the incipient danger of civil war within the realm he was soon to inherit. Tolkien provides few clues as to the underlying causes of the Kin-strife (1432–1447), but one of them surely must have been Rómendacil’s appointment as Regent of Gondor in 1240. This view works off the assumption that Pelargir was the center of opposition to Eldacar, and that the rule of that haven had at least from the time of Siriondil been traditionally bestowed upon the king’s son (thus avoiding any development of Pelargir into a rival power against Osgiliath).

With the creation of the Regency (an office which most likely did not survive Rómendacil) the heir to the crown was hindered from taking control of the haven, and its rule passed on to (again, my own assumption) Calimehtar and his descendants. When at last the Kin-strife broke out, two reasons are given for Castamir’s ascendancy over the other rebels: 1) he was Captain of Ships, and 2) he enjoyed the support of “the people of the coasts and of the great havens of Pelargir and Umbar” (ibid:327). In other words, it seems that the rift between Pelargir and Osgiliath began with the division of power between Rómendacil and his younger brother Calimehtar; the latter (or his descendants) apparently began to develop military and popular support along the coastal periphery of Belfalas Bay in order to create a separate power base from which to challenge Osgiliath. If this hypothesis is plausible, then it may shed some light on what was going on in Rhovanion between Rómendacil and the Northmen—just as Calimehtar was cultivating his own foundation of power in the south, so too Rómendacil was securing himself and his heirs by strengthening ties with Rhovanion.

The first manner in which Rómendacil exploited the situation beyond Anduin was his recognition and support of Vidugavia’s claim to the kingship of all Rhovanion. Whether or not this favour was formally granted, it was confirmed in practice by the Regent’s sending of his son Valacar as an ambassador. This relationship was renewed by Valacar’s subsequent marriage to Vidugavia’s daughter which ultimately precipitated (or rationalized) the Kin-strife. We do not know how long this relationship endured, but it was cer-



tainly in effect for the duration of Eldacar's reign (1432–1490). The sanctuary given the exiled king during the interim of the Usurper's reign indicates that Vidugavia's descendants were interested in maintaining Eldacar's future patronage.

The second means of turning the princely conflict in Rhovanion to the advantage of Rómendacil was his recruitment of Northmen for his military force: "he took many of them into his service and gave to some high rank in his armies" (ibid:326). Eldacar his grandson continued this policy of favor towards Northmen "by whose help he had regained the crown" (ibid:328) by settling many in Gondor following the Kin-strife. In all this it is crucial to keep in mind that the political autonomy of Rhovanion became more sharply defined as its involvement with Gondor increased. There is no positive evidence to suggest that the region was ever directly occupied or controlled by the Dúnedain.

## Conclusion

While this scenario of the relationship of Rhovanion to Gondor is, I believe, more plausible than that offered by the Iron Crown modules, we are nevertheless left with the problem of explaining why (if this was the case) the territory beyond Anduin was included within the realm of the kings in reference to the time of Hyarmendacil. We have imagined that *de facto* the Northmen of Rhovanion exercised political and military autonomy, while nevertheless acknowledging some kind of bond legitimated by kinship. By way of comparison, the Northmen of the Vales of Anduin are also said to have

"acknowledged" Gondor's authority (ibid:325); but unlike their brethren beyond Anduin, the realm of Gondor is never said to have encompassed the Vales of Anduin north of Celebrant. This distinction may therefore be in part a consequence of the fact that Turambar had "won" the lands eastward by military conquest, whereas no

such military expedition was ever recorded to have been carried out in the northern Anduin vales. The grant of Rhovanion to the Northmen was therefore based upon right of conquest as well as their ancient kinship. This is the most logical explanation for the *de jure* inclusion of Rhovanion within the realm of the kings until the time of Vidugavia and Rómendacil. ■





# Selections from a panel discussion on role-playing and Tolkien's World

Transcript Editor:  
Chris Seeman

*Participants: Chris Seeman, Brian T. Murphy, Eric Rauscher, Glenn Kuring, Andrew Butler*

*Held at the Tolkien Centenary Conference*

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**CHRIS SEEMAN:** I would like to open this discussion with a leading question which I think is of central importance to the whole matter of role-playing in Tolkien's world. As a gamemaster one must always consider the elements that make up a good game. Let us, then, begin by asking ourselves: what goes into making a good Middle-earth game—or, alternatively, what in a game evokes the feel of *Middle-earth* rather than some other fantasy setting? What is it about Tolkien's world that attracts us as role-players?

**BRIAN T. MURPHY:** Most obvious, I think, is the fact that so many of the so-called "sword and sorcery" or pseudo-Medieval role-playing games are, in a sense, based in Middle-earth. Take, for example, *Dungeons & Dragons*, the first and most popular of the kind of games I am referring to. Gary Gygax disclaims any great debt to Tolkien (Fritz Lieber is, of course, a

much stronger influence for him), and yet Hobbits are running around in his game. Quite often there is a crossover from Tolkien fans to gaming and vice versa so, in fact, he owes a huge debt. Essentially, then, there is a *connection* to Tolkien in these games.

**ERIC RAUSCHER:** What originally drew me into *D&D* was my interest in the Mythopoeic Society; in fact, the very first role-playing games I ever played took place at Mythcon years ago. Since then I don't do much role-playing because I got bored with this mishmash of semi-Medieval "I'm a ninja, you're a flying turtle." Without a strict genre to set it in the game became a free-for-all, which turned me off to it.

**CHRIS SEEMAN:** I think that *Dungeons & Dragons* and its successor games *do* (at least in practice) constitute their own "genre" in the sense that they share an implied style of

play—which, as you rightly point out, is characterized precisely by this homogenizing of discontinuous genres or settings into what we might call a *multiverse*. By way of contrast, Tolkien's world represents the exact opposite of the multiverse. As we all know, Tolkien's ideal was what he called the creation of a *secondary world*—a unified and coherent universe possessing "the inner consistency of reality." This is, of course, part of what makes Tolkien a great writer, but the notion of a secondary world is, I think, also very attractive to role-players (and, in particular, to gamemasters like myself). More than any other fantasy world that I know, Middle-earth contains (ready-made) all the necessary elements for a richly textured game setting. Tolkien spent his entire life creating this imaginary world in its most minute detail. For the gamemaster who would rather *run* a game than spend all his or her time laboring over a world to set it in, Middle-earth offers an attractive alternative to reinventing the wheel. One of the reasons why there never was a Middle-earth role-playing game in the seventies is I think because of the pre-



dominance of this multiverse paradigm as the taken-for-granted frame of reference for gaming. From the early eighties onward, however, a shift in this paradigm took place which made it possible to imagine Tolkien's world as a viable fantasy setting. With the birth of such games as *Call of Cthulhu*, *Stormbringer*, or *Pendragon* you finally had visible examples of how the literary genre of a particular author's works could be successfully translated into a game medium. It's just ironic that when Iron Crown Enterprises acquired the license to publish and market a role-playing game based on Tolkien's writings they ended up orienting it towards the old multiverse paradigm.

**GLENN KURING:** The beauty of Middle-earth as a fantasy setting is that it's already set up (with its history, geography, languages, and so on) so that those who have read Tolkien's books can pinpoint their relation to that world during the course of the game and say "Yes, I'm in Middle-earth." I have players who know the works very well, and they find a lot of fulfillment in exploring Middle-earth through the game. However, in order to achieve this the game has got to be run in such a way that it lends itself to that kind of response. This is not difficult so long as the game remains fairly true to the spirit of Tolkien's works, but it can become a major problem if the setting is only superficially linked to Middle-earth.

**ERIC RAUSCHER:** It's easy to say: "Hey, this is taking place in Middle-earth; I have a Colt .45 and an Uzi." But how do you make a game that *smells* and *tastes* like Middle-earth? That's the real challenge.

**ANDREW BUTLER:** The problem is in trying to come up with rules that fit the way the stories go rather than fitting the way other role-playing games go; because with games like *Dungeons & Dragons* you've got set types of adventure that most players are used to. And I'm guilty of this as well—I'm sticking these sorts of adventures into parts of Middle-earth and trying to make them fit, and in some cases they will. But in others it's trying to get the square peg into a round hole, and you end up distorting Middle-earth to fit the game rather than the other way around. Certainly in quite a lot of publications that have come out, because of the way their audience does things, the game designers have made modifications which don't necessarily fit in order to do what they want to do in that setting.

**GLENN KURING:** In order to make their products financially viable, I think that Iron Crown has tried to market *Middle-earth Role Playing* for more than one audience. On the one hand, they are targeting *D&D* players with hopes of getting them interested in Tolkien; on the other hand, they want to get people who have read *The Lord of the Rings* (and who may not have any experience with role-playing) to buy their games. But at best this effort has only been partly successful with the modules and rules they have published so far.

**CHRIS SEEMAN:** I agree with Glenn that for a gaming company this dilemma of having to "make the world fit the game" derives in part from these marketing considerations; but I think the gamemaster faces a similar problem in attempting to create adventures out of what is in some respects a closed world. By this I mean

that the basic history of Middle-earth has already been written and, as a consequence, certain limitations are imposed upon the players as to what extent the gamemaster can allow their characters to affect that pre-existing history without altering it beyond recognition.

**AUDIENCE:** I think there is a particular form of the problem in the case of Middle-earth where, at the worst, you get the hack-and-slay style of game backed up by a Monty Haul philosophy. Those two things are entirely contrary not only to the spirit, but to the letter of the basic narrative of Middle-earth. You cannot have a naive embrace of power and still say "This is really Middle-earth." Because if it were you'd find yourself laying waste to the Shire and trying to take over Mordor. I don't believe it's very easy to set a role-playing game in Middle-earth because Tolkien's mythology is about *not* excepting such power.

**BRIAN T. MURPHY:** I think I'd like to distinguish between the standard hack-and-slay scenario where a party of adventurers go in, clear the dungeon, kill everything they see, haul out anything they can carry, and go up a level; and real *role-playing* which, as the word suggests, has to do with *playing a role* and developing a character. I don't think that this distinction is made often enough. Tolkien's world is fundamentally character based—not treasure based, not murder based—but character based. The idea is not to go in, kill everyone, haul everything out. It is to fulfill some grander goal in terms of your *character*.

**ERIC RAUSCHER:** The style of play is also affected by the game mechanics themselves. The rule system



you use lends itself more or less to the type of role-playing you prefer. If you play the type of game where you are trying to get points to go up levels, then you are going to kill things—that's what the game system is designed to encourage.

**CHRIS SEEMAN:** What is fundamentally at issue here is the more general problem of how one is to translate the themes or values expressed by a given author into the language of game mechanics. While we should remind ourselves that it is the gamemaster and players who, in the last analysis, determine the quality and style of a game, we must also recognize that unless the desired actions and motives of characters are somehow grounded in and encouraged by the rule system itself, they cannot be sustained indefinitely. The real question then becomes how a game mechanics could be devised such that Tolkien's theme of "the dethronement of power" (to take just one example) would be imaginable. Also, to Brian's distinction between hack-and-slay and character based role-playing ought to be added a distinction between the style of play adopted by this or that group of gamers on the one hand, and the implied style of play promoted by a game company on the other. It's one thing for a gamemaster and players to turn the Middle-earth setting into a simple "dungeon expedition" type of adventure—that's their affair; it's quite another matter when an exclusively licensed company like Iron Crown publishes material which is *pre-disposed* to this rather limited focus. Even the purportedly "neutral" area description modules are written with a certain bias towards that style, which often renders them of limited value to

the kind of game which involves situations more complex than penetrating an enemy stronghold or stumbling upon a lair of orcs. This is not to depreciate the latter sort of scenario as a valid element in any role-playing game, but it would be refreshing if Iron Crown were to publish something that we could point to and say: "Now *that* is what a good Middle-earth scenario ought to look like," rather than find in module after module the standard fare that could be gotten from any other fantasy setting.

**AUDIENCE:** I have two things to say. First of all, I think a role-playing game is never good when it's hack-and-slay, no matter what kind of game it is. And second of all, for me it's really difficult to get into a Middle-earth setting because I have the stories in mind (which I've read a couple of times), and I can't really take on a character which has so much in common with those I'm used to in the book. It seems to me that there is a problem in trying to replay scenes from books.

**BRIAN T. MURPHY:** If you happen to find a group of players who have never read Tolkien (and, believe it or not, they *are* out there) then it is possible to re-enact portions of the books. But in this case you as gamemaster don't take on the role of sub-creator, and I think the whole attraction of role-playing games is that they make it possible for us to do just that. But beyond Tolkien's map you have other areas of the world that are left completely undescribed, and I think that exploring these through role-playing is one of the most fruitful ways of developing a Middle-earth campaign.

**CHRIS SEEMAN:** One of Tolkien's greatest strengths as a storyteller is his skill in giving the illusion of *historicity* and concreteness to his imagined world through the use of lacunae. These might take the form of off-handed references to the blank portions of his map, as Brian has pointed out, but they can also involve allusions to other historical events or far-off times only glimpsed at in the narrative. As a gamemaster, I find this sort of lacunae the most engaging point of departure for a role-playing game. Ultimately, what draws us most as gamers are those aspects of Tolkien's narrative which awaken our desire the most. In my case, I enjoy contriving situations, plotlines and so forth which make it possible for the players to contribute in some way to the events or outcomes already narrated by Tolkien. This strategy of making the player-characters the "unsung heroes" of Middle-earth tends to eradicate the problem of a closed world. This sort of thing often requires some delicate maneuvering on the gamemaster's part, but it is one of the jobs of any good sub-creator. Regardless of what your style of play or point of departure may be, the most important thing in running a Middle-earth game is that your players *not* feel that their characters are simply walking through a cardboard world, but one in which *their* actions and choices will make a difference. In this kind of usage of Middle-earth as a role-playing setting we ourselves become participants in the ongoing process of sub-creation which Tolkien has begun. ■



# A select bibliography of Middle-earth role-playing (1982-1992)

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USA

*(If there is anything that I have missed—and I'm sure there is—please send me the references so that we can put together a comprehensive bibliography of everything in print having to do with role-playing in Tolkien's world.)*

## The South-kingdom of Gondor

- Osgiliath (forthcoming)
- Anórien Minas Tirith (8301)
  - Calenhad: A Beacon of Gondor (8203)
- Ithilien Minas Ithil (8302)
  - Gates of Mordor (8105)
  - Ghosts of the Southern Anduin (8109)
- Lebennin Sea-lords of Gondor (3400)
  - Star Spray (*White Dwarf* #?:31-36)
- Belfalas Havens of Gondor: Land of Belfalas (3300)
  - Assassins of Dol Amroth (8106)
- Morthond Erech and the Paths of the Dead (8060)
  - Haunted Ruins of the Dunlendings (8101)
- Calenardhon Isengard and Northern Gondor (2800)
  - Mouths of the Entwash (8011)
- Harad Umbar: Haven of the Corsairs (2400)
  - Pirates of Pelargir (8104)

## The North-kingdom of Arnor

- Arthedain Rangers of the North (3000)
  - Bree and the Barrow-downs (8010)
  - Dawn Comes Early (LR0)
  - Darker than the Darkness (LR1)
  - Bad Men Full o' Thievery (LR3)
  - Rogues of the Borderlands (8014)
  - Weather-top: Tower of the Wind (8201)
- Rhudaer Hillmen of the Trollshaws (8040)
  - A Sample Game Environment (*MERP*:95-105)
  - Phantom of the Northern Marches (8102)
  - Trolls of the Misty Mountains (8103)
  - Dark Mage of Rhudaer (8013)
- Cardolan Lost Realm of Cardolan (3700)
  - Thieves of Tharbad (8050)
  - Woses of the Black Wood (8107)
  - Raiders of Cardolan (8108)

## The Misty Mountains

- Angmar Empire of the Witch-king (4020)
  - Mount Gundabad (3110)
  - Goblin-gate and Eagle's Eyrie (8070)
- Elven settlements Rivendell (8080)
  - Lórien (3200)
- Khazad-dûm Moria: The Dwarven City (2900)
- Fangorn Forest Ents of Fangorn (3500)
- Dunland (3600)
  - Ghost Warriors (8016)

## Rhovanion

- Greenwood the Great Mirkwood (4010)
  - Halls of the Elven-king (8204)
  - Denizens of the Dark Wood (8111)
  - The Necromancer's Lieutenant (8113)
  - The Dawn of Unlight (*White Dwarf* #?:28-32)
- The Plains Brigands of Mirkwood (8090)
  - River Running (8114)
  - Perils of the Sea of Rhûn (8110)
  - Dagorlad and the Dead Marshes (8020)
  - Taurëfanto (*White Dwarf* 87:30-37)
- Ered Mithrin The Grey Mountains (3113)
- Mordor Gorgoroth (3112)
  - The Tower of Cirith Ungol and Shelob's Lair (8030)
  - Teeth of Mordor (8202)

## Southern Middle-earth

- The Raj Far Harad: The Scorched Land (3800)
  - Warlords of the Desert (8012)
  - Forest of Tears (8015)
  - Hazards of the Harad Wood (8112)
- The Yellow Mountains Shadow in the South (3900)
  - Greater Harad (3111)
  - Nazgûl's Citadel (8205)
- The Mûmakan The Court of Ardor (2500)

## Thematic Modules

- Riders of Rohan (3100)
- The Usurper's Reign (forthcoming)



SUBMIT NOW!

SUBMIT NOW!

**SUBMIT NOW!**

*Other Hands* needs writers as well as readers in order for it to stay afloat, and we urge you to submit whatever you would like to see in print. Although we are still in discussion with Tolkien Enterprises as to the legality of publishing actual adventure scenarios within these pages, Iron Crown do not object in principle to such material being published in *Other Hands*, so long as they are not themselves excluded from participating in our journal. Issue 2 is scheduled for publication on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1993, and June 13<sup>th</sup> will be the submission deadline for that issue (any materials received after that date will be published in the October issue). At present, we have the resources for translating submissions in Spanish, but all others must be received in readable English in order to be considered for publication.

The content of the present issue is intended as a guideline for the kinds of things we are interested in publishing, but the scope of this journal is ultimately defined by you, the subscriber. We list here some ideas for features we would like to see in the pages of future issues:

1) A letters column for those who wish to communicate and discuss about what others have written in the journal, or about any topic of gaming interest.

2) Constructive feedback on ICE products, or evaluations of *MERP* (both Iron Crown Enterprises and Tolkien Enterprises receive copies of *Other Hands*, so here is an opportunity to be heard).

3) Articles on how to treat certain aspects of Tolkien's world from the perspective of game mechanics (by a particular rule system or by rule systems in general).

4) Profiles on the inhabitants and creatures of Middle-earth (whether invented or taken from the books).

5) Articles comparing aspects of Middle-earth by analogy to the history of our primary world (and suggestions for how such comparison might be exploited in the development of a campaign).

6) "Databases," or collections of references from Tolkien's works relevant to a particular topic (e.g. magic).

7.) Advice for gamemasters on how to run a campaign that "smells and tastes like Middle-earth" (to use Eric Rauscher's expression), or reflections on your own trials and tribulations as a GM or player.

Submissions are welcome in any form (preferably legible), but are easiest to edit when received on a floppy disk. Word for Windows 2.0 is the editing software currently in use, so if there is any question as to the readability of your disk, please save your document in ASCII or text-only format and include a hard copy. All submitted materials remain the copyright of the author unless we are otherwise informed. All submissions must be sent to Chris Seeman: PO Box 1213, Novato, CA 94948 (USA). Please write me or call if you encounter any difficulties, my phone number is (415) 892-9066.

**SUBMIT NOW!**

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**P**eople of Osgiliath!' Orodreth of Morthond addressed the multitude assembled before the Dome of Stars. Your defence of this city has been a valiant one, and yet in surrendering peacefully you have lost no honour but rather have shown wisdom in a hard time. Eldacar who once was king is now fled, and so has abandoned that claim. The captains will choose a rightful successor to rule over you in his stead. We are not your enemies! See, Ornendil whom you love I have defeated in fair combat; he shall receive mercy and live without shame. Pledge to us your loyalty and you shall fare likewise.'

The crowd heard him gladly, thinking that their lives and the king's son would be spared if they submitted to the victorious rebels. Orodreth, too, was relieved at their response, for he desired to stay the rebels from exacting punishment on the citizens of Osgiliath who had supported the now-exiled king during the siege of the preceding months. He had personally led the final attack on the Great Bridge, and had captured both Ornendil and his own cousin Mordulin, who was Ornendil's betrothed. At first he had purposed to allow them to escape the city, for they had been close in friendship before the outbreak of the Kin-strife five years ago; but Angbor, Damrod and Gelmir, Orodreth's trusted companions from Linhir, urged him to bring them before the captains for judgment. Castamir, they assured him, purposed to spare them in order to gain the confidence of the people. Only in this way, they said, could Orodreth hope to save the people of Osgiliath from the vengeful captains of Pelargir.

It was a lie.

As the people debated among themselves what their answer should be, a voice was raised among the captains. It was Lord Calimon of Lebennin, the cousin of Castamir who held a grudge against Orodreth. He had bribed Orodreth's companions to persuade their leader to bring Ornendil into their power, and now his rival from Morthond had fallen into Castamir's trap.

'Orodreth,' said he, 'the captains applaud your undying efforts to avert needless bloodshed in this unfortunate strife; but it seems that in sparing Ornendil's life you have overstepped your bounds. For though Eldacar is fled as you say, he has not in truth relinquished his claim to the throne. You, Orodreth, have willfully spared the life of his son and heir who is a threat to our righteous cause; and some there are who tell us that you had even contemplated to set Ornendil free, rather than slaying him at once as you should have. What proof have we that you also do not harbour ill-designs against us? What assurance do we possess that your betrayal is not a ploy of Belfalas against the captains of Pelargir? Indeed, what token of your allegiance could you give that would dissuade us from naming you traitor?' At these words Orodreth grew silent, knowing that he had been betrayed. His treacherous companions smiled at the success of Castamir's design. Mordulin clutched Ornendil, fearing for the life of her beloved. The fate of Osgiliath hung by a thread.

But Calimon laughed, and mocked his defeated rival. 'Come now, Captain of Morthond! What better way to allay our suspicions than by finishing what you have started? Kill Ornendil, or be declared our foe!'

Then Orodreth's heart was smitten as with a blow; and he drew his sword, knowing the evil that he was about to commit for the salvation of Belfalas. For he perceived that should he failed to comply, Castamir would use his disobedience as a pretext to invade his uncle's fief of Dor-en-Ernil that had remained neutral during the war against Eldacar. Mordulin was torn screaming from Ornendil's side by Castamir's men, cursing her cousin to death and darkness for the doom he had sown; but Ornendil stood his ground, seeing his death. 'Did I not warn you that the rebels would be your undoing,' he said to Orodreth, whose blade wavered; 'now we are both trapped by this usurper's design.' But Orodreth, blinded by despair, raised his sword and cried: 'Forgive me, Ornendil, and curse my fate!' And he slew the king's son before the people. Then he cast aside his blade and, falling to his knees, raised his eyes to heaven and whispered: 'Neithan ni gerino.'

Upon seeing the murder of Ornendil, the people of Osgiliath were unable to restrain their wrath and began to attack the rebels in a mad frenzy, only to be slaughtered in heaps upon the steps of the Dome of Stars. Castamir gave orders at once to burn the city and to show no mercy to any who resisted. The Usurper's reign had begun, and the memory of evil would not be forgotten....

## The Usurper's Reign



# Gondor During the Kin-strife

## ***A Forthcoming Middle-earth Campaign Module***

*by*

***Anders Blixt - Mats Blomqvist -  
Gunnar Brolin - Sanna Fogelvik -  
Åke Rosenius - Chris Seeman -  
Dag Stålhandske***

*The Usurper's Reign* will be the largest *MERP* publication to date, containing in excess of two hundred pages of text concerning the fate of the South-

kingdom during the civil war of the Kin-strife. Drawing upon previously published area description modules, and the creative work of its collaborating authors, *The Usurper's Reign* depicts the political and military situation of Gondor's chief cities—Pelargir, Umbar, Lond Ernil, Osgiliath, Minas Anor, and Minas Ithil—during the repressive rule of Castamir the Usurper (TA 1437–1447). Some twenty, full-length adventures set in the year 1441 enable player-characters

to participate in the ongoing struggle for the destiny of the realm, whether as underground resistance groups loyal to the exiled king Eldacar, traditionalist confederates seeking to advance the hegemony of the Usurper, or as individuals out to secure their own existence (or survival) under the new regime. Fell deeds and deadly intrigues await those who would brave the tumultuous events of *The Usurper's Reign*!

***Coming Soon ...***



# Product Review

Joe Martin  
River Running  
(Middle-earth Adventure #8114)  
Iron Crown Enterprises, 1992.

One of our hopes for *Other Hands* is that it will offer reasoned evaluations of the latest (or earlier) Middle-earth gaming publications, as well as reviews of anything which might be of value to Middle-earth role-players (e.g. other books, articles, accessories, etc. related or relevant to Tolkien's writings). We look forward to Iron Crown's expanded re-issues of previously-published modules, as well as the revised MERP rule system, and hope that *Other Hands* will be able to provide constructive feedback from ICE's primary audience. So start sending in your reviews—the more the merrier!

*River Running* is the most recent MERP supplement published to date. The approximately ninety pages of text, charts, and illustrations that make up this module comprise six scenarios set in the land of Dorwinion (presumably around the seventeenth century of the Third Age). The scenarios are independent of one another, but may be run with equal ease as a series of consecutive adventures. In addition to the scenarios, a brief introduction and epilogue provide background on the inhabitants of this region and information about the wine trade for which it is famous.

The adventures contained in the module share certain common themes and plot elements. Each scenario is set or begins in one of the many small villages along the Celduin (S. River Running) which, up until now, has enjoyed a relatively serene and prosperous existence. An ill (or, in one case, an op-

portune) event transpires which in some way threatens the lives of the peace-loving villagers, and which can ultimately be rectified only if a party of wandering mercenaries is hired to set things right. In five out of the six scenarios, the minions or purposes of the Necromancer of Dol Guldur are directly or indirectly involved; in all but one of them, violent conflict is the necessary means of resolution.

The first scenario, *The Corruption of Durannon Wood*, draws on the Tolkienian theme of the malevolence of sentient forests. It tells the story of a vengeful exile from the sleepy little village of Kardavan who was cheated out of his inheritance, and who has returned from a stint at Dol Guldur to get even with his ostracizers by transforming the local forest into a miniature version of Mirkwood, spiders and all. A reward is offered for explaining why the forest has gone bad, rescuing any surviving victims of its malice, and presenting proof that its evil has been vanquished.

The second scenario, *Hijacked Wine Barge*, tells you all you ever wanted to know about trade on the Celduin, and what to do when you run into the problem of Uruk-hai river banditry. A renegade Orc band has just landed itself a valuable wine barge by ambush, and its surviving owner is attempting to raise up a posse in the nearby river depot of Caradsurga to exterminate the thieves and recover whatever cargo the Orcs have not already imbibed.

The third scenario, *The Gargoyles of Haradruin*, concerns an old, ruined fortress overlooking the small but important toll town of Karías. Another wandering band of Orcs, down on its luck, has had the misfortune of taking up residence in the crumbling ruins of Haradruin, just prior to its having become the roost for a quintet of beasties recently escaped from the spawning pits of the Necromancer.

Each of these sorcerously created creatures has its own personality and unique talents, making them a veritable commando team for terrorizing the locals. On top of all that, Haradruin is cursed with an apocalyptic prophecy that the end of the world will be nigh whenever suitably evil creatures take up residence in it, making their removal all the more pressing for the restoration of peace, harmony, and trade.

The fourth scenario, *Carnage at Forodim*, allows player-characters to assume the roles of Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli by hunting yet another marauding Orc band across the plains of Rhovanion in order to rescue innocent captives before their captors reach the safety of Mirkwood. This sleepy little village is burnt to a cinder when its potential saviors arrive on the scene, its population recently abducted by the Necromancer's cronies. A cruising trio of trigger-happy Elves far from Thranduil's halls offer their assistance in tracking down the baddies, and a pair of overzealous village lads who managed to avoid capture beckon all wandering swords to oblige themselves of the time-honored tradition of giving aid to strangers in need. A race against time begins.

The fifth scenario, *The Wounded Drake*, begins when a wild-eyed Lossoth stumbles into the small village of Pardfan with the excited (and suitably exaggerated) eye-witness account of a dying dragon in a nearby cave ripe for slaughter and "profitable dismemberment." The gullible villagers, eager for salvage rights over the worm's valuable parts (i.e. scales, horn, bones, etc.), gather a harvesting party and head off for the Iron Hills. Unfortunately, the drake is not in as bad a way as the villagers have been led to believe, and joyfully awaits its anticipated meal. Characters hoping to partake of the worm had better be quick enough to



see that the current expedition is getting the drake right where it wants them.

The sixth and final scenario, *The Man-Wolf of Galgorin*, is a classic tale of unintended lycanthropy and the struggle to cure (or destroy) the unknowing victim before he devours all of his neighbors and becomes a pawn for the Necromancer's machinations. The peace and serenity of the isolated village of Galgorin has been shattered by an unnatural plague of wolves and wargs that now infest the farmstead of the swiftly-transforming local who was bitten by a werewolf while on sojourn. Because the man is not yet wholly infected with lycanthropy, would-be heroes have the option of trying to rehabilitate, rather than kill, their opponent with the help of the village lycanthropy experts.

All six of these adventures are detailed and internally consistent, providing fairly conventional, "episodic" plots which can be played out in a single session of gaming; they may therefore serve as useful "fillers" for a lengthier campaign. There is also nothing particularly original about them—or, rather, there is little in these scenarios that gives the player a taste of what makes Dorwinion a distinctive and interesting game setting. Small villages with their idiosyncratic problems can be found practically anywhere in Middle-earth, Dorwinion included; but one might have hoped to find at least one adventure in this collection which would involve characters in what the inhabitants of Dorwinion (according to their resume) do best—namely, mercantile adventure to far-off, exotic places.

In actual fact, the epilogue of the module addresses the issue of how characters might utilize their newfound fame (or infamy) from their recent exploits to win themselves a position in the wine trade, either as

agents for the Dorwinion "Realm-master," or as holders of the coveted license to export the legendary Dorwinion vintage. *River Running* would have been a more balanced module if these adventure possibilities had been exploited as more than an afterthought, particularly since the author himself states that "arrangements for profit are more honorable than combat or adventuring for treasure" (87), which is what the greater part of these scenarios boil down to. Accordingly, we look forward to a second Dorwinion adventure module which brandishes the cry: "See the Middle-earth! Trade in wine from the Land of Maidens!" (90).

While the content of this module is in general solid and well-conceived, there are a few minor aspects of it which bear nit-picking by the Tolkien purist. The background material on Dorwinion is necessarily incomplete, and may be fleshed-out in fuller detail with the Ready-to-Run module *Perils on the Sea of Rhûn* (#8110); nevertheless, this reviewer at least would have liked to have heard something more about how the inhabitants of this land characterize themselves. We are never told, for example, what these people call themselves (certainly not "Dorwinrim," since Sindarin is presumably not their primary language). Why, moreover, is Dorwinion referred to as "the Land of Maidens?" This is never explained.

Other peoples or races are sometimes referred to in this module with unwieldy diction: Sagaths (Sagath?), Logaths (Logath?), Logathian (Logathig?), Lossadan (Lossoth?). On a two occasions, one Éothraim character is anachronistically called a Rohir (74, 80). More significant a deviation, in my view, are the references to the Necromancer as "the Nameless One" (6, 9, 32, 48), which seem to imply recognition of the Necromancer's true

identity (which is not supposed to be revealed—much less perceived by anyone—until much later in the Third Age. Similarly, my understanding is that Uruk-hai do not appear at all until after the year 2000 in Mordor—not Dol Guldur at this earlier period (33). On one occasion, there is a Dorwinion military officer who is conversant in Black Speech (37), a secret (and dead) language in the Third Age known only to Sauron's most intimate servants.

The organization and presentation of the module is reasonably clear, though it is often necessary to read a scenario in its entirety in order to understand its basic plot. A summary paragraph at the beginning of each adventure for the benefit of the game-master (such as we have provided in this review) would have been much appreciated. Moreover, because the epilogue provides the overall rationale for adventuring in Dorwinion, it might have been better placed at the opening of the module. Some of the illustrations and maps might have been more tightly integrated with their accompanying texts. The one serious organizational flaw of *River Running* is its lack of any map which locates the individual adventure sites in the "big picture" (as one who apprehends things visually, I found the elaborate written descriptions of the locations of some of these village settings difficult going). It is unfortunate that such a map was not included, since I think many will agree that Pete Fenlon's cartography is one of the high points of the *Middle-earth Role Playing* series. ■

**Reviewer: Chris Seeman**