

The Red Book of Westmarch: The Official Council of Elrond Newsletter

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For the *Middle-earth
Collectible Card
Game* Community



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The Fellowship: COMMENTS FROM THE COE

Five Birds with One Stone: the Case for a New CoE Constitution

by Mark Alfano, Chair CoE

Greetings, MECCG-ers, and welcome to the maiden voyage of the new Council of Elrond Newsletter. We, the members of 2006-7, are working hard to revitalize both the CoE itself and the international MECCG community. Part of that goal involves connecting all players and collectors with common information and ideas and a sense of fellowship, and that is the role of this newsletter. Be sure to look for more CoE projects at [http://www.councilofelrond.org/!](http://www.councilofelrond.org/) In this newsletter you will find many articles for our different columns, listed at left. You can submit to the newsletter by following the guidelines on the last page. This article will be devoted to a direct address from the

Council of Elrond to you, our constituents. If there are any topics you think the CoE should address or explain, please feel free to write myself at mark.alfano@gmail.com.

The topic of this article is a number of justifiable complaints about the status of ME:CCG.

(1) Some national councils are totally defunct (e.g. Russia, France); others are isolated from the rest of the community (e.g. Poland); still others are disconnected from the contemporary understanding of the rules (e.g. Spain).

(2) The meta-game is becoming static: there

CONDUCT AND HOBBITSHIP

Sportsmanship and Take-backs by Jonathan "the Brown" Yost

Have you ever pondered what John Ronald Reuel Tolkien would think watching a Middle Earth tournament? Tolkien enjoyed card games like bridge and solitaire and I bet he also would have enjoyed this game we all love, but one aspect I'm sure he would have deplored is poor sportsmanship. One of the little known advantages of tournaments of a game like this, with its relatively small following and limited prize support, is the lack of appeal to those that seek to do

anything to win. I've found in my travels and many MECCG tournaments that almost all Middle Earth players are in it for the love of the works and the love of the game, not for the prizes or the glory of being crowned champion. If you've ever had the misfortune of playing a tournament with a large cash prize, you'll know what I'm talking about. Unfortunately in that situation, poor sportsmanship isn't just bad manners. To some, it's part of their strategy. It's a tactic to



SAM'S GARDEN OF SIMPLIFIED RULES

Introducing the “Play and Examples” File, and a tutorial on hazard limits

by Joe Bisz

This has been a great year for the Middle-earth community, and it's only getting better. In addition to Spain hosting a very successful Worlds tournament and player participation on the meccg.net forums increasing, there has also been a new Virtual Cards expansion released for playtesting, this newsletter with all of its great columns, and finally, after two years of effort, the Play and Examples File.

What is the Play and Examples File? You know all those COE Rules Digests buried online, hopelessly un-searchable and never moved to the CRF? Remember the clarifications buried in rulebooks and Dark Minions Inserts? Well, I have collected a vast amount of these rules and interpretations and put them all in the Play and Examples File, and if that wasn't enough, listed long examples to explain the finer details, point by point, and the document is fully searchable. Also, the document has been reviewed by many of the game's best rules judges, and as of Version 3.0, the Play file is “approved and recommended” to the Middle-earth community through the judge certification program. Wondering about the tricky ways Paths of the Dead can be played? Not sure how attacks on a non-creature card work? Do you know exactly what “immediately” means? It is the hope of the Council of Elrond that players who are caught in the labyrinth of rules confusions will find relief by reading the file as needed. Start reading the Play file online at meccg.net on the [Rules forum](#) or the [Judge Certification](#) forum.

For the rest of my article, with a little inspiration from the simple hobbit ways of Sam, I'd like to break down for you some of the most complicated timing mechanics in this game (or at least try!). I will be mostly quoting from the Play file, so this should give you a good idea of what you'll find inside those page too!

The topics I'll cover are: declaration and resolution of a card, and the related topic of hazard limits. There has recently been a new interpretation of the way hazards resolve. Well, not so new to the Europeans, but new to most Americans. So pay attention!

Resolution

There are four states a card or effect can be in:

- 1) Not yet declared (a card in hand or effect on table)
- 2) Declared but not resolved (also called “played”) (opponent may respond at this point, and then you take turns responding, until nobody wants to

respond)

- 3) Declared and resolved
- 4) Declared and fizzled

- For example: An example of *not yet declared* would be if I had River in my hand and was wondering whether it was worth playing on my opponent's company of two untapped scouts and one untapped ranger. Once I made up my mind and placed it on the table, I am *declaring* the play of the card River, but it hasn't resolved and taken effect yet, and this gives my opponent a chance to play something in response, such as a Many Turns and Doublings to lower the hazard limit. If neither my opponent nor myself play a card in response to the River, the River is considered *resolved*, and all of its effects take place.
- Another example: Hazards like Reluctant Final Parting have effects that are triggered by passive conditions and so they resolve slightly differently. Once I place Reluctant Final Parting on the table, I am *declaring* its play, and if nobody responds to it, the card will *resolve* when its chain-of-effects ends. Once it resolves, it immediately sets up an effect which might become triggered by a passive condition [COE 74]. If my opponent did have an ally that met the conditions of Reluctant Final Parting, the effect of Reluctant Final Parting would become automatically *declared* (but not resolved yet). My opponent could now respond to the effect being declared by *declaring*, for instance, a Marvels Told targeting Reluctant Final Parting. If neither player responded to the Marvels, the Marvels would *resolve* first, discarding Reluctant Final Parting. Now the effect of Reluctant Final Parting should resolve, but the hazard is no longer there, so it fizzles and has no effect.

Hazard Limit (and an example using Many Turns and Doublings)

The CRF says: “You check the hazard limit at declaration and at resolution. At declaration there must be no more hazards declared than the hazard limit. At resolution there must be no more hazards resolved than the hazard limit.” This means you must have fewer hazards declared than the hazard limit in order to *declare* a new hazard. You must have no more hazards declared than the hazard limit in order to

resolve a hazard. Hazards that are declared but not yet resolved still count in the tally for checking at resolution. Keep in mind that a card that has been *declared* in a chain-of-effects is still considered *declared* until the card resolves or fizzles; i.e. hazards that are declared but not yet resolved still count in the tally for checking “number of hazards declared” at the resolution of a hazard. This ruling interpretation is different then the way many North American players have been playing, but is considered official.

- **For example:** Gates of Morning is on table and Beorn and Legolas are in a company together. As soon as their organization phase ends their hazard limit is set to two. Their new site, Hermit’s Hill, is flipped over. The hazard player wonders why anyone would move to Hermit’s Hill; then plays a Cave Drake, and gives his opponent a chance to respond. His opponent declines. The hazard player then makes what is probably a poor strategic decision, and plays a River in response to his Cave Drake, thinking that Beorn will tap for the River and be at -1 prowess against the Cave Drake. In response to the river, the opponent plays Many Turns and Doublings. In the order that the cards were declared, the chain-of-effects is now:

Cave Drake
 River
 Many Turns and Doublings

Many Turns resolves first. The hazard limit becomes 1. The hazard player checks River at resolution. There are two hazards declared now, but only one allowed. (This is because the Cave Drake is still considered *declared* until it resolves or fizzles.) That’s not allowable, so River fizzles. The hazard player checks Cave-drake. Now there’s only 1 hazard declared, so Cave-drake resolves successfully and attacks the company.

- **Another example:** Gates of Morning is on table and Elrond and Elladan are in a company together. As soon as their organization phase ends their hazard limit is set to two. Their new site, Bag End, is flipped over. The hazard player plays a River, and gives his opponent a chance to respond. His opponent responds with a Many Turns and Doublings, and gives the hazard player a chance to respond. The hazard player is not very experienced in chains-of-effects or the game of chess, and so

makes a quick judgment: if he lets the Many Turns resolve, the hazard limit will be one, and his River will still resolve. The hazard player declines to respond. The resource player responds with another copy of Many Turns. The hazard player is now quick to realize that the two copies of Many Turns will both resolve before his River, reducing the hazard limit to 0, and his River will have no allowable hazards left and will fizzle. So, thinking that he’s getting the hang of this chain-of-effects thing, the hazard player (smartly) decides to play his second copy of River in response. Unfortunately, the resource player has been playing the same deck for years, and so expertly plays his third copy of Many Turns. After some puzzling over the mess on the table the hazard player realizes that the chain-of-effects and the order the cards were declared looks like this:

River
 Many Turns and Doublings
 Many Turns and Doublings (second copy)
 River
 Many Turns and Doublings (third copy)

Since the cards resolve in reverse order, Many Turns and Doublings (third copy) resolves first, reducing the hazard limit from 2 to 1. Now River would resolve, but first it checks to see what the hazard limit is. The hazard limit is 1, and at this point there are still two hazards declared, so River fizzles. Now Many Turns and Doublings (second copy) resolves, reducing the hazard limit to 0. Now Many Turns and Doublings (third copy) resolves, reducing the hazard limit to 0, since the hazard limit cannot go below zero. Now River would resolve, but first it checks to see what the hazard limit is. The hazard limit is 0, and at this point there is 1 hazard declared, so River fizzles. The hazard player shakes his head in grief, and wonders if there was any way he could have played that better. (Not really.)

Whew! That wasn’t too bad, was it? Remember, if it gets confusing, always reread the examples.





TEST OF LORE: TOURNAMENT-LEVEL AND FUN DECKS

The “Complete” Resource & Hazard Strategies Taxonomy, including Kris van Beurden’s deck *A Short Game* by Mark Alfano

Are you sick of playing 3 Risky Blow, 3 Marvels Told, Orcrist, Glamdring, and Wormsbane? Would you like to play a high-interaction deck that scares your opponent out of his pants? Does your opponent snore when you play Cave-Drakes and Sellswords? Well, your worries are over! Now you can easily discover the myriad alternative strategies -- resource and hazard, hero and minion -- available in the MECCG universe. All you need to do is follow [this link](#) for resources and [this one](#) for hazards, and new horizons will unfold before your very eyes.

Many players have contributed to this project, and all deserve our appreciation -- even those who only said “I’d like to do something like this kind of deck... can you help?” This article, which in the future will be devoted to the in-depth exploration of a particular deck from the taxonomy, lauds one such player this month by focusing on his deck. The man of the hour is Kris van Beurden, and his deck is entitled *A Short Game* (take a look at the deck before reading further).

Kris’s deck is incredibly fast and powerful. Its aim is to exhaust in three (yes, only three!) turns and call the council immediately. Why? Well, a number of reasons. Against One Ring opponents, such play forces the dunker to attempt to play Cracks of Doom on his third or fourth turn (depending on who went first). Against fallen wizards, *A Short Game* is likely to exhaust before the badbeard can play all his stage cards, leaving the unlucky wizard with only 1 Marshalling Point per card in at least some categories. And against minions, the deck can keep up with the speed of even such monstrous decks as the *Return of the Faithless Stewards*.

To play Kris’s deck, you only need **three rares**: Return of the King, The White Tree, and Tom Bombadil, though of course you will probably want a few more for your hazard portion. But perhaps simply looking at the deck list online doesn’t give you a proper idea of its potential.... The opening company is Aragorn with Cram, Beretar with Cram, Oin, and Haldir. That may seem more or less standard, but what happens next is the trick: each character heads off in his own direction -- Aragorn to Isengard, Haldir to Cameth Brin, Oin to the Old Forest, and Beretar to Bree. Without playing any Short Rests, that gives you only 6 cards, but if you play 1 Short Rest, you receive 13 cards. With two Short Rests, you will draw 20, and with all three you bring to your hand a whopping 27 cards! What’s more, if you manage to play Master of Esgaroth as well, then one of the characters can

move again, drawing even more cards.... The mind boggles at the possibilities.

In any case, Beretar’s only job is to play the Rangers of the North. Either Oin or Haldir should pick up Tom Bombadil. And Aragorn (joined eventually by Saruman, whose home site is Isengard) snatches a Sapling of the White Tree. At this point, you can use the boys in Eriador to kill creatures (a cave-drake is surprisingly easy prey with a single character and a Risky Blow). Only the latter company is relevant later: they next head to Minas Tirith, where the King Returns, the White Tree is planted, the Palantir is brought out and aligned, and Saruman meets by chance a 3-MP character.

It may not seem like much, but that’s already 10 character points, 3 faction points, 3 ally points, 2 item points, and 7 miscellaneous points, which comes out to a grand total of 25 -- just enough to call the council. With a good draw, you can do this easily in just two turns! With an acceptable draw, the barrage of points is launched on turn 3. Of course, if you need more points later, you need only look to the sideboard for Nenselde or the Knights of Dol Amroth.

There are a number of other subtleties to the deck, which Kris would be happy to explain to you if you run into him on GCCG, but the overall plan is now clear. If you still think it seems weak, the only solution is to give it a try. Kris did, and he won [LURE 2006!](#)

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LORE OF THE RINGS: TOLKIEN THE AUTHOR

Arachnomania in Middle-earth

by Wolfgang Penetsdorfer

I am starting with a column that gives insight into Tolkien's life and his works, given the topic is not totally alien to our beloved card game.

There are many spiders in the middle-earth tales, some of them quite prominent. Ungoliant is the one who is incited by Morgoth to destroy the trees of Valinor that gave light to the world. In The Hobbit there are the Great Spiders of Mirkwood, that brought Bilbo and the dwarves into a dangerous situation. Then there is Shelob in The Lord of the Rings, who lies in wait for Frodo and Sam at Cirith Ungol. She is also known as a descendant of Ungoliant and as the ancestress of the Mirkwood spiders; thus she is the genealogical link between the very first spider Ungoliant down to the lesser creatures we all know. Finally also the tale of Roverandom is not devoid of spiders: masses of them are living on the moon, where they are chasing the moon beams and devour everything that encounters them.

So one might think that Tolkien has a love for spiders, since his use of those creatures extends beyond having some scary monsters in a thrilling tale.

SPIDERS IN MYTHOLOGIE

All over the world spiders take an important role in the myths of various cultures. Best known to us is probably the tale of the girl Arachne, who has dares to challenge Athene for a duel at the loom. After the woman has won, the goddess became enraged in such a manner, that she transformed her into a spider, so she is able to pursue her artistic skill for all eternity.

The Myths of the Hopi Indians know a spider woman called Kogyangwuti. She servant to the earth creating sound, motion and life on it and also filling it with meaning and purpose.

There are other indian tales telling of a spider, who brought fire to the world, or who gives shape to all things and holds them together with her net.

Dream catchers have become very common during the last years in our sleeping rooms. They are rooted in an indian legend, where a man, who is haunted by evil powers in his sleep, is instructed by a spider to built a dream catcher, which will watch over his sleep letting the good dreams pass through only.¹

In the mythology of India the spider's web is a symbol for Maya, the divine power that both sets up and shapes the world. One presupposes the other continually. Thus in the middle of the web there is a spider, stylized to a horizontal eight, a symbol for infinity. The radial-symmetric designed web corresponds with the cosmic order, in the middle of which the spider as a weaver keeps alive this order and cares for its onward renewal.

In the Norse (northern Germanic) mythology there are the Norns: three females, who are weaving the fates of all livings. Urd² is responsible for starting the thread of life (reflecting the past), while Verdandi³ weaves the individual pattern of life into the thread (the presence), and finally Skuld⁴ cuts it in due time (the future).

There is another spider woman in the myth of Atlantis. After the downfall of the continent it is her task to lead the inhabitants to a new home.

Finally there are oceanic legends speaking of a god Nareau, who appears in two different manifestations: on the one hand as an old spider, who creates, and on the other hand as a young spider who shapes.

So far this rather rough overview over some myths, which shows, that the spider as a mythological figure is known to a very large extent among all sorts of cultures. Some recurring motifs are eye-catching, such as the spider being a woman with creative power.⁵

Of course there are two sides of every coin. Especially during the middle ages the spider becomes demonized as a sort of witch animal. One might think that a female creative power does not fit Christian patterns.⁶ The superstitious belief in central Europe tells of women who are able to change into spiders carrying off virgins used for ritual sacrifices. Also the Anglo-Saxons know of impish spiders.

In the Japanese mythology there is a gigantic spider demon who is defeated by the fabled hero Kintaro.

This negative picture of spiders is also used in modern psychoanalysis. Thus Sigmund Freud takes the spider as a symbol for the devouring womanliness, that lures and excites, but then prevents thriving. The very same idea was used before by Friedrich Nietzsche, calling God a spider.

From the beginning Ungoliant was also called “Gwerlum” or “Wirilome” (“Gloomweaver”), which is very fitting, since the english word “gloom” reflects both dimness as well as sadness. And though there is no philological proof, the sound of –lum and lome reminds of the english word loom. That leaves gwe- and wiri- as a first syllabe, and both have a significant similarity of sound to the scotish “weird” or the german “werden”. So Ungoliant also becomes a weaver of fate filled with sorrow and gloom.

To decipher the name of Shelob is much easier. Tolkien himself explained it in one of his letters to his son Christopher: “Do you think Shelob is a good name for a monstrous spider creature? It is of course only “she+lob” (=spider)⁸, but written as one, it seems to be quite noisome.” Tolkien quite liked the german translation Kankra, which reminds of the english and latin word “cancer” with the typical female suffix –a.

Finally even The Hobbit is not devoid of Tolkien’s love for etymologies. When Bilbo sings his taunting verses on the spiders, he calls them “lazy lob”, “attercop” and “tomnoddy”. No need to explain the first. Both “attercop” and “tomnoddy” are oldenglish names for spider as well as for a foolish person. Finally “edderkopp” means spider in Norwegian.



NOTES

¹ In fact there are many different indian stories about the origin of dream catchers, but the central meaning is always the same.

² Urd derives her name from the german syllable “ur-” (“prime” in english) as well as from “Erde” (“earth” english).

³ The name of Werdandi may be derived from the german “werden” (“to become” in english), but also the old scotish word “weird” or “wyrd” meaning “fate”. Since the story of Beowulf is so important for Tolkien’s fiction, let’s have quotation out of it here: „Gloomy was his [Beowulf’s] spirit there, death-eager, wandering; the weird was at hand, that was to overcome the old man there.”

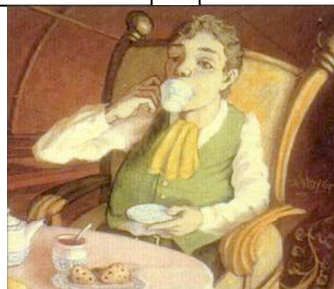
⁴ Skuld gave the skalds their name. As the shamanic priests of their peoples the are known to be close with the god death.

⁵ Which reminds of the proverb: “If you wish to live and thrive, let the spider run alive.”

⁶ Despite the story in the Apocryphs, where a spider hides the Holy Family under her cobweb, when they have been on the way to Egypt fleeing the Roman pursuers.

⁷ Cf. Cirith Ungol, Torech Ungol

⁸ it’s more fitting to think of the oldenglish “lobbe” (=spider) and not of the modern word “lobster”.





SARUMAN'S PALANTIR: THOUGHTS ON THE PLAYING FIELD

New Strategies for the Virtual Cards at NA Championships
by Mark Alfano

In preparation for North American Championships in Princeton, Joe Bisz and I created a set of 39 “Virtual Cards.” Virtual Cards are a way to produce expansions for the Middle-earth card game without publishing new physical cards. Essentially, we have taken 39 existing cards and invented new game texts for them that have utilize completely different strategies and open up the possibility of brand new deck types. Since these card texts exist in a downloadable document on the internet, they are called “Virtual.” Have you ever wanted to play Pirate as a Minion player? Ever dreamed of defeating Sauron by keeping the One Ring and using force of arms? Well, both these decks are possible now. Think that Sauron and the Balrog are too powerful? Wish you could do something more about squatters and Fallen-wizards? We’ve added some cards that might come to your aid. This is an unofficial expansion to MECCG—it is not a released set. However, it is our hope that this side event will generate lots of player feedback on these cards from playtesting, so that in the future an official expansion to the Middle-earth game can be seriously contemplated. If you are interested, check out <http://www.meccg.net/nachamps06/> for the card texts and [the forum page](#) for discussion.

Some of the new decks are obvious, e.g., virtual Morannon lets you use the One Ring to kick Sauron’s ass, and Horns, Horns, Horns allows you to reenact the muster of Rohan. Others stand out less on the surface, though they could be just as powerful in the right deck. Here is a list of just a few of the decks I would be excited to see on Friday during the Virtual Card Tournament of NA Championships:

Hero Decks

- (1) Underdeeps deck with Ancient Stair and Wondrous Maps;
- (2) Alert the Folk, Armory, Rebuild the Town, Bard;
- (3) Legolas, Gimli, Annalena, Oin, 3x Crept Along Carefully;
- (4) Fair Travels in Dark, Fair Travels in Shadow, Tower Raided;
- (5) Ent-Draughts, Elrond or Galadriel or Thrain, Fireworks, Armory/Jewel of Beleriand;
- (6) Alliance of Free Peoples, Army of the Dead, Token of Goodwill;
- (7) Wandering Wizard with virtual Vanishment.

Minion Decks

- (A) Lieutenant of Morgul, Taladhan, Snaga; Smart and Secret, Diversion, Well Preserved, Freeze the Flesh;
- (B) Black Numenoreans, Black Horse, Umbarean Corsairs, Usriev of Treachery;
- (C) Open to the Summons, Baduila, Euog, Baugur – a covert Balrog company with two leaders!

Fallen Wizard Decks

- (I) Fallen Saruman, First of the Order, Never Refuse, Shameful Deeds, Lotsa Spells;
- (II) Fallen Gandalf, Narya, Heart Grown Cold, Plotting Ruin, Smoke on the Wind, Burning Rick Cot and Tree;

Hazard Strategies

- (a) Crebain, Dwarf of Waw, the Riddle Game;
- (b) Withered Lands, Fever of Unrest, Half an Eye Open.

4



The Shire Season: Tournament Calendar

August							September						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5						1	2
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
27	28	29	30	31			24	25	26	27	28	29	30

August

- ✚ Gaming at Gencon, August 11th
- ✚ MEECG North American Nationals, August 25th through 27th (<http://www.meccg.net/nachamps06/>)

September

- ✚ Christian Jentgens will be hosting the **Swiss National Tournament** on August 27th.
- ✚ The Nordic Cup will be held the 9th-10th of September in Stockholm, Sweden. It is organized by the Swedish Council of the Variags and the Finnish Council of Barad-dûr. (<http://www.meccg.net/dforum/viewtopic.php?t=1875>)

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That's all folks! But The Red Book is always looking for more articles about MECCG or Tolkien. We try to fit articles into already existing columns, such as our ethics (Conduct and Hobbiship) column and Thoughts on the Playing Field column, and you don't have to be a Council member to submit. One community member submitted to the column "Play of the Month," and described a particularly unbelievable moment in his MECCG game. Submission is not a guarantee of publication. All submissions, letters, and correspondence to The Red Book may be edited and published unless the piece says otherwise. We also welcome letters to the editor! For length and format guidelines and more detailed descriptions of our columns and the kinds of pieces we're looking for, please go online to <http://www.councilofelrond.org/forum/viewtopic.php?t=7>. Email the editor: joebisz@verizon.net.