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THE HALL OF FIRE
FAN WEBZINE

THE HALL OF FIRE

The Unofficial Lord of the Rings RPG Webzine

In This Issue

GREETINGS, SALUTATIONS...

Another issue is here for your enjoyment. We have a new author joining our ranks as well as a returning author.

As for this month's content we have some new Edges to help characters and a new Flaw to flesh them out. There is also an article about how to play games within your games.

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It's All Optional
Games Within the Game
by David "Issachar" D.

Competition is deeply ingrained in our lives. It's war, sports, business, and romance. In real life, we prefer to compete peacefully and for lower stakes, and we often turn to games to indulge the competitive spirit without bloodshed. But in the fictional world of a role-playing adventure game, competition is usually a high-stakes, even deadly, matter for the characters. Not all competition in an RPG must be involve combat, however. Introducing games-within-the-game creates interesting role-playing situations or entertaining diversions that liven up the adventure when used properly.

Narrators in the Lord of the Rings RPG face a challenge when trying to incorporate the Games skill into their chronicles, because so little information is provided in the Core Rules. This article suggests rules for resolving the outcomes of a variety of games that might fit within the world of Middle-Earth. It also describes ways in which characters and NPCs might try to cheat at games, or defeat efforts to cheat made by opponents. There are even a few ready-made scenarios involving the Games skill that you can drop into your chronicles whenever you like.

Redefining the Games Skill
Because different games draw on a broad range of abilities, I recommend treating the Games skill as a skill group, like the Lore skill. Suggested sub-skills within the Games skill group include Games/Accuracy (based on Nimbleness), Games/Bluffing (based on Bearing), and Games/Strategy (based on Wits). I'll be using these categories to present rules for various games.

Strategy Games
Strategy games typically depend heavily on the intelligence of their players to determine the outcome, although some games involve a significant measure of luck. Most of these games involve dozens of individual moves, which must be reduced to a small number of opposed skill tests. I recommend using opposed skill tests to represent the early, middle, and late phases of the game. For each victory in an earlier test, award bonuses to later tests. This represents the advantage gained by strong play early in the game, and the way it can affect the game's outcome.

For example, conduct a three-test game as follows:
Early game: Each player makes an opposed Games/Strategy [specific game] test. The winning player adds a +1 bonus to each of the next two tests for each degree of success (+1 for Complete success, +2 for Extraordinary success, etc.).
Mid-game: Each player makes an opposed Games/Strategy [specific game] test, adding the bonus from the Early game, if any. The winning player adds a +1 bonus to the final test for each degree of success (+1 for Complete success, +2 for Extraordinary success, etc.).
Late game: Each player makes an opposed Games/Strategy [specific game] test, adding bonuses from the Early game and Mid-game, if any. The player with the higher modified test result wins the game.

If you deem a particular strategy game to be especially complicated or long, you can increase the number of "phases" of the game. Similarly, a simple strategy game could be conducted with only two tests. (Remember that the fewer the tests, the more strongly the outcome is influenced by luck.)

Here is a list of strategy games suitable for Middle-earth:

Game	# Tests	Description
Chess	4	A game of abstract warfare for two players, involving capturing your opponent's pieces.
Draughts	3	Also known as checkers, another abstract "capture" game for two players.
Go	4	An ancient two-player game in which the object is to control the majority of the game board.
King's Table	3	An asymmetrical "capture" game for two players, in which one player attacks the king while the other defends.
Mills	3	Also known as Merrills or Nine Men's Morris, a two-player game of controlling the board and capturing opposing pieces.
Noddy	3	A predecessor of cribbage, a card game for two players involving making point-scoring combinations of cards.
Sennet	2	A racing game for two players in which the goal is to be the first to move one's token around the board.

BLUFFING GAMES

Bluffing games, such as liar's dice, poker, or brag, usually involve equal measures of luck and skill. The roll of dice or the cards dealt determine the strength of a player's hand, and then he must make the best use of it by bluffing the other players.

Use the following rules to simulate a typical bluffing game. This system attempts to incorporate blind luck, skill at bluffing, and skill at perceiving bluffs.

1. Each player secretly rolls 2d6 and records the result. This is the player's hand strength, representing how favorable his dice or cards are.

2. Each player makes a TN 7 Games/Bluffing [specific game] test. (A Persuade [fast talk] test may be substituted, at a -2 penalty.) For each degree of success above Marginal (a Complete success or better), a player adds +2 to his hand strength.

3. Each player makes a TN 7 Insight test. For each degree of success above Marginal (a Complete success or better), a player adds +2 to his hand strength.

4. The players compare their modified hand strength scores. The player with the highest score wins the game (or the round).

ACCURACY GAMES

Accuracy games reward manual dexterity and hand-eye coordination, with almost no element of luck involved. Examples include golf, darts, and horseshoes. Most of these games could be resolved in the same manner as strategy games, with three or four opposed Games/Accuracy tests. But since a smaller number of individual moves are usually involved in Accuracy games, it is also possible to play them out in greater detail if your group so desires. (An Accuracy game played out in this manner should still take less time than a typical combat encounter.)

Following are suggested rules for resolving a few specific Accuracy games:

Darts: In each round of the game, each player makes three TN 12 Games/Accuracy [darts] tests (Ranged Combat/Thrown Weapons [darts] tests may be substituted instead). For each degree of success above Marginal (a Complete success or better), the player adds a +2 bonus to his final score. Add the results of all three tests and any bonuses earned. The player who scores the highest total wins the round.
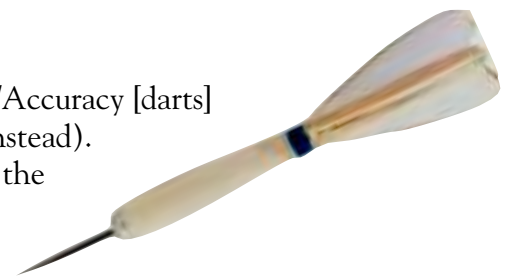
Golf (quick play): Assume a nine-hole course with a par of 3 for each hole. Each player starts at par, with a total score of 27. Each player makes nine Games/Accuracy [golf] tests at TN 12. For each degree of success above Marginal (a Complete success or better), the player subtracts 1 from his total score. For each degree of failure, he adds 1 to his total score. The player with the lowest total score wins the game.

Golf (slower play): For each hole, conduct an extended Games/Accuracy [golf] test at TN 30 for a simple (par 3) hole, TN 40 for a challenging (par 4) hole, or TN 50 for a very difficult (par 5) hole. Count the number of tests required to reach the TN of the extended test and record that number as your score (the number of strokes you took). You score a hole-in-one if the test result on your first stroke is TN 25 for a par 3 hole, TN 30 for a par 4 hole, or TN 35 for a par 5 hole.

Horseshoes: Each player throws four horseshoes on his turn, making 4 Games/Accuracy [horseshoes] tests. If a test beats TN 15, it is a ringer and the player scores 3 points. If a test beats TN 12, it is a leaner and scores 1 point. The best test result (between both players) that is lower than TN 12 also scores 1 point.

The first player to score at least 21 points wins the game, but the winner must win by at least 2 points, or play continues for another turn until there is at least a 2-point margin of victory.

Jackstraws (Pick-up-Sticks): A handful of straws (10 per player) is dropped into a pile on the table. On his turn, a player rolls 4d6 to determine the TN of his Games/Accuracy [jackstraws] test (a Legerdemain [prestidigitation] or Legerdemain [pick pocket] test may be substituted). He then makes the test to lift a straw (usually the topmost) from the pile without disturbing any other straw. If he beats the TN, no straws are disturbed and the current player may take another turn.

If he fails to beat the TN, his test result becomes the TN of an Observe (spot) test that each other player makes to notice the movement of a straw. If another player noticed a straw move, the current player still gets to keep the previous straw, and play passes to the next player.

The game ends when the last straw is removed from the pile; the winner is the player who extracted the most straws.

Marbles: Players decide who goes first by making opposing Games:Accuracy (marbles) checks to shoot a marble as close as possible to a line drawn ten feet away. The highest-scoring player goes first, followed by the second-highest, etc. A circle is then drawn on the ground, and thirteen marbles are placed in an X shape in the center of the circle (one marble in the center and three on each arm of the X).

A player makes his first shot from outside the circle's edge. With his shooter, he tries to knock a marble out of the circle (TN 12 test). If the player succeeds, he shoots again from the location where his shooter stopped. For each degree of success greater than Marginal (Complete success or better), the player gets a +1 bonus on his next test, reflecting the advantage gained from having the shooter stop inside the circle and close to the other marbles.

If the test result is a Failure, the player fails to knock a marble from the circle, and his shooter leaves the circle. If the test result is a Complete Failure or worse, the player's shooter remains within the circle and is vulnerable to a shot from an opponent. The opponent, instead of shooting at a marble as normal, may try instead to knock the shooter out of the circle (a TN 12 test). If the test succeeds, the player whose shooter was knocked out of the circle is eliminated from the game.

Barring player eliminations, the winner is the player who knocks the most marbles out of the circle.

Snapdragon: A usually noncompetitive parlor game in which players take turns snatching raisins out of a bowl of brandy that has been set on fire. On each player's turn, the player snatches a flaming raisin from the bowl (a TN 10 Swiftness test) and pops it in his mouth (a TN 8 Stamina test). Each failed test results in the player taking 1 point of damage. Typically, players drop out of the game voluntarily after suffering singed fingertips or tongues.

Lyin', Cheatin' Scoundrels

In the absense of regulatory organizations to standardize and monitor gambling venues and paraphrenalia, it's up to the players to determine whether or not one of them is cheating. Cheaters often rely on cards or dice that are rigged to provide favorable results. If you, the Narrator, want to introduce those elements into your game-within-the-game, here are some suggestions.

Loaded Dice: Wooden dice can be carved around a heavy inclusion in the wood, like a pebble. Dice can also be hollowed out and filled with wax and a small weight. When held in the hand, the wax melts and causes the weight to drift down. Differences in the rounding of some edges and slightly off-square faces can also produce loaded dice.

Creating a set of loaded dice requires a Craft test. The result of this test is the TN of the Observe [spot] or Observe [touch] test required to detect the tampering. This Observe test is made at a -2 penalty unless the player is specifically examining the dice to determine if they are fair or not. Any Games skill relating to dice

games grants an affinity bonus to the Observe test of a player who examines the dice. The bonus is +1 for every three ranks in the Games skill, rounding down.

Marked Cards: Cheaters can make subtle markings on the backs or edges of cards to recognize a card's value without seeing its face. A Conceal test is made to mark the cards. The result of this test is the TN of the Observe [spot] test required to detect the tampering. This Observe test is made at a -2 penalty unless the player is specifically examining the cards. Any Games skill relating to card games grants an affinity bonus to the Observe test of a player who examines the cards. The bonus is +1 for every three ranks in the Games skill, rounding down.

Punishment for Cheaters

When cheaters are exposed, different societies exact varying degrees of punishment upon the perpetrators. In a lenient society, or one without effective law enforcement, a cheater might simply bear the burden of his reputation, and find that others are unwilling to play with him.

A common punishment for cheaters is public humiliation, such as being bound for a day in the stocks. Cheaters are normally required to repay their victims in the amount they were defrauded, and possibly a bit extra. Sterner punishment, such as might be found in the great cities of Gondor, would include imprisonment for days or weeks.

In some societies, such as the stricter Dwarven enclaves, cheating at games is a serious violation of the social code of honour, and cheaters might be exiled from their homeland, their property forfeit to the government. It is rumoured that among the Southrons, cheaters often suffer the loss of an ear or are branded on the cheek, forever marking them as untrustworthy.

SCENARIOS FOR YOUR CHRONICLE

Here are a handful of plot hooks and situations that you can use to involve your players in games within the LotR role-playing game.

A Fair Day on the Greens

Avid golfers from all over the Westfarthing are gathering in Michel Delving for a three day tournament of golf. Widely expected to win the tourney is young Holman Chubbs of Nobottle, whom no one expected to show an ounce of talent at anything, and who has stunned the community by outplaying two long-time golfers in the preliminary matches. Chubbs is an outsider, from a poor family, and he has no friends among the circle of long-time players. Despite his successes, he is often left alone, and would welcome a bit of friendly company.

Big Folk, who occasionally travel through Michel Delving, are not permitted to compete in the tournament, although a few confident young Hobbits might challenge them to a friendly nine-hole match before and between the scheduled official games. By custom, the loser buys a round of drinks at the inn that evening.

The Game of War

A low-ranking nobleman, who earned his title by rising through the ranks of the military, is an avid player of the game King's Table. He prizes the game as a means of cultivating patience and strategic thinking, and admires those who play it well. He might invite an intelligent or military-minded PC to indulge him in a game or two. If the PC plays well, the nobleman will be impressed and might offer help, information, and hospitality.

Service While You Wait

It's a slow day at the local smithy, and while the young journeyman works on re-shoeing the party's horses, the blacksmith offers to play a few rounds of horseshoes against one of the PCs. To make things interesting, he might knock off a few coppers from the price of his services if the PC wins the match...which few challengers can do.

Straw Poll

A grizzled, hawk-eyed man sits in the corner of an inn's public room, watching with interest as a few young men play at jackstraws. After the games are over and the players disperse, he approaches the winner and mentions that he knows of some work at which such a nimble-fingered person could make a bit of money. A group of talented men who recently lost one of their number -- fell sick of a sudden, the poor fella did! -- is looking for someone to help them complete a job within the week. Interested?

Merchants' Diversions

Travelling Dwarf traders have stopped their carts in the shade along the side of the road to take a little refreshment. As they eat, they scratch out a track in the dirt and divide it into squares, drawing a different Dwarf-rune beside each space. This is a traditional racing game, which they play with a set of old worn dice. The rules are simple but involve a bit of strategy in addition to blind luck. The merchants are happy to play against newcomers, and exchange news and offer "bargain" prices on sundry items while they play. If they lose, they are rather ungracious in defeat, and make insinuations that the opponent might have tricked them, especially if the PC used his own dice.

Cheaters Never Prosper

An altercation has broken out in an inn, over a dice game in which the stakes grew rather higher than usual. The loser, in a furious rage, accuses the winner of cheating with loaded dice. A couple of onlookers try the dice and agree that they are loaded, but the winner insists that the dice are fair and his accusers are too drunk to tell good dice from bad. The argument is on the verge of breaking into a fight -- or more likely a lynching, since no one is on the side of the winner and the loser is a popular local with several burly friends behind him.

Fan Flavour
New Traits
New Edges

Strong Gut
by Nolmir

Whether due to natural gift or repeated exposures, you are especially resilient to ingested poisons.

Requisite: Stamina 3+

Effect: When making a Stamina test to resist the effects of poison, you receive a bonus of +2 to your test result (CRB pg. 246).

Improvement: Yes. You may take this edge multiple times, each time granting an addition +2 to Stamina tests to resist the effects of poisons, up to a maximum +8 bonus.

'Keeps His Liquor'
by Nolmir

Either through natural gift or repeated use, you are especially resistant to the effects of alcohol.

Requisite: Stamina 3+

Effect: When making a Stamina test to resist the effects of alcohol, you receive a bonus of +2 to your test result (HOF 55:3-4).

Improvement: Yes. You may take this edge multiple times, each time granting an addition +2 to Stamina tests to resist the effects of alcohol, to a maximum +8 bonus.

New Flaws

'Can't hold his liquor'
by Micah A. Walles (Razor77@halloffire.org)

Alcohol has a greater effect on you then on most.

Effect: When making a Stamina test to resist the effects of alcohol, you receive a penalty of -2 to your test result.

Improvement: Yes. You may take this flaw multiple times, each time causing an addition -2 to Stamina tests to resist the effects of alcohol, to a maximum -8 penalty.

WHAT'S OUT THERE

This is a list of Web sites along with Decipher's official Web sites. We have found they supply useful Lord of the Rings game information.

THE HALL OF FIRE WEBZINE http://halloffire.org **THE HALL OF FIRE WIKI** http://wiki.halloffire.org **DECIPHER'S LORD OF THE RINGS RPG HOME** http://lotrrpg.fanhq.com **ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ARDA** http://www.glyphweb.com/arda/default.htm **FAN MODULES FOR MIDDLE-EARTH** http://groups.yahoo.com/group/fan-modules **SCOTT'S RPG CENTRAL** http://www.geocities.com/scott_metz/ **CHRONICLES OF THE NORTH** http://roleplay.avioc.org/ **MERP.COM** http://www.merp.com **OTHER MINDS MAGAZINE** http://www.othermindsmagazine.com	**THE MAD IRISHMAN** http://www.mad-irishman.net **THE LAST ALLIANCE** http://thelastalliance.com **RPG TOOLS FOR DECIPHER'S CODA GAMES** http://groups.yahoo.com/group/rpgtools/ **THE STEWARD AND THE KING** http://www.stewardandking.net **THE TOWER HILLS** http://homepage.mac.com/jeremybaker/towerhills **TREK-RPG.NET** http://forum.trek-rpg.net/index.php **CODA WEBZINE REPOSITORY** http://groups.yahoo.com/group/coda_webzine **THE ONE RING.COM** http://www.theonering.com/ **THE ONE RING.NET** http://www.theonering.net

CALLING ALL GAMERS!

Interested in submitting…

- A mini or side adventure?
- New creatures, or fell beasts?
- New Orders or Elite Orders?
- Racial / Order packages?
- NPC's?
- Weapons / equipment / magical items?
- Fan Art?

If so, write to us for details on submission submissions@halloffire.org with 'Fan Content' in the subject line. Please include your name and/or pseudonym (handle/online identity) and email address(es) with which one of our editors may contact you.

Please note that if you would like to submit a mini-adventure, Decipher will not consider it for publishing.

Fancy yourself a writer or artist and would like to contribute to the webzine?

If so, write to us at submissions@halloffire.org with 'Writer' in the subject line. One of the editors will get back to you with details about writing for THE HALL OF FIRE.

Want to know what the submission guide lines are?

Visit http://wiki.halloffire.org/Submission_Information for the current submission guide lines.

If you would like to post an advertisement for:

- A local or online RPG that you are hosting
- An RPG convention or tournament
- Or any events pertaining to The Lord of the Rings RPG

Write to us at ads@halloffire.org with 'Ad' in the subject line along with your advertisement. The advertisement must be less than 100 words and any graphic to go with it must be no more than 1' x 1'.