

The Official MECCG Newsletter

Expanded to
40 pages!

September 27, 1998

THE OFFICIAL MECCG NEWSLETTER

Issue 3

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THE OFFICIAL MECCG NEWSLETTER

Letters from the Guard House

James Kight

Well, as you can tell by the title, this is my first issue as the Official MECCG Newsletter. Thanks to everyone for your words of encouragement. This issue is definitely my best effort so far, and I hope that you enjoy it to the fullest.

As you also might notice, this issue is substantially larger than the previous issues. This is because of the plethora of submitted articles that are coming in.

Now that I am not writing all of the articles, I can facilitate a larger amount of information as I am not trying to come up with everything in this Newsletter. My personal thanks to all the writers who have helped get that monkey off my back!

If any of you have suggestions or ideas for articles, feel free to submit the ideas or the entire articles to me via email and I will be happy to include them here. The more information and ideas I have com-

ing in from all of you, the more diverse and substantial this newsletter will become.

Otherwise, there isn't much to say this issue as I have spent most of the last few weeks preparing for the US Nationals coming up. I will be sure to give you folks a detailed report on the tournament next issue.

See you then!

James Kight

Featured Artist: *Liz Danforth*

James Kight

This issue's **Featured Artist** is Liz Danforth. Liz has been doing fantasy work for some time, starting way back with Tunnels and Trolls for Flying Buffalo, Inc. and going all the way up to her recent assignments from ICE for MECCG and from Five Rings Publishing Group for Legend of the Burning Sands. Liz is in my opinion one of the better artists on the market today, and as her interview will reveal, one of the more thoughtful ones as well. She has definitely left her distinctive mark on MECCG, ICE's Middle

Earth products and the genre as a whole. It was my pleasure to conduct this interview and to learn as much as I did about Liz. I hope you do too. As evidenced by the examples of her art within this issue, she remains a very busy artist. Enjoy!

TOMN: I remember your work from as early back as Tunnels and Trolls with Flying Buffalo and later doing black and white art for ICE. How did you start in the business and then eventually find your way to doing card art as well?

Liz: You are correct that much of my earliest professional work, nearly all black and white, was done for Flying Buffalo. I'd freelanced for Flying Buffalo (which is a local [Phoenix, AZ] company) as early as 1976. I did a cover for a little magazine called *Supernova*, soon followed by illustrations for the (then-current) 2nd edition of *Tunnels & Trolls*. It's what everyone (me included) was playing around here.

In 1978 I was hired as Buffalo's staff artist and general productions person. Over

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Featured Artist: *Liz Danforth (cont.)*

(Continued from page 1)

time, I did a little bit of everything there: writing, editing, typesetting and paste-up (no desktop publishing back then!), as well as artwork. That sort of thing has always been pretty common among small and medium-sized game companies.

The productions and publications side of FBInc grew, the staff expanded, and we did some pretty cool stuff for a few years. We put out the magazine *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, won a couple of HG Wells Awards (the Origins awards) for adventures and supplements, and generally put a lot of heart and soul (often with a hearty seasoning of humor) into everything that went out the door.

In 1985, though, it was time for me to go freelance, and I did. Rick Loomis (head of Flying Buffalo) had taught me the ropes of the business, and I'd become well-acquainted with many of the people and companies in the game industry. Since then, I've been feeding myself and keeping a roof overhead largely, if not entirely, on my artwork, with a little accessory editing, writing, and computer game design mixed in to keep things interesting.

When I became involved in card game art, it was within that larger context. Lisa Stevens [of *Wizards of the Coast*] had been a friend since her *Lion Rampant* years, and at *Origins* in 1993, she showed me the first Magic card I laid eyes on. I thought it was amazing that *every* card could have *full color artwork* on it -- from my Buffalo days, I knew how expensive color printing

was. She said the art director for the card game (Jesper Myfors, at that time) was interested in my art because he knew it from *Tunnels & Trolls*, and he wanted to ask me about perhaps doing work.

He did ask - and I was interested. I'd been looking for an opportunity to do more color work. I wanted and needed the practice, but didn't have time between paying assignments to do work on specification. The small card format was an excellent venue in which to experiment and stretch my wings.

"I'm not Jewish, but when I visited there during a trip to [Wurms] Germany two years ago, I found the cemetery a most profoundly moving place; I can only call it holy ground."

TOMN: What is your favorite piece of your own work?

Liz: I don't have one, individual piece I consider my "favorite" (which I'd bet is often the answer you'll get to a question like this). One reason is that, as the artist, there's always something you know *should* have been done better somehow - although if you knew how to have done it better, wouldn't

you have done so? Usually the flaws start showing up soon after I finish a piece (if not sooner). This is one reason that, the more recent a piece, the more I'm apt to like it. If I still like it in six months, it's probably pretty good despite the flaws.

There are pieces of different paintings I like a lot, or which have special resonance to me. One example is *Ent in Search of the Entwives*, a poignant subject. The place depicted is far more so: the Jewish cemetery in Wurms (Germany). (It's an interesting story about how it survived through WWII.)

I'm not Jewish, but when I visited there during a trip to Germany two years ago, I found the cemetery a most profoundly moving place; I can only call it holy ground. I touched that memory to paint the "Ent" piece without, I hope, trivializing reality with the fantastical.

Many paintings have a story that goes beyond the pigment and board. Another example is one I've been asked about a number of times: why there is a tribute to Roger Zelazny on the "Elves of Lindon" card. (This is too often asked with a parenthetical "And who is Roger Zelazny anyway?")

For those who don't know, Zelazny was an exceptionally fine science fiction and fantasy writer, multiple award-winner, and one of the most well-read and clever men I've ever had the pleasure to get to know. When Mike and I were called by a

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Design & Contact Information

For those of you who might be interested, this entire issue was designed and written using Microsoft Publisher 98 for Windows. Times New Roman is the main font.

Issue 3, Volume 1

This issue was written and printed the week of September 27, 1998.

There will be an online version of this newsletter at the following web address:
<http://www.therealm.org>

If you are interested in contacting me:

James Kight
240 Longwood Drive
Winston-Salem, NC 27104
jameskight@mindspring.com

Featured Artist: Liz Danforth (cont.)

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mutual friend, and told that Roger had gone into the hospital and wasn't expected to come out, it was a staggering blow.

What has this to do with the Lindon painting? I was on deadline for ICE's main release of Middle Earth. With the news about Roger, I absolutely did *not* feel up to painting, but I also knew I had to meet the deadline. Although I'd been lined up to be working on a different piece (one of the trolls, as I recall), I also had the Elves piece -- which, as originally assigned, was going to be the elves of the Grey Havens.

From the Grey Havens, the heroes of Tolkien's tale sail away to the West never to return to Middle Earth. Drawing on Celtic myth, Tolkien was referring to the Celtic Isles of the Dead, Tir-na-Nog, off the west coast of Ireland. Zelazny, in his tales of Amber, also incorporated Tir-na-Nog into the flow of the story. That juxtaposition, with the death of one of my personal heroes, made that painting an appropriate place to focus my feelings, to paint into the character's hand a silver rose (the icon of Corwin, the hero of Zelazny's main Amber stories.)



The painting got done, it turned out well, and I was able to continue on with the rest of the assignment. I asked Pete (Fenlon, at ICE) if a note could be included on the card, assuming in my own mind it'd be 4 point type below the flavor text, at best... Pete respected Zelazny's work as much, I think, as I did, and the card appeared as you see it.

Does this mean every piece I do is a downer? No. There are definitely cards I've illustrated that come rooted in manic mischief... but there are few Tolkien pieces that have that flavor. (On the other hand, the story from *The Hobbit* about the invention of golf *did* engender a peculiarly-shaped helm on the goblin of the tale -- in one of the ink drawings I did for a MERP sourcebook.)

TOMN: It sounds like you have read the Lord of the Rings...and you have some knowledge of Celtic mythology. How much leeway does a company like ICE give you with their art...does it come from your exposure to the genre or do they give you direction?

Liz: Yes, yes; some, I suppose so, and it depends. (You ask a convoluted question, you get an incomprehensible answer!)

Actually, I had *The Hobbit* read to me as a pre-schooler (and I'm old enough that *that's* weird). I read *Lord of the Rings* for the first time around fifth grade, and have read it any number of times since. I read science fiction from a young age too, eschewing fantasy for many years as "just that Conan stuff."

In college, someone introduced me to Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, and had me actually *read* Howard's Conan (instead of pre-



Untitled troll illustration by Liz Danforth 1991 from Lord of the Rings Adventure game, © 1991 ICE

judging his lesser imitators), and I was hooked.

My knowledge of Celtic myth goes hand in hand with my interest in ancient myths and cultures from all around the world. Celtic tales and the related Germanic myths are part of my own typically-American multi-Euro-ethnic bloodlines.

Doing art for ICE's various Middle Earth products has always been a pleasure. Sometimes the art direction for individual pieces has been tightly defined, and sometimes it has been extremely open.

I tussled with them, early on, about whether elves could be depicted with Spockishly pointed ears -- I wanted it; it's what says "elf" to me. We compromised by agreeing that I could hide elven ears and let the readers imagine what they wished. (It's the same reason I wrapped a scarf around the lower face of the female dwarf, I'll be damned if I'm going to agree with the "female dwarves have beards" interpretation of Tolkien's ambiguous statement.) Since then, ICE has relaxed its strictures (or given up on a

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Featured Artist: *Liz Danforth (cont.)*



Akhorahil illus. 1995 Liz Danforth from METW, © 1995 ICE

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lost battle!) regarding elven ears, but even now I tend to hide or downplay them in my pictures for the company.

On the whole, though, my vision of people and places in Tolkien's works seems to jive well with the various art directors' visions. I've worked with several there, since 1980; the current art directors Jessica Ney-Grimm and Jason Hawkins I consider as friends.

I'm not altogether satisfied with all my efforts, but at least the hobbits don't just look like little boys with furry feet. Ultimately, however, no fully-realized envisionment (in ink or paint) will satisfy everyone when the artist is interpreting another's written canon. I can only hope, occasionally, to elicit the "That's what an Ent looks like!" response.

TOMN: What other artist do you consider to be a real talent?

Liz: By the wording of the question, do I correctly take it to mean "what other artists currently working, especially in card art?" A delicate question, since I consider many of them respected friends and wouldn't want to overlook any. Among the artists appearing in the Middle Earth sets, Omar Rayyan is one of whom I know nothing personally, yet his work invariably catches my eye when I'm

opening packs. Beyond that, I feel constrained to keep my own counsel.

Broadening the question, I aspire to learn from Michael Whelan's color schemes, Carravaggio's and Rembrandt's chairoscuros, Maxfield Parrish's whimsy and technique, Waterhouse's story-telling detail, and Max Ernst's twisted bizarreness. There's plenty more, but that'll give you the idea...

TOMN: Who or what inspires you as you paint?

Liz: In answering the two previous questions, I've brushed on a few facets of an answer to this one. There are nearly an infinite number of such facets; every painting has unique well-springs. Still, trying to answer the question, I'd say there are a few broad categories of "inspiration" that come up time and again; for example, the natural world. I like to include small animals in backgrounds, clouds or birds in the skies, because I notice those things when I'm outside playing with the dogs or going out for exercise. I've taken a zillion pictures of clouds, despite knowing a photo is never going to capture "it" -- but then, neither will a painting, though I'll keep trying. Mossy tree bark, Mirkwood-like forests, fogs and blizzards... I live in a desert (Phoenix), and these are novelties to me, and a challenge to depict. Recent assignments from Five Rings Publishing, for their Legend of Burning Sands and Deadlands/Doomtown ccgs, have enabled me to pick up some of the "local" and, to me, natural feel of desert heat and raw rock. But that's not the "conventional" setting of most fantasy tales.

I'm altogether too fond of Celtic and Germanic knotwork, and will incorporate such designs into a painting whenever the opportunity suggests

itself as appropriate. In a Tolkienesque fantasy, that can be fairly often.

That's actually a small facet of my broader delight in the imagery of ancient cultures and past times. From German castles to sculptures from Barcelona, from Art Deco buildings in Ohio to Ankor Wat and Etruscan tomb paintings; all of these have inspired details in my work at one time or another. I endeavor never to *copy*, but to incorporate such detail as will make the place I'm painting seem as real as if I were.

TOMN: Do you ever find yourself unable to complete or even start a piece?

Liz: I'm going to take the long 'way around to answer this...bear with me.

I tend to have a rather down-to-earth take on art as my profession. If I were a farmer, no one would ask "Does your muse dictate if you should plant corn in rows or on hillocks?" A plumber wouldn't be likely to complain that brass fittings "just don't speak to me."

Don't get me wrong: I *do* consider art a very different kind of profession from farming or plumbing, but I also think Artistes [sic] make more of that

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Golodhros illus. 1996 Liz Danforth from MEDM, © 1996 ICE

Featured Artist: Liz Danforth (cont.)

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difference than reality warrants. I produce art for my living; my integrity dictates that I also produce Art while I'm doing it.

Which is a long way around to your answer: Somewhere between rarely and never.

Occasionally I feel under-inspired by an assignment, sure. So I find something to inspire me: a kinesthetic sense, a photograph, a turnabout on the expected, thinking longer about what's asked for (or what's *really* being asked for), some technique or style or lighting effect I want to practice, or just a little dose of humor.

Sometimes I can tell my instincts are not on target at any given moment, or I've said "my hands aren't working right today." That's usually a matter of time and/or changing gears. If I'm having trouble inking, I might need to sketch awhile to loosen my hands which, counterintuitively, gives me back the control to ink fine work. I may just need to come back to it in an hour.

I could go on longer, but you get the idea. I'm sentimental to the core, but I try not to be self-indulgent about it. Or as the T-shirt says "The boat sank-get over it."



Liquid Fire illus. 1997 Liz Danforth from MEWH, © 1997 ICE



Scatha illus. 1996 Liz Danforth from METD, © 1996 ICE

TOMN: What music if any do you listen to as you work?

Liz: Loreena McKennitt is nearly always in the mix. Beyond that? A fair bit of Celtic and/or folk music: Steeleye Span, June Tabor, Jethro Tull, Milladoiro, the Chieftains; then a lot of multi-artist, themed collections. After that it comes in ones and twos, played occasionally: Warren Zevon, Sarah McLachlan, Indigo Girls. There are spates of musicals and soundtracks: I've just been listening to soundtracks for *Rent* and *Chicago*. *Aliens*, *Conan*, and *Braveheart* cycle through. And now and again I get the classical or light jazz bug; fortunately there are two good radio stations in Phoenix that carry those formats. Kinda eclectic, kinda dated; but hey, it works for me.

Oh, if I'm on deadline and there's a basketball game on the radio, I'm probably listening to that. Especially WNBA; I'm a *huge* fan of the Phoenix Mercury.

TOMN: Do you have any plans to publish your work in collected form?

Liz: No. I have a few prints, but I don't believe my present level of quality warrants a publisher's interest. I'll get there; just not yet.

[Editor's Note: For those of you who are interested in seeing an online collection of Liz's work, you can go to the Daydream Graphics website -- www.daydream.com -- Liz states that it's as close to a published folio as she is likely to get any day soon, and there's a number of other fine artists at the same location.]

TOMN: What was the most important piece of advice you ever received?

Liz: "You're never beaten until you quit."

Sometimes it's hard to apply, though, because you have to examine whether you're just being bullheaded about not acknowledging your human limitations!

TOMN: Sometimes when I study a particular artist's work I get a feeling of urgency, like he or she is trying desperately to convey something, and it's almost as if the telling is just as important as the message. It's like they are serving some purpose that even they cannot understand. Then there are those artists who simply do it for the love of art. Where do you find yourself as you create and how do you view your gift?

Liz: Questions for one more philosophical, perhaps, than I tend to be

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Dwar of Waw illus. 1995 Liz Danforth from METW, © 1995 ICE

Featured Artist: Liz Danforth (cont.)

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(especially in public!). Grant me, first, that I think this is a nearly unanswerable question. That being said, I'll try to come up with an answer, albeit this is partial and therefore necessarily erroneous...

I'm incredibly lucky to be able to do something I enjoy so much, and which other people often express to me a desire to do as well. I don't understand what all the fuss is about, sometimes, because it's usually very easy for me to produce a good-to-excellent composition. The multifarious demands of color work, on the other hand, I've likened to wrestling a herd of wet cats; you no sooner get ahold of one than another wriggles out of control and leaves you bleeding besides.

Technique is only part of it, though, easy or hard. Imagery comes from my desire to open a window for others -- and for me -- to clearly *see* what their imagination whispers about.

Fancy words hiding a gigantic "Huh? I dunno. Don't ask me; I'm off to go work on something new."

TOMN: Occasionally I dabble in poetry...and I often find myself wondering if I would ever be able to make money from something such as poetry or art. I guess it's hard for me to imagine placing a monetary value on such things. I suppose that is why many people feel that artists are underpaid for their abilities. How do you manage to figure out what a piece is worth...do you go by gut feeling or is there a reasonable market guideline?

Liz: Your underlying question is "What is art worth?"

"Art is priceless. Any individual example of it, however, is worth exactly what someone will pay for it." (My

thanks to friend Michael Stackpole for this concise answer!)

I could (and did) write an essay of my thinking on your question, and will spare you the overwrought and lengthy discussion of it, here. **[Editor's Note: the lengthy version is at the end of this article.]** For now, I'll try to answer the smaller version of your question: "How does one price his or her artwork?"

If you've never sold your work before, there are any number of books dealing with the down and dirty: *Setting the Right Price for Your Design and Illustration*, *Freelance Forever*, and *This Business of Art* are a few I've bought over time. This is somewhere to start; check the library or inter-library loan if the bookstore doesn't carry what you want. Go ahead and corner artists at conventions and pick their brains for specifics. Attend convention art shows and auctions too, and see what goes for what kinds of prices.

For me, monetarily, I use the examples of previous payments as a benchmark for new commissions. I factor in intangibles -- like how interested I am in the client or topic, how easy/hard it will be to fit into my schedule, and whether a job offers me something else besides money that I want.

This latter can be fairly important. For example, the earliest commission for a Magic: The Gathering card was \$50 cash and \$50 in stock. The stock was worthless Monopoly money at the time, and I had no reason to think that would change. I had to assume I'd never see one red cent over the \$50 cash and, if only money were the consideration, I'd not have done the work. (I almost didn't, in fact, for just that reason -- my black and white commissions paid far better.) However, I badly wanted to do more color work.

Therefore the internal equation changed: I was getting paid *something* for painting, which was way better than painting on spec for nothing.

Every artist I've talked with, pro or amateur, mentions the piece (or pieces) they just can't bear to part with. For newcomers, that's sometimes *every* piece. Trust me; five years from now (if you continue to produce and grow), you'll probably wonder why you cared so much. Equally, there's some piece you'll sell and five years later kick yourself for letting it get away. If you let yourself get hung up on this, you'll make yourself crazy. The fundamental thing to understand is "You can always make another one".

TOMN: After reading your answers to my question, I am questioning my own perception about art and artists. There is quite a bit about art and illustration that I don't understand, as much as you might not understand about say...being an athlete or an actor. Both of them are trades, but one wonders how someone can accomplish certain things without so much fuss.

I suppose that there isn't always a necessary line between pure art and commercial art; although most if not all artists do both for a living. I guess I am trying to find out where you stand in the area of self-awareness as far as your purpose, or rather "if there is sometimes a message in your work." Perhaps it's rude of me to think that there is a difference between art and commerce, or artistes and artists. People can frequently be both, I imagine. Some work is pure inspiration (or perhaps, work for the soul) and some work is just work.

Liz: There's supposed to be an anecdote about Lawrence Olivier and Dustin Hoffman (I think it was those

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Featured Artist: Liz Danforth (cont.)

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two...): Hoffman, being a "get into the skin of the person and **be** that person" type of actor was (being young at the time) struggling with a role. When he asked Olivier how he, Larry, could slip so smoothly into *his* role, Olivier said "That's why they call it 'acting,' son."

Olivier is the source of any number of excellent anecdotes, btw. Ask me about the King-Lear (or Hamlet?) on-stage Olivier story sometime, for *another* side of this multifaceted problem.

TOMN: I think it is important for people to be able to try to understand the phenomenon of "Wow! Look, it's Dustin Hoffman!" when his work or anyone else's is just as much as skill (perhaps) as us when we are working. I suppose that there could be the underlying perception that there always has to be a message in art, that work is a side-effect of the talent. I don't know.

Liz: One book I cited, *Freelance Forever*, was the first to open my eyes to acting as equivalent in the freelance-business sense to art or writing; since then, I've added (with caveats) professional athletics. So, yes, I know where you're coming from on this, but think about it this way: how much are the "freelancer-industries" (art, writing, poetry, acting, athletics, etc) both condemned and lauded because almost *everybody* can do at least *something* like them. There's the assumption, however unconscious, that not only "I wanna be like Mike" but "I *can*"... after all, I've thrown a basketball around, and this is just a little more of the same.

How many trained, educated professionals -- brain surgeons or police, fire fighters or biochemical engineers -- seem inclined to say "I'll write (or

paint or whatever) when I retire" ... or "...on the weekends." The assumption is that inclination and practice are *enough*. After all, the kids do children's theatre (with Mom and a few other adults at hand)... must not really be hard to be Sir Lawrence, eh?

And they'd all be shocked if an artist declared "Well, I'm going to be a brain surgeon when I retire." (As if artists *ever* retired!)

Liz: The following is an opinionated, somewhat self-indulgent, and thoroughly personal perspective on the value of one's art (prompted by James' question about same); the longer version:

Every person who seeks to make a living from an internal creative well-source -- whether poetry, art, music, acting, or writing -- gets knotted up on this one, at one time or another. My opinions on this rarely make me popular in artistic circles, but here again my practical sense kicks in: when selling your work, it is worth precisely what someone will pay you for it, no more and no less. Any hypothetical "should" has little place in the equation because such work is extremely subjective. Paying for that work is capitalism in action, at its best and worst.

For every person who thinks artists are underpaid, there's those who think they're overpaid. Opinions may be informed or in ignorance, and both may be different from hard facts. "Quality" is almost impossible to pin down precisely, regardless of what The Mavens Of Good Taste would declare. There's like or dislike, skill or ineptitude, communicative or ambiguous... but unless Plato was right about the existence of a philosophical Ideal (which posit I do not grant, personally), then "quality" has no immutable existence. Consensus of opinion, pro

or con, also shifts over time. Or to move from sublime to silly, I'll quote Gene Wilder's Willy Wonka: "Where is fancy bred -- in the heart or in the head?" (or was that moving from silly to sublime?)

I think there's considerable confusion as to the meaning of "worth" in a discussion like this. Things can have monetary worth. There can be some Cosmic Truth Godhead Worthiness. On top of that, too many people confuse their personal worthiness (on either scale) with the worth of their work. Now we have four intersecting variables being called by one name. No wonder there's confusion!

I consider it very important to remember that a person's self-worth and the value of their work must be kept segregated. They have nothing in common but a shared locus of time and place.

It is my opinion that money is not dependent on the Cosmic Value (although it can follow). Nor is Cosmic Value necessarily sullied by the presence or exchange of money. (This is not a universal opinion, I know.) The person's integrity and self-awareness, I think, determine the respect I'll proffer. I hate seeing embittered artists reviling themselves for accepting an assignment they're not proud to sign their names to. Putting bread on the table may be the genuine bottom line, and I have no problem with that. Maslow's Hierarchy. I just don't think a person should hate him/herself for doing what's needed, and doing it as well as it can be done. Whether that's doing a "babe" picture, a Magic card, or the Sistine Chapel ceiling, you give it your best and keep moving.

Regarding the worth of my own "Art" on some grander, cosmic scale? What I do, I do with integrity, putting as

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Featured Artist: *Liz Danforth (cont.)*

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much of myself into each piece as I would were I doing "my own" art (a phrase that's always been somewhat nonsensical to me; this is "my own" work regardless of its relationships, as much as I am my own person, regardless of being related to mother, father, and so on.) I strive ferociously never to "phone it in" on any project I accept -- if I take the job, I'll give it my best. When I'm dead fifty years, if my work is remembered and appreciated - - great. That's all I could wish for. If not? I won't be there to know. Anticipating either result is pointless conjecture. Time, literally, will tell -- as no one, and nothing else, can.



Catch an Elusive Scent illustrated by Liz Danforth 1997 from Middle Earth: Lidless Eye © 1997 ICE



Morgul-knife illustrated by Liz Danforth 1995 from Middle Earth: The Wizards © 1995 ICE

My thanks to Liz Danforth for taking time out to answer my questions. I hope like myself you have learned a little more about what it is be like to be an artist, and perhaps learn a little more of their perspective.

Liz was a joy to interview and was very patient with me as I fumbled with my questions trying to ask the right ones. She would like me to mention to everyone to please feel free to visit her spot on the web at www.daydream.com.

[com](http://www.daydream.com) to see more of her art and to perhaps purchase some of it for yourself. Also, be sure to peruse the issue to see more examples of Liz's art.

I have a few artists lined up for next issue, but haven't decided who I will interview next. Here is a preview: Rob Alexander, Christina Wald, Rebecca Guay and Omar Rayyan.

See you next issue!



Untitled illustration by Liz Danforth 1985 from Riders of Rohan MERP Sourcebook, ©1985 ICE

Card Review: *Twilight*

James Kight

Twilight

Hazard Short-Event

Environment. One environment card (in play or declared earlier in the same chain of effects) is canceled and discarded. Twilight may also be played as a resource, and may be played at any point during any player's turn.

Without a doubt, Twilight is one of the most misunderstood and misused cards in MECCG. It is also one of the most playable cards. Twilight is the only card that can be played at any time during any player's turn as a hazard OR a resource.

Twilight Basics

How does this affect other cards? For one thing, if you decide to play Twilight during your turn, during your movement/hazard phase, you can declare it as a hazard, thereby eliminating the chance that your opponent will target it for cancellation with cards like Many Sorrows Befall, Blind to the West and Ire of the East. Of course, it can always be targeted for cancellation with another Twilight.

If you play it right, only another Twilight can effectively cancel another Twilight. You can, however, make Twilight ineffective with other cards (like immediately replacing a Doors of Night/Gates of Morning targeted by Twilight with another Doors of Night/Gates of Morning, though a Doors of Night played in such a way counts against the hazard limit).

Many people mistakenly view Twilight as a "roadblock" counter. While this can be so, it is not representative of the playability and flexibility of Twilight. Suppose your opponent is playing a resource strategy that relies



on the play of Gates of Morning; a properly played Twilight can effectively hamper his strategy. Unless he is also playing with Twilights, the war of the environments becomes a simple matter of math (I will get into that in a minute). Also, there are many hazard strategies that rely on Doors of Night, and a well-timed Twilight can shut that down as well.

Sometimes the quickest Twilight isn't always the best Twilight. Why waste such a card when your opponent only has Doors of Night in play? Perhaps it would serve you better if it were played on the Doors of Night after a Shelob or The Will of Sauron were played. In that case, both cards would discard instead of just one. In many cases, a second card wouldn't discard, but would still become ineffective. Never tip your hand until it is necessary to do so.

The Numbers

As far as math goes, depending on the number of Twilights and Gates/Doors you have in your deck, you can go a long way in assuring yourself the mastery of the game environment. Let's

say for example that you are playing a wolf/spider/animal hazard strategy with Wake of War and Full of Froth and Rage. A good support to the Wake of War is Doors of Night. This gives an additional +1 strike and +1 prowess to all wolf attacks over and above the normal bonuses given by Wake of War. Let's assume for the moment that you decide to put 3 Doors of Night and 3 Twilights in your deck for support. Your opponent happens to be playing a Gates of Morning/Echo of All Joy/Star of High Hope strategy, and has 3 Gates of Morning and 3 Twilights as well.

When the game begins, your opponent goes first, and plays his first Gates of Morning. You currently have a Doors of Night in your hand, but at the present time, Gates of Morning is not affecting the game. He moves to Lorien, you both draw two cards, and he plays Star of High Hope. One of the cards you have drawn is a Twilight. Again, you could choose to target Gates of Morning or Star of High Hope with either Twilight or Doors of Night, but since there is no combat, perhaps patience is in order. Finally, sensing that you probably don't have anything to play, your opponent plays Echo of All Joy. Now is the time for action.

You play Doors of Night, expecting Gates of Morning, Star of High Hope and Echo of All Joy to leave play. Your opponent quickly plays a Twilight to prevent this from happening, but you smartly respond to it with your own Twilight. Having no further counters to play, you and your opponent watch silently as the environment clears and [Doors of] Night falls.

The score of cards played:
Your opponent: 4, You: 2

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Card Review: *Twilight* (cont.)

(Continued from page 9)

Card efficiency to be sure. Also, you have seen 1 Gates of Morning and 1 Twilight from your opponent, and can reasonably expect 2 more of each. You yourself have 2 more Doors of Night and 2 more Twilights, and currently, your environment is in play. Now it is just a matter of waiting for the next environment to counter. You are now fully entrenched in what is affectionately known as the "Environment Wars."

He plays a Gates of Morning, you counter with Twilight. He plays Twilight, you play Doors of Night, and so on. Once you get the initial upper-hand, it's just a matter of remembering how many of each you both have played. Granted, not every deck will have 3 of each such environment, but it is good practice to assume such when you see the first one.

Many times Twilight can serve as an effective counter by itself. Not everyone plays with environments, but those who neglect to prepare for them can live to regret it. Even if you don't plan on building up your own environments, it would be prudent to have at least a small amount of protection against it. In this case, since you are using Twilight by itself, a well-timed Twilight is your only option if you want to be able to execute your game plan.

Deck Construction

Now that you have gotten a good look at how Twilight can work both by itself and in tandem with other environments, we can talk a little bit about how Twilight figures into Deck Construction.

Since Twilight may be played as both a hazard or a resource, it can be

counted as either in deck construction. Sometimes this flexibility can make filling in the blanks or paring down the deck a bit easier.

Let's once again assume that you are playing a hazard strategy that requires Doors of Night. Nearing the end of your hazard construction, you notice that you have 32 hazards and 30 resources. Currently you are counting your 3 Twilights as hazards. Conveniently, you can count one of those Twilights as a resource, and effectively change the count to 31 hazards and 31 resources.

If you happen to want more hazards, you can count all three Twilights as resources, changing the count to 33 resources, and 29 hazards, leaving you 4 more slots for hazards. Because of the flexibility of Twilight in deck construction, there are many different reasons for counting Twilight as either a resource or a hazard.

For Fallen Wizards, deck construction is a bit more tricky. A Fallen Wizard may only use two of any resource card instead of three. Thus, if a Fallen Wizard were to count Twilight as a resource, he could only count two of them as resources. The third Twilight would have to be counted as a hazard for deck construction purposes. Now, once play starts, he can use a Twilight any way he chooses. The restriction for counting Twilight as resources count for deck construction purposes only.

Serious Play/Combinations

Because of the relative restrictions on Twilight, its uses, though flexible, are somewhat limited. This not to say that Twilight cannot serve as one of the more important cards in your deck. Twilight specifically targets and/or counters environment cards. Twilight

is itself an environment card, which is why another Twilight can counter it. When used in combination with other environment cards, it can serve as the "Ace-in-the-Hole" that preserves your environment.

At last year's US Nationals, I was playing in a tournament held the same day as the finals. Since I didn't make the finals of the big event, I was playing in a side-tournament to pass the time. I had decided to put together an environment deck based upon a card from Dark Minions that everyone had said was a really bad card: Balance Between Powers.

The deck was fairly simple: go down into the underdeeps and lock the upstairs into a nasty snowstorm. I managed to get the Doors of Night, Will of Sauron, Snowstorm combination out, and was ready to counter any Twilights I saw. And as I had guessed, my opponent attempted to wipe the environment clean with a Twilight. I countered their Twilight with a Twilight of my own, and the snowstorm stayed on the table the rest of the game.

Would I have tried that without a backup Twilight in my hand? Probably not, but seeing as how it was early in the game, I may have been able to get the lock down again. The important thing for me to consider as I played the Twilight was staying ahead in the environment war. My opponent was never able to get ahead of me with the environment, and it made all the difference in the game.

Another interesting thing to do with Twilight is to keep the environment fresh and constantly changing. Without The Will of Sauron, Snowstorm becomes a little less powerful, but only slightly. It is perfectly ok to play

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Card Review: *Twilight* (cont.)

(Continued from page 10)

a Snowstorm even if you are in a Wilderness if you have a Twilight to remove it when you are ready to move. In this case, you might run out of Twilights quicker than your opponent, because you are both putting an environment into play and removing it all on your own, which is ok as long as it stalls your opponent.

What if there isn't any room in the deck for Twilight? That's a tough question to resolve. Do you put Twilight in your Sideboard? Do you leave at least one in your deck? It's up to you how many Twilights you have in your deck, but don't be surprised if you find yourself looking for one when there isn't one to be found. At least give yourself the option to quickly get to your sideboard if you don't have enough room in your deck. Be sure to include An Unexpected Outpost if you plan to get to your sideboard.

Misconceptions

One of the misconceptions about Twilight is the malleability of the card. Being able to be played as a resource or a hazard can create some confusion during game play. When the game is in progress, Twilight is a hazard until played specifically as a resource. You must declare which when you play it.

If you are playing Twilight during your resource during, and it is in the movement/hazard phase, I am going to assume it is a resource unless you indicate to me otherwise. Therefore, I will be able to target your Twilight with my Many Sorrows Befall. Be sure to keep track of how you play Twilight to avoid any unnecessary mistakes.

Another important thing to remember about Twilight is how it is treated when it is inactive; that is, how other

cards act and react to Twilight when it is not currently being played. When you use cards like Smoke Rings and An Unexpected Outpost, Twilight is and always will be a hazard. Even though you can play Twilight as a resource, it is only a resource when you play it as such, and at no other time. It is an important technicality to remember when you are planning your deck and working through your strategy. If you plan to recycle Twilight, don't forget to plan for it as a hazard, not a resource when you put your deck together.

Conclusion

Well, I hope this article made a few things about Twilight a bit clearer. It can be a very instrumental card if played correctly. Always keep in mind when and how you are playing Twilight.

Next issue: Fury of the Iron Crown

Survey Question: Responses and This Issue's Question

Last Month's survey question asked readers what card they thought needed errata and why. Here are the results (these are not necessarily my views):

Mouth of Sauron - Only playable against non-Ringwraith/Sauron opponents.

Arwen - should have bonus to influence against Dunedain, Men, and Man factions.

Biter and Beater - This card should be exempt from the limit to prowess, and should instead affect the number of strikes and body of the attack.

Sting - Should be affected by Biter and Beater.

Seized by Terror - Should be modified for minions, affecting Border-lands and Free-domains (for minions).

"Two-Headed" Troll - Change "ally" to "Troll ally". Currently unaffected by Dark Quarrels, etc.

Farmer Maggot - change "If one of your companies faces an attack while at a site..." to "If one of your companies faces an attack while at or moving to a site..."

Bard Bowman - Change prowess and body to 4/8. Change text to read: "Unique. +2 direct influence against any man faction in Northern Rhovanion. +2 prowess against Dragon and Drake attacks."

That's it for last issue's question.

As for this issue's question, here it is:

Which is your favorite character to use in MECCG?

Send your answers and responses to: jameskight@mindspring.com

See you next time!

Focus On - Nathan Bruinooge

James Kight

This issue I turn the **Focus On** spotlight in the direction of Nathan Bruinooge, one of this country's and the world's top players. Nathan shares some of his views about MECCG and gives us a peek into his own life as well. Enjoy!

TOMN: Brief biological info (family, school, job, hobbies, etc...)

Nate: I'm trundling along on a PhD in English at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. When I'm not reading stuff I try to be writing stuff. I have a wife (she plays, but hasn't kept up since MELE) who's rooting for me to place in Toledo so that she can come along to Paris. I keep telling her that there's plenty of players I know who are perfectly capable of cleaning my plate in any given game, so hopefully she's not keeping her hopes too high.

TOMN: What got you interested in MECCG, the game or the story?

Nate: A bit of both, but if I had to pick one it would have to be the game. I avoided METW for the first year it was out because I was sure whatever ICE had done couldn't do justice to Tolkien. When some friends cajoled me into playing, I was proved wrong. But since then it's been the quality of the game itself that's kept me interested.

TOMN: What makes MECCG deck-building different from other games, if at all?

Nate: There seems to be much greater breadth in the sorts of decks you can make, compared to other games. We speak of a "Gondor" deck or a "Mordor" deck, but one person's ver-

sion of it can differ very widely from another's -- and the gap between playing any given deck well and playing it badly is even wider. The sideboard is great too; it can serve as a haven for close cards that don't make the cut, or become an integral part of the deck's main strategy. MECCG decks are pretty easy to throw together, but to make one right takes far more work than any other CCG I've come across. But that's true of the game in general -- it takes a lot of time and energy to get into it, but the rewards match the effort.

TOMN: What do you try to take from each match?

Nate: A good time, most of all, of course. In tournaments and serious games, I'm also always trying to look for ways to make a better deck and play the decks I do play better. It's pretty rare that I finish a game without a couple changes I want to make to the deck or to the way I play it.

TOMN: What is the most rewarding thing about playing?

Nate: The best thing, ironically, doesn't have anything to do with the playing of the game itself. Reward #1 for me was the chance to go to Barcelona, see the city, hang out with the world's best players, get drunk after losing in the semi-finals, etc. My chief motivation for preparing for Toledo at this point is the chance to make it to Paris.

TOMN: Which card or idea would you most like to see in MECCG?

Nate: More smoking cards! Longbottom Leaf is showing up in MEBA, and that's lovely, but we're still missing a pipe minor item.

TOMN: What is your most exciting moment playing MECCG?

Nate: Too many for one to stand out. Certainly the most *memorable* moment is when Hector (current world champ) nailed me with 3 Rain-drakes and a Chill Douser all in one turn, vaporizing my hopes at Worlds in a puff of smoke. But that's not exactly "exciting" from my perspective. The best games are always the close ones, where you know that, if things had gone just a little bit differently, it could have fallen the other way -- that it was down to the teeny tiny choices. Chances are very good that I'll have a new answer to this question after Toledo.

TOMN: What in your opinion is the most underrated card in MECCG?

Nate: As soon as I name one someone will remind me of the one I forgot, but at that moment what leaps to mind is Spying Out the Land. Not that people think it's bad -- it's just that for all the people who acknowledge it, I never really see anyone *playing* it. But I'd play with a company full of Belegorns for a chance to play Spying. I'm only starting to discover its tremendous butt-saving capabilities.

TOMN: Overrated?

Nate: Beorn & Glorfindel. They're the ubiquitous hero-company starters for a very good reason, but their very ubiquity has made them so predictable that when I see them show up I'm rarely worried. Winning tournaments is largely about doing the unexpected, and this pair is about as expected as they come. This doesn't mean they can't be scary in good hands, of course, but good hands often take other routes.

TOMN: Give your thoughts about the Balrog distribution discussion...

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Focus On: *Nathan Bruinooge (cont.)*

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Nate: The game has suffered from the huge drought between expansions this year, and that's too bad. I wish MEBA could have arrived sooner. As for the new distribution paradigm, it's hard to know how it will work, of course. I'm rooting for it. Big switches like this are usually a prelude to renaissance or to death. We'll see which.

TOMN: How much longer do you think MECCG has?

Nate: The rules overload of MELE-MEWH, coupled with the huge gap between MEWH and MEBA, is a definite setup for MECCG to take a fall, especially considering how volatile and whimsical the CCG market can be. This is too bad, because from a strictly design perspective, the game has only continued to improve (MEWH is my favorite expansion) and is clearly the best-designed CCG out there. Still, the Tolkien factor is significant, and the international player base is very strong. Nobody should make the mistake of thinking the game is doomed just because everybody on their particular block has stopped playing. And the game only has to hold on for a while before the movie can help drum up more support. There's a lot of factors going into whether it can make it that long, but the success of the new format is probably the biggest one. Here's hoping.

TOMN: Give us a small tip on your own deck-building style. No cards, necessarily, just how do you go about the process?

Nate: For the resources, default mix is 13 MP cards, 17 support cards, though it varies depending on the specific deck. I usually figure out where the deck is getting the points from first (MP cards & characters) and then add in the support (though this is

always a give & take process, of course). Hazards will either be full-on creatures (13-15 hazard creatures with support) or something else (12 creature minimum). Often I start with a twist or combo that's interesting, and usually, after some testing, that twist or combo doesn't actually end up in the final product. Foolish Words & Adunaphel are the two cards that I'm never ever ever without. Beyond that things vary widely depending on whether it's a hero deck, FW, or minion. I write decks down on paper (referring to printed spoilers lists when needed) rather than flipping through my cards -- margins in my notebooks will often have columns of "3 DTs, 2 VoMs, 2 SStrokes, 2 Weighs" etc. That way I don't end up with overbloated decks that I need to cut down.

TOMN: Do you keep track of each player's style of play?

Nate: Not in any rigorous sort of way, no. But any bit of that sort of knowledge is very helpful. The trick is that if **you** know how **they** play, then **they** know how **you** play as well. If I didn't like to play so much, I'd love to go to PrezCon or Origins or something like that just to watch -- I'd probably learn more that way than I could in a dozen games with my same old decks.

TOMN: How important is the "metagame" aspect of card play?

Nate: Mondo important, at every level. If you can come to a tournament with a deck whose resources dodge the greatest number of your opponents' hazards, and whose hazards nail the greatest number of opponents' resources, it will get you almost all the way, if you're competent. The amount of second-guessing and reverse psychology that can creep into that process can get dizzying. And that's just the construction metagame -- there's

also the myriad decisions that are made in-game based not on what's on the table, but what's in the zeitgeist and what's behind the eyes of your opponent.

TOMN: In your opinion, is there a "typical strategy" that can consistently win, or is winning more dependant upon a player's skill?

Nate: Skill, skill, skill. Absolutely no question. Strategies come and go, based on new expansions and on the popularity of the hazards that can hose the strategy in question. Skill stays. There are a few "typical truths" about decks and about play that can take you far, but not as far as practice and the ability to make good snap decisions during a game.

TOMN: If you had the authority to change something about MECCG, what would it be, and why?

Nate: If I was suddenly given that authority, I'd take some time to talk to the designers and get a sense of their goals and priorities. I'd sit in on the design of an expansion, watch it develop to its release, and examine the experiences of the playtesters. I'd play a far wider base of players than I currently have the opportunity to, and I'd watch a couple dozen tournaments, taking careful notes. Then, maybe, I'd feel qualified to autocratically change something about the game. But not yet.

TOMN: Would you support a revised edition of MECCG?

Nate: I certainly would, although the timing of it would be crucially important. I think the game is going to have to achieve an upswing on its own, but it gets moving in that direction, a revised edition in a year (or

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Focus On: *Nathan Bruinooge (cont.)*

(Continued from page 13)

maybe more) could catapult it even further.

TOMN: What would you most want a revised edition to include or exclude?

Nate: I'm torn between my desires on this one and a what might make economic sense. I think it would be great to create a core set of cards, with improved texts, and have older cards be considered to bear their newer versions' text. But that's bookkeeping -- something I can keep up with, to be sure, but the real issue is whether it will keep players and attract new ones (something more bookkeeping usually doesn't do). Whatever else, I think some rules changes to make a faster game (without sacrificing depth) would be crucial.

TOMN: What in your opinion would bring more players to MECCG?

Nate: Well, there's all kinds of hurdles to cross about the perception of a game and the vagaries of the CCG market -- things that have little to do with the game itself. Mastering the

marketing metagame, as it were, is probably more important to attracting new players than any adjustments to the game itself. Nevertheless, I don't think there's much doubt that the game will have to become less complex (or at least no more complex) in order to stay in town. That's too bad, in a way -- I *like* the game because of its richness and complexity. Trimming it down without sucking it dry will have to be a task for very deft fingers.

TOMN: Ok, last turn of the finals, your opponent has played The Balance of Things, and the Council has been called. One of your characters is holding an 2 cp item worth 3 mp's and a corruption card (Lure of Nature). Another character of yours is by himself holding a 1cp item and Alone and Unadvised. You have one Voices of Malice in your hand. Which card would you target?

Nate: I plead not enough information! How many MPs are the characters worth? Is it my only item? How have my dice been rolling? Am I a Ringwraith or a Fallen-wizard? How close

is my MP total to my opponent's? Is Balance going to give him any trouble? Your question is a remarkable testament to the richness of the game -- congratulations. Now, if you simply must have an answer, I'd nail the Balance.

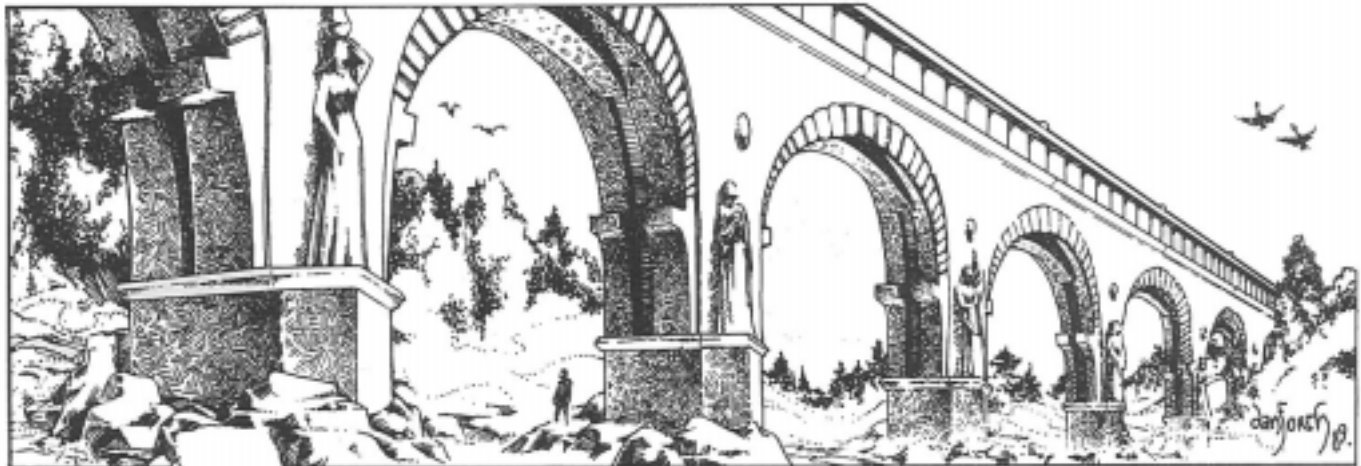
TOMN: Your favorite quote...

Nate: "In the very shape of things there is more than green growth; there is the finality of the flower. It is a world of crowns." G.K. Chesterton

TOMN: Your favorite opponent...

Nate: Ah, come on, I can't just name one. Steve Brown & Eric Silverman in RL. Josh Grace and Steve Kontoulis on the 'Net. And others too numerous to mention. The game can only be as fun as the people you play it with, so that the fact that I'm still kicking around with it says a lot.

Thanks to Nate for taking the time to be interviewed and for giving us some insights into his personality and style of play!



Iant Iaur illustrated by Liz Danforth 1989 from Middle Earth Adventure Guidebook II © ICE 1989

Review: NetMECCG

Charles E. Bouldin, Esq.

Have you ever wanted to play someone, but the nearest players are either asleep or a thousand miles away? Have you ever desired to play with cards not yet in your collection? Perhaps you want to play without damaging your collection.

If you have a computer running Windows and have a connection to the internet, your dreams have come true! NetMECCG (originally known as NetMETW) is THE piece of software for you! It is great, it works and the price is right. You might be disappointed to find that contrary to the norm for software today. It is: non bug ridden; currently available; easy to install; and easy to use. You can even personalize parts of it (I have a function key set that will tell my opponent "Call of Nature played on me. Be right back!") The price is beyond belief, given the quality of work present in the software. It is free for the downloading! Yes, I said free. Amazing! And now for a limited time only, for the same low price (not including shipping and handling) you can get DeckMECCG AND SealedMECCG! And if you download it right now, you get a bonus of the NetMECCG soundpack (available in two flavors, 16-bit and 32-bit) included.

Seriously though, the software to play our beloved MECCG is available, stable and waiting for you. Whether you live in New Zealand or New Jersey, you can find opponents around the world ready to play MECCG at most anytime of day or night. There have been three World NetMECCG tournaments, and there is now going the summer session of the World NetMECCG League. Check out <http://www.cstone.net/~ichabod/> for details.

I interviewed (via email) the creator and author, Mike Collins on Friday September 11, 1998. Here is the interview.

TOMN: First, tell us a little about yourself.

Collins: I'm 29, married, and expecting my first child next week. I graduated with my Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering *last* week, so it's been a busy month! My wife and I currently live in Columbus, Ohio, but that will probably change as soon as I find a permanent job (offers, anyone?). I'm a musician who spends a lot of time playing and writing songs, and my other hobbies (besides the obvious one of gaming) include playing sports (hockey, racquetball, etc.) and being outdoors.

TOMN: When did you first read *The Hobbit*? When did you first read *The Lord of the Rings*?

Collins: I first read *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* when I was 11. My sixth grade teacher gave them to me to read. Believe it or not, the Ringwraiths were pretty scary to me, so my first reading was as much a horror story as a fantasy/adventure epic.

TOMN: How many times have you read *The Hobbit*? How many times have you read *The Lord of the Rings*?

Collins: Oh, probably six or seven times now. I think that they were best the last time that I read them. I had just read *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales*, which made reading *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* more enjoyable.

TOMN: When was the first time you made it the whole way through *The Silmarillion*?

Collins: After two failed attempts, I finally made it the whole way through a few years ago. I didn't understand much when I read it that time, so I immediately had to read it again! It was much better the second time through.

TOMN: Have you read the entire *History of Middle Earth*?

Collins: No. I've read bits and pieces, but a lot of what I saw was old drafts of existing material -- I'm not too interested in that.

TOMN: When were you first introduced to MECCG?

Collins: Right before the *Unlimited* printing came out. I had been playing *Magic* for awhile, but what I didn't like was the fact that combat was deterministic. I was coming up with some new combat rules that involved dice when I heard about MECCG. I bought a starter and was hooked! I really like the idea of a company of characters moving around, overcoming enemies, and collecting resources. Plus, the artwork is fantastic.

TOMN: Do you collect MECCG or play MECCG or both?

Collins: Mostly collect -- I love the artwork. I have all of the cards from all the sets in binders, which I reference when I play. I don't use my cards to play; I play only using NetMECCG, and even that has been fairly infrequent as of late. When I *do* play, I'm a casual player that's in it more for the fun than to win.

TOMN: What prompted you to write NetMECCG?

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Review: NetMECCG (cont.)

(Continued from page 15)

Collins: My old roommate was the only other person I knew who played MECCG, and he had just moved to Nashville. We were trying to come up with a way to play MECCG over the Internet (e.g., via IRC or email), but everything that we tried was a bit lacking. What we really needed was a "virtual table" where we could interactively play cards, role dice, etc., just like the real thing. At the same time, I was trying to come up with a programming exercise that utilized Windows 95, the Internet, object-oriented programming and database programming. The two needs fit perfectly together, and NetMECCG was born.

TOMN: How long did it take you to write the initial version?

Collins: I started working on NetMECCG in May of 1996. It took about a month before I had the first beta version done; of course, that version was pretty rough. It took another month of play-testing and bug-hunting before I had the version that I sent ICE. Even it was pretty rough compared to what NetMECCG is today.

Believe it or not, the very early versions of NetMECCG had a completely different interface. The old interface was truly a "virtual table" -- it looked like a table top, and there were little pictures of all of the cards that you moved around (much like the interface that Microprose later used in its "Magic: the Gathering[®]" computer game). However, all of the playtesters liked the present interface better. While the old interface is impressive looking, the present interface is both more compact and more convenient.

TOMN: How much time does each new expansion require to add to

NetMECCG (MEDM, MELE, MEWH, MEBA)?

Collins: It varies widely. Many of the expansions didn't introduce any new game mechanics, so I only had to add the card texts to the database. MEDM, on the other hand, took *a lot* of time to implement. Minions introduced several game mechanics (such as site histories and face-down cards) that required fundamental changes to NetMECCG. Fortunately, none of the expansions released since MEDM have been as difficult!

Typically, I also add a bunch of new features with each NetMECCG version, so even the "easy" expansions have a lot of work associated with their NetMECCG release.

TOMN: Was it difficult to obtain permission from ICE?

Collins: No, I don't think so. Originally, they were considering marketing NetMECCG themselves, but decided it was "far too incomplete to be considered for real distribution/publication". In their defense, NetMECCG did have some rough spots back then. Instead, they decided to commission a similar product, but I haven't heard anything more about that.

Fortunately, ICE granted me permission to distribute NetMECCG myself, with four conditions: 1) I cannot charge for it, 2) I cannot include any of the card art, 3) I cannot include any of the "flavor text" from the cards and, of course, 4) I must include the proper copyright statements.

I'd like to add here that other companies are not so generous. I know several other programmers attempting similar programs for other CCGs, but Iron Crown is the only one

that I know of that actually granted permission for a freeware distribution of a playing aid for their game.

TOMN: Why do you not include the card art?

Collins: Well, as a lawyer, you probably know more about this than me! <laughs> My guess is that both the card art and flavor text restrictions come from the fact that ICE doesn't actually *own* the art or Tolkien text, but only license them.

TOMN: Has ICE approached you for a license to bundle your software with MECCG and sell it under ICE's name (CD-ROM or online)?

Collins: Not since they first looked at NetMECCG.

TOMN: Did/Does ICE paid/pay you anything for writing this software?

Collins: No. I've actually had very little interaction with ICE since they gave me permission to release. However, it's worked well for both of us, I think. I enjoy being able to supply the Internet community with a method for playing MECCG online, while I think that ICE benefits from the increased visibility and playing opportunities that NetMECCG provides. I know several players (myself included), who would not still be buying MECCG if it wasn't for NetMECCG. It also makes it easier to bring new players into the game, as they can try it out without a huge initial investment.

TOMN: Are you required to pay ICE for a license to use their trademarks and copyrighted material?

Collins: Fortunately, no!

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Review: NetMECCG (cont.)

(Continued from page 16)

TOMN: What type of hardware and software is necessary to play NetMECCG?

Collins: NetMECCG runs on machines running Windows (Windows 3.1, Windows 95/98, etc.). The only other prerequisite is a TCP/IP connection to the Internet, such as through a direct connect or Windows Dial-up Networking.

TOMN: From where can folk download NetMECCG?

From the NetMECCG homepage, which is currently located at <http://eewww.eng.ohio-state.edu/~mcollins/netmeccg.html>. As I recently graduated from The Ohio State University, it is likely that NetMECCG will have to find a new home in the near future.

TOMN: What additional files are needed after one has downloaded NetMECCG?

Collins: Strictly speaking, nothing else is needed. However, there are a few other files which are extremely useful. The first is the deck builder, DeckMECCG, which allows you to easily build decks for NetMECCG (it also serves as a great reference!). Another is the sealed deck generator, which can simulate sealed deck tournaments. There are also several text files which come with NetMECCG which are quite handy, such as SITEHERO.TXT. Finally, serious players will always want the newest card info database (available from the NetMECCG homepage), which reflects typo-fixes and recent errata.

TOMN: What is the status on porting NetMECCG to platforms other than MS-Windows (Java, Mac, Linux, Univac 1108)?

Collins: I don't intend to port NetMECCG to any other platform, except for possibly Java. However, I'm willing to give the source code and any other consulting help that I can to any NetMECCG porting effort. As such, there have been numerous attempts (at least 8 that I can think of offhand) to port NetMECCG to other platforms, but I think that maybe only two are still in the works (a Mac port and a Java port). As far as I know, both of them are still far from being released.

TOMN: How do I do (x) in NetMECCG?

Collins: I've tried to make sure that NetMECCG can do *everything* that you could do in a real game. If you're unsure how to accomplish something in NetMECCG, try the NetMECCG help first, then the FAQ, then lastly ask someone who might know (such as me, or the MECCG mailing list). [Maillist is metw@tower.ml.org. Subscribe by sending email to listproc@tower.ml.org with the body containing only "subscribe metw <your name>".]

TOMN: Where do I report bugs?

Collins: Bug reports should be emailed to me, at mcollins@ee.eng.ohio-state.edu. Surprisingly, not many users bother to do this, even when they've found a bug.

TOMN: How do I play against myself using NetMECCG (solitaire, head-to-head)?

Collins: The NetMECCG FAQ provides the best description of how to do this.

TOMN: How do I find other people to play?

Collins: The best place to start is Chris Cable's excellent NetMECCG players list [<http://www.mdi.net/~chscable/netmetw.htm>]. The list contains well over 100 players and their ICQ numbers. Serious players should also consider playing in the NetMECCG World League. Links to both of these sites are provided on the NetMECCG home page.

TOMN: Does ICQ pay you for advertising their wares?

Collins: No, but I also don't have to play them to *use* their wares (ICQ is currently freeware), so I don't feel slighted. <smiles>

TOMN: Will you be integrating the Balrog into NetMECCG?

Collins: Definitely. As with every other release, I'll also have some other new features in NetMECCG beyond those necessary for MEBA [Middle Earth: The Balrog].

TOMN: Will it be in time for the Balrog's debut?

Collins: I hope so. As a courtesy to ICE, I always wait to release a new version of NetMECCG until a short time after ICE releases the expansion. This also gives me time to get all of the cards myself and double-check them against what I have in the card info.

TOMN: Has writing and upgrading NetMECCG made you a better player?

Collins: It's certainly made me aware of the fine points of some of the game mechanics! It's also allowed me to play against (read: humiliated by!) some really good opponents that I

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Review: NetMECCG (cont.)

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wouldn't have had the opportunity to play otherwise. Whether I'm actually a better player because of it...probably not!

TOMN: What is the average game duration for a one-deck game? What is the average game duration for a two-deck game?

Collins: For me, games take less time with NetMECCG than with cards. However, many players aren't as familiar with the NetMECCG interface, so I think that the games take longer for them. I've played games as short as 30 minutes, to ones which have taken 6 hours.

TOMN: Why does playing in the World League not count for Council of Lorien purposes?

Collins: Good question. My guess is that it would be difficult to monitor the games to insure the same type of integrity that you get at sanctioned tournaments.

TOMN: Will you continue to support and integrate expansion modules (elflords, dwarven lords)?

Collins: Yes.

TOMN: Do you plan on implementing code to permit the toggling of a dragon lair's hoard status?

Collins: <laughs>

TOMN: Where can people send suggestions of features they would like added to NetMECCG?

Collins: Anyone is free to email me with their suggestions. I always fix bugs and problems with game mechanics. Otherwise, I tend to add

features which are useful to a wide audience while not requiring a lot of additional work.

TOMN: What new features do you plan on releasing in the next version?

Collins: Besides support for MEBA, there are a host of new features. The most noteworthy is what I'm calling "pushing", which is the ability to highlight a card or select a company on your *opponent's* screen. In this way, players can show the current company/card to their opponent without having to use the chat area. I think that it has a lot of potential. Some other improvements include the sidebar "swap" area for playing against Fallen-Wizards, and some streamlining when using On Guard cards.

TOMN: When is the next version of NetMECCG due out?

Collins: Shortly after MEBA is released by ICE.

TOMN: When will you be including the AI that will play hazards in solitaire mode or in head to head competition?

Collins: Right now, I don't have any intention to add AI to NetMECCG. It would require a lot of work, and MECCG is complex enough that I'm not sure that a computer AI player would be feasible. For example, consider Microprose's Magic: The Gathering. This is a commercial product, with a pool of programmers [and investment capital; ceb], yet the computer AI often makes glaring errors when playing its cards.

Should I get the free time, the big change that I would like to do is to make NetMECCG a true client/server-type game. I'd like to make it so that

the server could support multiple games, each with multiple clients. I envision something like the Internet gaming aid Kali, or Blizzard's Battle.net. This would allow players to connect to a server, chat, look for opponents, and join game there, instead of having to know your opponent ahead of time. It would also allow games with more than two players, as well as providing a mechanism for "observers" that could watch other players' games. We'll see if I ever get the time to do such an overhaul.

TOMN: What is the feature you thought would be a hit, but has been ignored by the unwashed masses?

Collins: Custom messages. NetMECCG supports 10 custom messages along with custom WAVs, but I've never played against *anyone* who uses them. When I created the feature, I dreamed of each player have a personalized set of messages and WAV files, with players exchanging sound-packs before the game. However, this feature has been largely a bust.

TOMN: What feature did you begrudgingly add and were surprised at the acclaim it generated?

Collins: The In Play viewer. I don't use it much myself, and it took quite a bit of work, but it's one of the features for which I've received a lot of positive feedback.

TOMN: What do you think as to MECCG's viability?

Collins: I think that it's a niche market game right now. It's probably a bit too complex and too time consuming to become a mainstream game, but I think that the people who

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Review: NetMECCG (cont.)

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play it are dedicated and will stick with it. I'm impressed that ICE is standing by their product, and continually trying to improve it. In particular, I'm really excited about the new format being used for the MEBA release.

TOMN: Any thoughts you wish to share with the newsletter readership?

Collins: Don't be shy. NetMECCG is a labor of love fueled by the well-wishes of those who use it. Additionally, many people use NetMECCG far more than I, and are far better players of MECCG than I. I need their help to find bugs and make suggestions for improvement. So, send me email and let me know what you think.

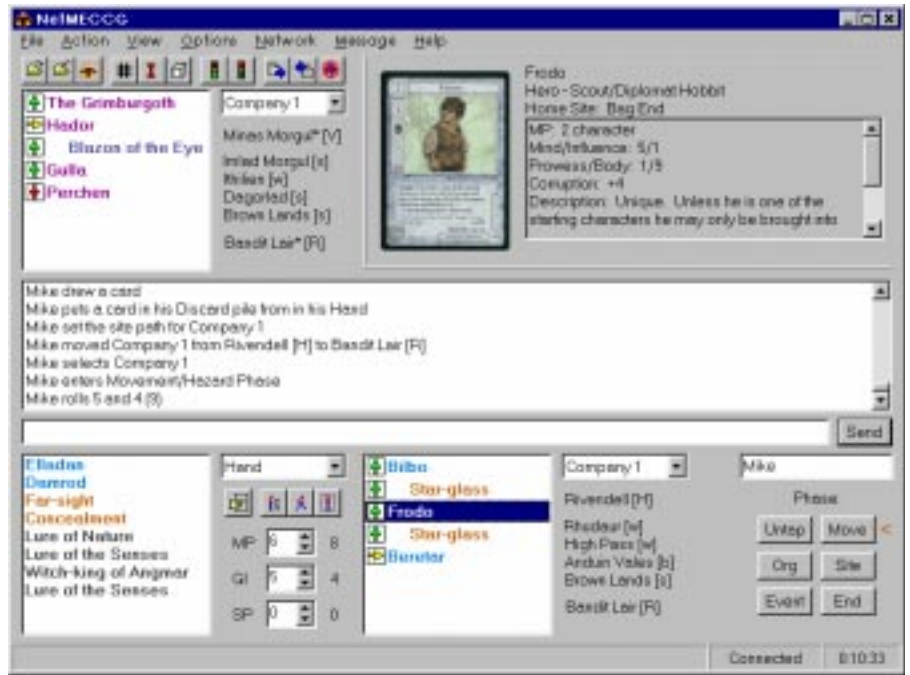
Oh, and one other thing. If you ever find yourself playing me with NetMECCG, have mercy!

Thanks for interviewing me. It's been fun.

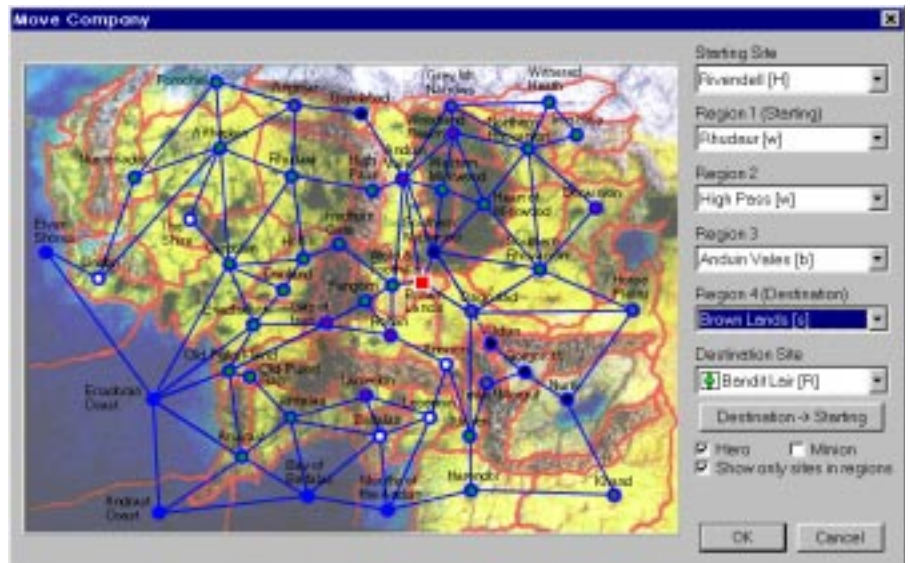
TOMN: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. We wish you and your wife and soon to be baby well and good health.

Send comments to the author of this article at cbouldin@pacificnet.net or to the creator of NetMECCG at mcollins@ee.eng.ohio-state.edu.

Thanks to Charles and Mike for helping me out with this article. NetMECCG is a great program to play Middle Earth, especially for those without anyone locally to play with or for those without a large budget. Don't miss out on a great tool for testing your decks. You can even play solitaire if there is no one to connect to.



Above is a screen shot of NetMECCG. The lower portion of the screen shows your hand to the far left, and your companies in the middle. The lower right of the screen displays your current companies last movement path, as well as the names and types of regions you moved through. To the upper right of the screen is the card information area. This shows the card information for the last card highlight, which is currently Frodo. The upper left of the screen shows the information for your opponent's cards. The area in the middle of the screen is the "dialogue" area, where the program gives you information based on the actions you perform, and displays any messages that you or your opponent may have typed.



This is the screen for company movement. When you click the button for movement on the main screen (the three small man icons in the lower left of the screen), this is the display that pops up. The large window displays the various regions and their adjacent regions (with connecting lines), and the right of the screen allows you to manually enter your path. As you choose your regions, the red square (seen in the large window) lights up the affected region. You can toggle between any of the site versions, and you can even tell the program that you wish to stay put this turn, by hitting the "Destination - Starting" button and then hitting the "OK" button. Note that you can set your path for the next movement during your opponent's turn.

Deck Tip: *Effective Use of the Sideboard in MECCG*

Jason Klank

The sideboard is probably the most underrated and most overlooked aspect of deck construction for the game of MECCG. To not have one can mean almost certain defeat at the hands of a deck for which your hazard strategy has no effect on. However, a lot of people have no idea of what kind of cards to utilize in their sideboards (both "standard" and the 10-card "fallen-wizard" sideboard). I've even seen some people go so far as to just toss in some extra MP sources and some extra random hazards in hopes of using them on the second go-round of their play deck!

Personally, I have to build a sideboard to cover not only what my main hazard strategy cannot handle, but frequently a "backup" plan – MP sources in case of duplication. What you include in your sideboard is a matter of taste, and highly depends on the "meta-game" of your particular playing environment. Some might be wondering what the term "meta-game" means. Basically, it's a determination of what a given opponent or group of opponents could possibly be playing in the games ahead. Essentially, you're trying to "guess" what type of decks you will be facing to determine what type of hazards you will be playing. The same goes for your resources.

If a particular deck is popular in your area, it could possibly pay for you to try something different while playing hazards that will hurt those decks the most. This is most effective if your opponents have built their hazard strategies around the popular deck, and your deck can avoid the hazards that are most likely to be played against you.

To be quite honest, the sideboard was created especially for tournament play. If you're playing for fun, there would be no need. Just play a 3 deck game and have 40-50 resources and hazards in your deck and just deal with it. The purpose of this article is to help you understand the typical sideboard cards and the effective use of sideboard manipulation.

Sideboard Hazards:

The main consideration of your sideboard is that of hazards. What would you do against a One Ring deck, if your main deck hazard strategy couldn't deal with one? You would probably get the Ring dunked on you! This is where the sideboard comes in. There is almost NO WAY of being able to deal with EVERY type of resource strategy that your opponent can be playing.

Common Sideboard Hazards That I Often Include:

Here, I will list some sideboard hazards that I usually include in my sideboard – hazards which would usually have no place in my main deck, but could come in handy in the long run against the right opponent:

Short Legs Are Slow – A big defense against a One Ring deck. This forces One Ring players, who use Hobbits, to use Region movement exclusively. This will get you at least 1 extra turn to do something about their trek to Mt. Doom. Combined with *No Way Forward* you can buy yourself a LOT of time.

The Ring Will have but One Master – the ULTIMATE One Ring deck hoser. If your opponent gets the One Ring out quickly, but is unable to get to Mt. Doom quickly (say, you pulled off a Short Legs are Slow, or a No Way

Forward), this card will force them to discard a character each turn. It is difficult to deal with and can also get rid of your opponent's Wizard (as he is eligible to be discarded). The only way around losing characters is to put the Ring-bearer into his own company and trudge forward.

The Will of the Ring – a card that will allow you to force a corruption check on the Ring-bearer. At the least, you will force other characters to tap, or make the resource player waste a corruption-check modifying card.

Rolled Down to the Sea – if you catch your opponent off guard, you can force him to discard the One Ring (as it IS a ring).

The above cards are almost ALWAYS in my sideboard. In smaller tournaments, you may not come up against a One Ring deck. However, it is my experience, that in the larger tournaments, that there will be some players playing that strategy. It's always best to have something against it just in case you happen upon one of them. Here are some other generic hazards I often use, but not always:

Neither So Ancient Nor So Potent – There are a LOT of items in the game that give BIG MP's if stored. This is a handy card-breaker. If your opponent goes to all the trouble to get that big item, stored at a haven, play this. The 2 MP's that your opponent gets will more than likely be much less than the item stored. Also useful against those decks that get lots of factions and allies, but not heavy on items. If they store their only item, play this, which will remove their only source of item MP's, and let you double yours.

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Deck Tip: *Effective Use of the Sideboard in MECCG (cont.)*

(Continued from page 20)

Doubled Vigilance – This popular anti-Mordor-Squatter deck card is becoming more and more a staple card in hazard decks against Minion players. If you catch a large company sitting at Mt. Doom playing all sorts of 1-MP things, this card is your answer.

Other hazards are usually determined by what “holes” you have in your hazard strategy. If you’re playing a Man hazard strategy, you might want to toss in a few Man boosters or other Man creatures to cover areas of the map that are not visited frequently in your area (like coastal seas).

Sideboard Resources:

The purpose of having additional resources in your sideboard are twofold. One, if you are playing a game, and it is a close match in MP’s, you will need additional sources in your sideboard for your second-time through your deck.

If it’s close enough to where you cannot be certain that you can stop your opponent from catching you (or you need to catch him), then do not necessarily call the Council. I’ve seen many 12+ MP turns happen after I have called the Council. If the totals are 27-26 in your favor, it will still be a long game.

The first thing I usually include in my sideboard are *factions*. If you frequent sites where there are more than 1 faction playable, or say an ally and a faction, include 1 in your play deck, and the other in your sideboard. If you cycle, you can bring it into your deck. If for some reason your opponent gets your *Easterling* faction, you can bring in your *Wain-Easterlings* and not waste a turn.

The second thing I usually include are extra item MP’s. There’s plenty of Major item sites around the board (and heck, there’s even a good number of Greater item sites), that a few extra cards in your SB can’t do anything but help eventually.

The most difficult thing to determine what type of sideboard resources to include in your sideboard depends heavily on what your resource strategy currently contains. If you’re going around getting items and factions with lots of Warrior- and Ranger-types, what happens if your opponent plays some Hazard Permanent-event on you? What if you have already used all of your Marvels Told that are in your play deck? Or what if you didn’t include them for one reason or another? Have them in the sideboard. There’s many ways to access cards from your sideboard (we’ll get into that in a bit).

The only sideboard resource which is always include (only if I’m playing a Minion deck) is *Sudden Call*. I can’t think of any instance where you would want *Sudden Call* in your normal playdeck unless you were playing a 1-deck game. Minions have a VERY difficult time in the 1-deck game simply because heroes can out-race them easily.

Accessing Your Sideboard:

There are many ways, both resource- and hazard-wise, that allow you to access your sideboard. I will go through the most common ways here:

Resource Methods:

If your Wizard/Ringwraith is in play and you have at least 5 cards left in your Play Deck, you may tap him during your Organization Phase to place 1 resource from your sideboard into your play deck or up to 5

resources from your sideboard into your discard pile. This is most effective in those decks that don’t require that you move your Wizard/Ringwraith much. If you have a way to bring your resources in your discard pile back to your Play Deck (Favor of the Valar) or a way to bring them to your hand (The Mouth or Uvatha the Ringwraith), bring a bunch to your discard pile. This is also effective if you’re about to cycle your deck to get a lot of resources into your deck after you cycle.

Smoke Rings/Weigh All Things to a Nicety – Both of these cards allow you to bring 1 resource/character into your Play Deck from either your Sideboard or your discard pile.

Hazard Methods:

An Unexpected Outpost – This is probably the most common way to manipulate hazards in your deck. It will allow you to bring 1 hazard card from your sideboard or discard pile into your play deck (up to 2 hazards if *Doors of Night* is out). If *Doors of Night* is out, you can even bring 1 hazard from both your discard and sideboard. The most common use for these is to bring back another *An Unexpected Outpost* and another hazard card from your discard pile – thus allowing you to continue cycling hazards.

You can also access the hazards in your sideboard by tapping your Wizard or Ringwraith at the end of your opponent’s untap phase, or by tapping and discarding a Nazgul hazard Permanent-event during your opponent’s movement/hazard phase. By doing either, you can bring 1 hazard from your sideboard into your play deck or up to 5 into your discard pile but only if you have at least 5 cards left in your deck.

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Deck Tip: *Effective Use of the Sideboard in MECCG (cont.)*

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Above are the most common ways of accessing your sideboard. There's others, but they are not as common nor are they as simple to use. I know that this article may seem lengthy and a good number of you probably already know all of the methods above, however, this article is intended to be used by those newer to the game or those not used to using

their sideboard effectively (or at all). With the current discussion of reducing the game time, some people have brought forth the idea to eliminate the sideboard. I think that this would be a bad idea, and would remove one of the better aspects of the game.

If you have any comments, feel free to drop me a line at dominia@bellsouth.net or dominia@therealm.org



Black Rain illus. 1997 Liz Danforth from MELE, © 1997 ICE

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

James Kight

Last Issue's Quiz received such a good response that I thought I would continue the quiz this issue, but this time I am going to ask questions about each set separately. This issue will be questions related to the **Wizards set only**, next issue will be **Dragons**, etc.

Therefore the answers for this issue's quiz are specifically restricted to **Middle Earth: The Wizards**. Answers on page 28.

To which regions is "Tom" keyable?

- A. Wilderness, Shadow-land, Dark-Domain
- B. Shadow-land, Dark-Domain
- C. Double Wilderness
- D. Wilderness, Shadow-land

Which of the following regions is not adjacent to Anduin Vales?

- A. Redhorn Gate
- B. High Pass
- C. Southern Mirkwood
- D. Brown Lands

How many regions are adjacent to Andrast?

- A. 6
- B. 4
- C. 2
- D. 5

Which of the following characters is not a diplomat?

- A. Cirdan
- B. Denethor II
- C. Adrazar
- D. Arinmir

Which of the following resources is not a long-event?

- A. Elf-Song
- B. Clear Skies
- C. Ford
- D. Fog

Without the use of any items or your wizard, what is the maximum number of mind for characters that you can have on the table at the end of the organization phase?

- A. 46
- B. 37
- C. 41
- D. 29

What is the lowest possible MP total after the Council has been called, including negative numbers?

- A. -23
- B. -20
- C. -17
- D. -21

What is the largest possible hand size not including cards drawn for the movement/hazard phase?

- A. 11
- B. 12
- C. 10
- D. 13

Which hazard card gives the greatest number of corruption points?

- A. The Pale Sword
- B. Lure of Nature
- C. The Balance of Things
- D. Morgul-Knife

Which Nazgul has the lowest Body?

- A. Ren the Unclean
- B. Khamul the Easterling
- C. Akhorahil
- D. Dwarf of Waw

Assuming Galadriel is carrying no weapons, what is her prowess and body when 1 Nenyia resolves?

- A. 6/11
- B. 5/12
- C. 3/12
- D. 7/9

How many allies are playable at multiple sites?

- A. 4
- B. 1
- C. 3
- D. 2

Which of the following creatures has the greatest number of strikes?

- A. Assassin
- B. Orc-Raiders
- C. Ghosts
- D. Ghouls

How many items are storable at sites other than havens?

- A. 4
- B. 3
- C. 5
- D. 1

Which Nazgul (if played as a permanent-event and then tapped for its special ability) is the only one that becomes a long-event?

- A. Adunaphel
- B. Indur Dawndearth
- C. Witch-King of Angmar
- D. Dwarf of Waw

Which Man faction requires the lowest influence check as printed on the card?

- A. Men of Lamedon
- B. Men of Northern Rhovanion
- C. Men of Dorwinion
- D. Men of Lebennin

Which of the following spells gives the highest modification to the resulting corruption check?

- A. Wizard's Fire
- B. Wizard's Voice
- C. Wizard's Laughter
- D. Wizard's Flame

Answers on Page 28.

Ruminations: Knowing the Rules

James Kight

One of the more interesting things about going to Middle Earth tournaments is how many players (experienced and otherwise) are unfamiliar with the rules. This may sound surprising concerning the experienced players, but it is quite a bit more prevalent than you may think.

As recent as Origins '98, I witnessed quite a number of players who were unfamiliar with even the most basic of rules, and even more who were not aware of all the errata that has been issued since the game's release.

I saw more than a few players discard to their hand size at the end of the turn, and then discard and draw again. Folks, this is against the rules. The rule states: At the end of turn phase, you may choose to discard a card. THEN: Return to hand size. Period. Let's say your hand size is eight and you have played an on-guard card during your opponent's turn, and chose not to reveal it. At the end of the turn, you would discard a card as is your choice. Then: you return to hand size. Since you chose to discard a card, you are already at 8, so the turn is over for you.

As simple as this may sound in theory, there are quite a few players out there who do not understand this rule. The question is: just how familiar with the rules do we need to be?? Just who expects us to memorize a 60-some odd page rulings file?? Considering the complexity of the rules even when the game was first released, it is no surprise that there are players out there who are very unfamiliar with whole sections of the rule book.

Perhaps this is a necessary evil of a game as potentially complex as this one is. Maybe there needs to be a rule

for every possibility. I hope not though. There's only so much you can do in fifty minutes...or an hour and a half.

Which brings up another point: how long do these games have to be to accommodate the rules we are given? Without even stopping to think I can tell you that the majority of games I have played with a time limit I did not go through an entire deck cycle. No matter how quick you think players are going to be, there is bound to be someone or some situation that requires special attention.

I'm of the opinion that the reason so many players have so little grasp of the rules is that we don't teach them everything when we show them the game. I have heard myself say on more than one occasion, "Uh, that's for influence. I'll show you that later. (much later)". And who can blame us? Would you want to spend a whole evening going through the possibilities of combat or influence? "Not I," said the chicken.

This is probably one of the telling signs about the current state of MECCG. The inability to attract new players to the game because to get them involved, it requires a 3-4 week course, a video-tape, a take-home test, etc., etc. Maybe not that bad, but you get the picture. Just giving them a rule book and some cards isn't going to make it happen either.

As a crown's guard, I am constantly trying to figure out ways of explaining the rules in a format easy enough so that everyone can understand, and brother, it ain't easy. I've tried everything from overheads to practically talking through each and every situation, but I usually end up wasting my breath. I've even tried using the cards as a story-telling tool to explain the

game, and that helps, but when the story is over, it's up to the player to make their own story. More often than not they forget the rules.

Which brings me to another aspect of knowing the rules: cheaters. Now, don't flinch, we all know who we are. Whether it's playing a card illegally or taking Tom Bombadil up to Carn-Dúm, we have all slipped up at one time or another. And to be clear, I am not referring to the occasional "whoopsie", but the repeated abuse of a card, a rule, or a misunderstood intention of the game.

My view is, if you have to cheat, go play blackjack and win some money. What makes this worse is when the offender knows the rule and intentionally exploits another player's ignorance or misinformation. Sad to say that I have seen quite a few players take advantage of newbies by whipping out some combo that makes their opponent's head spin trying to figure out what is going on. And usually the new player just nods because he has no clue what just went on.

I also dislike the "loop-holers", who try to find each and every exploitable combo just to get a point. Game designers are not perfect and are bound to miss something occasionally. The right thing to do would be to ask the rules administrator (a.k.a. NetRep) what the interpretation should be. That is not always going to be a hard and fast clarity, but at least some common sense should be involved.

If you find yourself looking at an impossibly powerful combination, chances are it was overlooked. Now, being human, it's nice to be able to surprise your friends and impress the girls with your wonderful prowess and bear-trap mind, but as far as the

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Ruminations: (cont.)

(Continued from page 23)

game is concerned, the more loopholes you find, the more errata will eventually be issued. I'm certainly not saying that the fault is entirely ours (those of us who ferret out these loopholes), I personally think the playtesters need to be a bit more objective.

When the game was first released, the original Council of Lorien rules concerning tournaments placed the burden of catching a mistake on the player and his opponent, and told them to correct the mistake as it was found. Frankly, I think this is a bit weak. Necessary, granted, but weak. As a tournament coordinator, I am certainly not going to expect the new players to have a full grasp of the rules, but I will expect the experienced players to understand them. Is that fair? Well, maybe, maybe not.

What am I supposed to do as a tournament coordinator to ensure that the player all play fair and that everyone has a good time? Deck checks? Deck lists?

Anyway, I suppose what I am driving at here is that the rules as they currently stand are putting a burden on the old players, the potential players, and the coordinators. Yes, it's time for a rules revision.

I think we all know what we want the rules to say, and basically how the game works, but by now it's gotten to the point of being too stretched-out. A rule book here, a companion guide there, a rulings file here and an errata listing there. It's really all too much. I still have trouble remembering everything about agents. I shudder to think what the new players go through, especially when they are coming in after six expansions.

The big question for ICE is, how to make a major revision to the rules without losing a majority of your current customer or without still turning off your potential customers. Do you eliminate some aspect of the game? Do you shorten the game time? If so, by how much? And what part of the game is eliminated if any to do so? How much of this will allow the players to gain a better working knowledge of the rules?

To be frank, I find Magic easier to play. Not more fun, just easier. So easier isn't always better, but there is something to be said for simplification. And there are hundreds of thousands more Magic players than there are Middle Earth players. Now I know that's not a fair analogy, especially seeing as how Magic was out first, but it makes you think about the power of one rule versus twenty.

Middle Earth does have some things going for it, namely:

1. The background/world to use for simulation.
2. The ability to portray somewhat of a role-playing aspect while keeping the game playable with only cards.
3. The ability (hopefully) to learn from the earlier mistakes of other card game companies.

Not all of these are going to remain true, nor is this an exhaustive list of the good things about Middle Earth; but most of the other good things in my opinion relate to the potential in the rules and the simulation.

When MECCG first came out, I didn't even hesitate to buy cards, the attraction of the game from a collector's and player's point of view was overwhelming. And I think that this attraction

was what helped MECCG gain its first legs and allowed it to be able to consider more complicated simulation and possibly a richer game environment. BUT. This should not be a welcome opportunity to turn MECCG into Rolemaster (aka RuleMaster) by inundating it with numerous rules to try to cover all the bases. The simpler the game (to a point), the more of a game it remains instead of a labor.

I don't really like carrying every single one of my cards with me, but for the sake of keeping track of all my options, I don't see where I have a choice. I don't mind reprints, but I would also like a little revision to go with it. A little sugar, a little medicine.

Far be it from me to tell ICE what to do, I think I have a few thought and ideas of my own (naturally):

1. Get more players involved in the gathering of ideas and suggestions.
2. Bring in more playtesters to work out the rulings kinks for the rules that you decide on.
3. Eliminate the urge to over-complicate a card with unnecessary text. If it needs that much text, you probably need to re-think it.
4. I'd much rather have a slight delay in expansion release that have 20 cards out of a set that need errata because they were hurried out.
5. Simplify movement.

Those are just a few of my thoughts about knowing the rules and how to make the rules less of a chore. I'm sure everyone else has a thought or two of their own.

See you next issue.

Liz Danforth Art



Annatar & the 7 Rings illus. 1994 Liz Danforth from Moria, MERP Sourcebook © 1994 ICE



Adunaphel illus. 1995 Liz Danforth from METW, © 1995 ICE



Dwarven Mask illus. 1994 Liz Danforth from Moria, MERP Sourcebook © 1994 ICE



Dwarven Warriors illus. 1994 Liz Danforth from Moria, MERP Sourcebook © 1994 ICE

Game Review: Pyramidis

James Kight

If you have not had the chance to play Pyramidis (distributed by ICE), then you are missing another great game! Pyramidis is a strategic board game similar but not so similar to Parcheesi. The object is to get all your pieces around the board to your home space. Along the way you will run into your opponent's pieces, and he will try to prevent you from winning while trying to win himself.

You start the game with 8 pyramid pieces, all in one stack on your home space (fig. A). By moving your pyramids in stacks, the object is to go around the board until you have moved at least 5 of your 8 pieces to your ending space, which is represented by a large colored triangle (the same color as your pieces) pointing off of the board (fig. B).

During your turn you may move any one stack of pyramids which has one of your pyramids on top. When moving any of your stacks, you pick up the entire stack (even if there are any opponent's pyramids in the stack) and then drop the bottom pyramid of the stack onto each successive space, whether it is already occupied or not. You must move stacks in the direction of the arrows of the same color as the top pyramid. You may not skip a space. The number of spaces moved is equal to the number of pyramids in the stack you are moving, to a maximum of 5.

No more than 5 pyramids may be in any one stack (except your beginning stack), and any move that would place a pyramid on a stack of 5 pyramids must instead skip that space and resume placing pyramids on the next available space. Stacks of 5 pyramids are called Towers (fig. C).

A player may not skip a turn, unless all of his pyramids are captured (which means that none of his pyramids are on top of any stacks). If a legal move exists, it must be taken.

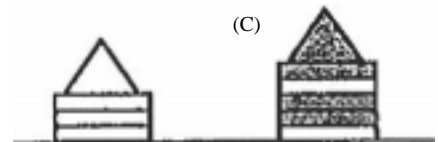
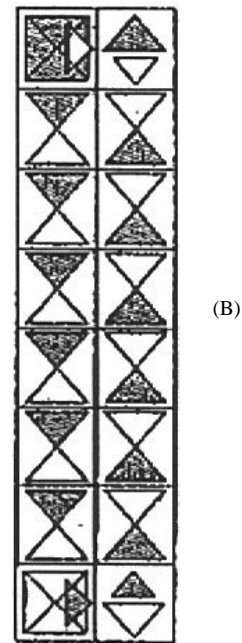
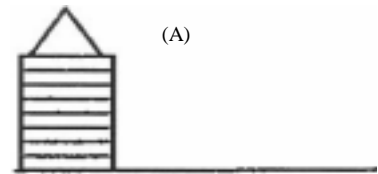
The color of the pyramid on the top of the stack determines who may move the stack, and also determines in what direction the stack is moved. As you place your pyramids during movement, you gain control of any stacks that your pyramids can legally land on.

The four spaces at the center of the board (where all four tracks meet) are the only place where pyramids may be moved outside their track as a result of another color moving your pyramid (only in a 4-player game). These pyramids which are off of their colored track if moved must move using the shortest possible route back to their track, and then they must comply once again with the direction of their colored arrows once they have returned to their track.

If during movement a pyramid (or group of pyramids) lands on the final space of its own color, it is immediately removed from the board, and all remaining pyramids must be placed as if the removed pyramids had not existed.

The first player to have at least 5 of his 8 pyramids in his home space wins. The 2 player game requires that the players use tracks that are exactly opposite from each other

Having played this game recently, I can say that it is an easy game to learn, but can be interesting to master all the different strategies involved, especially with the 4-player game. I recommend this game to those players who enjoy a simple but challenging board game.



Pyramidis is designed by R. Siegers.

Produced and distributed by Iron Crown Enterprises.

Illustrations provided by Iron Crown Enterprises and can be found in the Pyramidis rule book.

The Role of Dice in MECCG

Julian Wilson

In any game of MECCG you are likely to make numerous rolls with those two little cubes that often seem to defy any notion of averages and come up "snake eyes" three times in a row. In this article I intend to look at some of the many situations where you must roll those dice and the likely outcomes of these situations. First though, some assumptions: I will assume that the dice are fair, that each face has one chance in six of facing upwards when thrown, and that subsequent rolls are independent of previous rolls. Now you may have noticed, contrary to what I said in the first sentence of this article, that numbers like 2 and 12 are rarely rolled, whereas numbers like 6, 7 and 8 come up often. This is because you can only roll a 2 by rolling a one on each die, whereas you can roll a 7 by rolling a one and a six, a two and a five, a three and a four, a four and a three, a five and a two, or a one and a six. Thus you are six times more likely to roll a 7 than a 2. The percentage chances of rolling various numbers are listed in the following table:

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

Of course in most cases you are interested in rolling greater than or less than some number. For example you may need to roll greater than 9 to eliminate a character with body 9. The chance of this is equal to the chance of rolling 10 plus the chance of rolling 11 plus the chance of rolling 12, i.e. $8.3 + 5.6 + 2.8$, which equals 16.7. Alternatively, you may note that there are six ways of rolling a 10, 11 or 12 out of thirty-six possible dice permutations. Six out of thirty-six is a one in six chance, which is approximately 16.7% in percentage terms. I will tend to use this second way of calculating chances. Now for some examples from MECCG:

Corruption:

Radagast is bearing Glamdring and has a Lure of Nature played on him as he travels through three wilderness regions. What chance does he have of failing one of his three corruption checks? Radagast has three corruption points, but plus one to all his corruption checks. He will fail if he rolls at least one "snake eyes" in three rolls. His chance of passing all the checks equals his chance of rolling greater than 2 on all three checks, which is $35/36$ times $35/36$ times $35/36$. So, he has a $42875/46656$ or 91.9% chance of passing all three checks and therefore an 8.1% chance of failing at least one.

Radagast is fortunate and passes all three checks. He rests up at Rivendell and tries to remove the Lure of Nature by not tapping and rolling greater than 7. His chance of success is $15/36$ (41.7%). He rolls a 6 and does not remove the Lure. He decides to travel to Bree to influence the Rangers of the North to join his cause. As he sets off, he has a Lure of the Senses and Foolish Words played on him. His chance of passing all his corruption

checks as he travels through two wilderness regions is $30/36$ times $30/36$. This comes to a 69.4% chance of success and thus a 30.6% chance of failure. Radagast manages to fight off his urges for a quiet life in the woods and reaches Bree to meet the Rangers.

Influence:

Unfortunately, Radagast is not as eloquent as would be usual for such a worthy wizard. He must make an influence check of greater than 9 with only +6 to the roll, rather than the normal +10. His chance of being successful equals his chance of rolling a 4 or better, i.e. $33/36$ (91.7%). He manages to succeed despite his foolish words and plans to wait in Bree for Beretar to join him. While he waits, he enjoys the excellent beer of Barliman Butterbur and plays Glamour of Surpassing Excellence. His chance of removing the Lure of Nature is $30/36$ and his chance of removing the Lure of the Senses is $21/36$. His chance of removing both is $30/36$ times $21/36$, which equals $630/1296$ (48.6%). He is lucky, the quality of Barliman's beer helps him to relax and focus on the important tasks ahead: both Lures are removed. However, the Foolish Words requires a roll of 8 or better to remove. Radagast has a $15/36$ (41.7%) chance of success, but fails. Perhaps the beer is not so conducive to his eloquence.

Combat:

Beretar joins Radagast and they set out on a dangerous mission to Gollin-gate to track down Gollum. On the way they are attacked by Trolls from the Mountains. There are three strikes with prowess twelve and body five. Beretar has prowess five and body eight. Radagast has prowess eight and body nine. The extra strike from the Trolls is assigned to Beretar as a -1 modification to his roll. Radagast and

The Role of Dice (cont.)

(Continued from page 27)

Beretar both tap to face their strikes. Radagast goes first, swinging Glamdring at the nearest Troll. His chance of defeating the strike is 30/36 (83.3%). His chance of defeating the body is 26/36 (72.2%). His chance of defeating both is 30/36 times 26/36, which equals 780/1296 (60.2%). Radagast manages to slay his Troll, while Beretar struggles against his two. Beretar's chance of defeating the strike is 10/36 (27.8%). Beretar fails and is wounded. The chance that he will die is 10/36 (27.82%). Beretar lives, and he and Radagast escape from the Trolls to continue their journey.

While in the High Pass, our erstwhile pair is again beset with danger. This time, a Giant attacks the company. Radagast plays And Forth He

Hastened in order to untap himself. Then he taps to face the strike. His chance of defeating it is 26/36 (72.2%). He does so handily. One less Giant to trouble the Free Peoples! Finally Radagast and Beretar reach Goblin-gate, but they do not enter since they both desperately need rest.

The next morning, Radagast and Beretar decide to enter Goblin-gate. Beretar is still wounded, but Radagast is refreshed, so they walk down into the tunnels. Fortunately for the duo, the Orcs are busy squabbling amongst themselves so that they do not notice the stealthy strangers. Deep down they find Smeagol, who decides to join the pair in the hope of finding his Precious. Smeagol leads Radagast and Beretar out of the tunnels. The mission has been successful.

I hope that the above examples illustrate a few of the numerous occasions where dice rolling is required in MECCG. Using basic methods of probability, it is possible to calculate the chances of many different events occurring. This can be used to evaluate the relative effectiveness of hazard creatures, hazard events, the usefulness of characters and the difficulty of play of certain resources. I hope to write further articles in the future on the role of probability in MECCG.

[Thanks to Julian for submitting his article! Though I am not a big fan of mathematics or statistics, I really enjoyed it. Hopefully we can make it a regular feature. Thanks again Julian! Please feel free to submit your comments and suggestions!]

Answers to MECCG Quiz on Page 22

To which regions is "Tom" keyable?

C. Double Wilderness

Which of the following regions is not adjacent to Anduin Vales?

A. Redhorn Gate

How many regions are adjacent to Andrast?

D. 5 (Andrast Coast, Anfalas, Bay of Belfalas, Eriadoran Coast, Old Pukel-Land)

Which of the following characters is not a diplomat?

B. Denethor II

Which of the following resources is not a long-event?

C. Ford

Without the use of any items or your wizard, what is the maximum number of mind for characters that you can have on the table at the end of the organization phase?

C. 41

Elrond, Galadriel and Haldalam in General Influence (20), Elrond using Vilya can control another 10, Galadriel using 3 Nenyas can control another 10, and Haldalam can control a 1 mind character for a total of 41.

What is the lowest possible MP total after the Council has been called, including negative numbers?

D. -21 No points in any category, plus the following characters in your dead pile: Elrond (-3), Cirdan (-3), Galadriel (-3), your Wizard (-5), Frodo (-2), Bilbo (-2) and Aragorn (-3). Total of -21.

What is the largest possible hand size not including cards drawn for the movement/hazard phase?

D. 13 (Elrond at Rivendell, Galadriel at Lorien, Cirdan at Grey Havens controlled by Pallando, who has tapped the Book of Mazarbul. +5 cards)

Which hazard card gives the greatest number of corruption points?

A. The Pale Sword (6 corruption points)

Which Nazgul has the lowest body?

B. Khamul the Easterling (8 body)

Assuming Galadriel is carrying no weapons, what is her prowess and body when 1 Nyenya resolves?

B. 5/12 (she is a 3/10, and will add +2/+2)

How many allies are playable at multiple sites?

A. 4 (Gollum, Shadowfax, Roac the Raven and Bill the Pony)

Which of the following creatures has the greatest number of strikes?

D. Ghouls (5 strikes)

How many items are storable at sites other than havens?

B. 3 (Book of Mazarbul, Sapling of the White Tree and Earth of Galadriel's Orchard)

Which Nazgul (if played as a permanent-event and then tapped for its special ability) is the only one that becomes a long-event?

C. Witch-King of Angmar

Which man faction requires the lowest influence check as printed on the card?

C. Men of Dorwinion (a 6 is required)

Which of the following spells gives the highest modification to the resulting corruption check?

A. Wizard's Fire (gives a -4)

Council of Lorien Ranking System Unveiled

Michael Reynolds
MECCG series editor

A couple of years ago, a committee at ICE set requirements for the MECCG ranking system. This committee represented design, operations, and marketing. John Curtis and myself then designed the system.

Before describing this beast John and I thrust upon you, I want to list the requirements the committee set forth. This is to provide a perspective as complete as possible.

(1) Each player is described by a number called "ranking points." This number approximates the performance of that player in sanctioned tournaments relative to other players.

(2) New players start in the middle of the pack. They have no inherent disadvantage or advantage relative to veteran players.

(3) Do not discourage players who perform poorly in a tournament from playing again.

(4) Do not discourage players with access to a very low frequency of tournaments.

(5) Award play in multiple tournaments.

(6) Keep paperwork simple for tournament coordinators. Complexity of recording tournament results is inversely proportional to their accuracy.

(7) Minimize data entry. Only a small number of hours can be devoted to it.

(8) Adjust player's scores for quality of opponents (given by opponents' ranking points). This yields ranking points that most accurately indicate a

player's success.

(9) Do not encourage accomplished players to stop playing. If the average quality of opponents is much lower than his own, an accomplished player should not have "everything to lose and nothing to gain."

Resolving these nine simple requirements together was a huge challenge. For example, requirements (4) and (5) contradict each other, as do (8) and (9). A little more subtle is the conflict (6) and (7) have with (8). I dislike compromise as much as anyone, but the situation was inherently over-specified. This means direct conflict was unavoidable, and compromise inherently necessary. Despite the compromise and not reaching the nine requirements perfectly, I think the system works. We are never satisfied, however, and look to improve it where we can.

Here is the system in a great big nutshell. Each player comes into sanctioned play with 500 ranking points. At any single tournament, each player gives 10 ranking points to a point pool to be redistributed after the tournament. The points returned to a player depend solely upon how that player placed in the tournament (first, second, etc.). Points are returned according to the Ranking Points Table. This cross indexes a player's placement in a tournament with its number of players to yield the player's returned points. Ranking points are then cumulative from tournament to tournament. Note that a player can never lose more than 10 points from a single tournament. Sample point distributions are given below.

The average ranking points per player is constant. This directly satisfies requirement (2). The total number of points awarded in a tournament equals the number penalized. The net change

in the number of points in the system after each tournament is zero. If you add all the rankings points in the system and divide by the number of players, the result will be 500 - a first-timer's total.

Placement in tournaments-rather than results against individual opponents-is the basis for each player's ranking points. John and I speculated tournament results would often be turned in incomplete, inaccurate, or late. We were right. From the mass of tournament results to date, player positions are usually clearly discernible, but not all opponents. Luckily, we only need to know opponents for breaking a few placement ties.

John and I did not feel ICE could or should give tournament coordinators a hard time for the nature of returned results. We therefore chose the simplest data for the system. We and our hundreds of players rely on a handful of devoted people across our continent to run tournaments. They do this purely out of true enjoyment of the game, and we do not want to discourage them.

We do not presently track opponents' ranking points and adjust for quality of opponents, as per requirement (8). The database routine is written to do this, however. Unfortunately, because of the nature of results discussed above, adjusting for quality of opponents is often meaningless. As per requirement (7), we cannot devote the time to communicate with players and coordinators to fix bad or missing data. Considering requirements (9) and (2) together, adjusting for the quality of opponents would only yield a small order correction anyhow. This means it will not make that much difference.

Council of Lorien Ranking System Unveiled: (cont.)

(Continued from page 29)

John Curtis generated the Ranking Points Table cell by cell. We figured a formula did not exist to handle all the stuff we wanted the table to do. For example, the second place finisher should receive approximately the same number of points as the first place finisher in a tournament with half the number of players. This follows if you figured he beat half the field. Here are some sample ranking point returns. The table is too big to fit here, but the following three samples should portray its essence.

With 6 players

1st place: 21 (net gain of 11 ranking points, because he gave up 10 points to start the tournament)
 2nd place: 15
 3rd place: 10 (no net gain)
 4th place: 10
 5th place: 4
 6th place: 0 (net loss of ten points)

With 12 players

1st: 27
 2nd: 22
 3rd: 17
 4th: 13
 5th: 11
 6th: 10
 7th: 10
 8th: 6
 9th: 3
 10th: 1
 11th: 0
 12th: 0

With 24 players

1st: 34
 2nd: 28
 3rd: 23
 4th: 19
 5th: 16
 6th: 14
 7th: 13
 8th: 12
 9th: 11
 10th: 11
 11th: 10

12th: 10
 13th: 10
 14th: 10
 15th: 7
 16th: 5
 17th: 3
 18th: 2
 19th: 1
 20th: 1
 21st: 0
 22nd: 0
 23rd: 0
 24th: 0

[Thanks to Mike Reynolds for giving us this explanation into how ranking points are devised. I myself asked him this question awhile back, and instead of letting him off the hook by giving me a quick answer, I thought it would be spartan of him to offer up the answer in the form of a brief article to let you folks in on the answer as well.]

A Golden Card Idea

Spencer Carney

If you've ever let your mind wander through Tolkien's Middle Earth via MECCG (and who reading this hasn't), you've probably come up with an idea for a new card or two to enhance the simulation aspect of the game. Well, I decided to put my idle brain ramblings to use and contribute a card idea to James's MECCG newsletter. Of course, I realized that I would be putting something out there that might be criticized, questioned, or (worst of all) ignored, so I thought about turning the whole feedback thing into a contest. (Rules for feedback and cool prize choices listed after the card idea.)

Okay, here's the card:

Hung on a Gold Chain

Hero Resource Permanent Event

Only playable on an item controlled by a character at a haven. Place this card with the item. All bonuses and special abilities of the item are ignored. Bearer receives +1 to all of his corruption checks. +1 corruption point to every character other than the bearer in his company. Cannot be duplicated on a given item. Bearer may make a corruption check and discard this card if successful.

That's it. An event that protects you (a little) from the corruption of an item in exchange for not letting you use it (and also for making it a little more tempting to the other characters in the party).

Now for the contest part. I want feedback...or flavor text...or an awesome way to abuse this card...or artwork to go with it...or a story to go with it...or a great way to play hazards on somebody who uses this card. or a new hazard card that would really hose somebody using this card (something like "The Gold Chain Breaks"). You get the idea. Be creative and maybe James will put your entry into next issue. [Sure, why not. JK] Regardless of whether he does or not, I will review all entries and pick my favorite. If its yours, I'll give you a Limited Edition Assassin or Mouth of Sauron, your choice. (If your submission is REALLY good, I'll give you both.) Readers, start your brains!

Spence Carney

Runę Alphabęts

James Kight

For those of you who may have been wondering what those runes on the front cover of each of the Newsletters say, I have decided to include a hint sheet. Each newsletter cover includes two statements that you can decode, both using rune alphabets from Tolkien's world.

The runes below the main title on the cover use the Moon Runes alphabet more commonly seen on Thror's Map. These are examples of the letters that Elrond decoded under the light of the moon, hence the name Moon Runes.

A	𐌰	a	𐌰
B	𐌱	b	𐌱
C	𐌲	c	𐌲
D	𐌳	d	𐌳
E	𐌴	e	𐌴
F	𐌵	f	𐌵
G	𐌶	g	𐌶
H	𐌷	h	𐌷
I	𐌸	i	𐌸
J	𐌹	j	𐌹
K	𐌺	k	𐌺
L	𐌻	l	𐌻
M	𐌼	m	𐌼
N	𐌽	n	𐌽
O	𐌾	o	𐌾
P	𐌿	p	𐌿
Q	𐍀	q	𐍀
R	𐍁	r	𐍁
S	𐍂	s	𐍂
T	𐍃	t	𐍃
U	𐍄	u	𐍄
V	𐍅	v	𐍅
W	𐍆	w	𐍆
X	𐍇	x	𐍇
Y	𐍈	y	𐍈
Z	𐍉	z	𐍉

Also included on the cover is the Tengwar rune font. I have always been particularly fascinated with the legend of the Noldor in Tolkien's works. I have also included below the translations for each rune as it relates to our own alphabet. One interesting thing to note is the supposed absence of a "P" rune. It's still there, but it is actually represented by a small symbol that sits over the preceding letter, such as in the word "complacent", written in Tengwar as 𐌌𐌌𐌌𐌌𐌌𐌌𐌌𐌌𐌌.

The letters as seen separately would read:

𐌌 𐌌 𐌌 𐌌 𐌌 𐌌 𐌌 𐌌 𐌌

The "p" symbol sits over the "m" rune in complacent, indicating its location.

M = 𐌌

P = 𐌌

MP = 𐌌

Now, in such a word as "peculiar", where the "p" rune begins the word, the "p" rune juts out, and is written in Tengwar as:

𐌌𐌌𐌌𐌌𐌌𐌌

This is not to say that these runes are the bible of the Noldor language, but this is how they have been represented on the computer.

Tolkien created many other languages for his works, and they have continued to fascinate linguistic scholars far and wide.

To the right is a listing of the Tengwar runes. Granted, these are only representative of a computer font version of Tengwar. I would refer you to the appendices of the Lord of the Rings for the correct usage of the Tengwar. In this and future issues, I will continue to use Tengwar (as represented by the computer font

version) and will also be changing from Moon Runes to Angerthas, which is more recognizable. Keep in mind also that the Angerthas shown here is a computer font

(Continued on page 32)

a	𐌌
b	𐌍
c	𐌎
d	𐌏
e	𐌐
f	𐌑
g	𐌒
h	𐌓
i	𐌔
j	𐌕
k	𐌖
l	𐌗
m	𐌘
n	𐌙
o	𐌚
p	𐌛
q	𐌜
r	𐌝
s	𐌞
t	𐌟
u	𐌠
v	𐌡
w	𐌢
x	𐌣
y	𐌤
z	𐌥

Runes Alphabets (cont.)

(Continued from page 31)

representation. Not all of the nuances of the runes can be shown, but you can get a good idea of what they look like in use. Shown below is the translation table for the Angerthas rune font.

A	A	a	a
B	B	b	b
C	C	c	c
D	D	d	d
E	E	e	e
F	F	f	f
G	G	g	g
H	H	h	h
I	I	i	i
J	J	j	j
K	K	k	k
L	L	l	l
M	M	m	m
N	N	n	n
O	O	o	o
P	P	p	p
Q	Q	q	q
R	R	r	r
S	S	s	s
T	T	t	t
U	U	u	u
V	V	v	v
W	W	w	w
X	X	x	x
Y	Y	y	y
Z	Z	z	z

As you can see, there are some interesting comparisons to make between Angerthas and some of the original Celtic runes from the ancient times. Tolkien borrowed heavily from Celtic runes and root words, as demonstrated by the following word comparisons.

In Westron, the language of the Hobbits in Tolkien's Middle Earth, the word "hobbit" means "hole-builder".

Tolkien created a philological origin for this word using an Old-English construct written as *holbylta*, meaning "hole-builder". The hobbits called themselves *kuduk*, taken from *kud-dukan*. Both of these terms were Gothic versions that Tolkien derived from the old German word *khulaz*, meaning "hollow".

Where To Find More Information

There are many sources of information to go to when you are interested in finding out more about the runes and languages used and invented by J. R. R. Tolkien.

One source is the Lord of the Rings book itself. Appendix E of the Lord of the Rings gives a good description of the writing and spelling of the languages used in his book. Also included is a chart of script for the Tengwar and Angerthas runes as they are properly used (i.e., other than the fonts used in this article).

Another good book for every Tolkien fan interested in language is *The Languages of Tolkien's Middle Earth* by Ruth Noel (published in 1980 by Houghton Mifflin). It covers a little bit of each of the 14 different languages invented (and assorted alphabets) for use in the Lord of the Rings and the Silmarillion. It gives a

good description of Tolkien as a linguist and includes a dictionary, a pronunciation guide and a glossary for translating the various languages. Also included (as it seems to be in most Tolkien related books) is the Line of Kings from beginning to end.

Recently published is *The Hobbit Companion* by David Day (who also wrote the Tolkien Encyclopedia). It is a hardback book that goes for about \$21.95 US and is lavishly illustrated and decorated. Very nicely produced. David goes into great detail into the behind-the-scenes aspects of the Hobbit and its creation. *The Hobbit Companion* discusses Tolkien's fascination with language and his purposeful, sometimes humorous derivation of words from some of the older languages to use as his words in *The Hobbit*. Also included is the heritage and history of the hobbits, the land in which they live, the society of the hobbits, as well as some of the more famous hobbits of the Shire. Plenty of illustrations abound in *The Hobbit Companion* (most by Lidia Postma), with the best one being the "hobbit woodstock" featuring just about every hobbit worth mentioning in attendance, with a picture and name guide following.

One of the more powerful attractions of the Lord of the Rings is its history, heritage and language. There is much more to Tolkien's creation than meets the eye, and probably a little bit of something for everyone.



Pocketted Robes illus. 1997 Liz Danforth from MEWH, © 1995 ICE

New Card Ideas

James Kight

Have an idea for a card? Send it in! just because your friends laugh at your creations, doesn't mean it isn't a good idea. All cards start somewhere. I have recently spoken to Mike Reynolds of ICE about gathering the card ideas to pass on to ICE since Ichabod is no longer there to do so. So for now, I am the official liaison for ICE for collecting new card ideas.

Anything you can think of, feel free to send it in. Do you think another site needs creating? Write one up, perhaps put a little art with it, and send it my way. I am gathering all the ideas, keeping track of all discussions and revisions, and finally passing them on to Mike.

Wondering what to create? Well, let's walk through an example of card creation and see what we can come up with.

First, there needs to be a reason to create a card. I for one think there needs to be a way to transfer allies to other characters so the ones toting them around aren't stuck with them if you decide you want to go do something else with them. How many times have you been forced to put Tom Bombadil under your wizard, only to realize that now he is nowhere within reach of any greater item sites.

So I decided to come up with a card that would allow a character to transfer an ally to another character. As you think of your card effect, however, it is important to remember to try to balance the card's power relative to its playability (remember Vilya). No need to make a card that would warrant errata right off the press.

I immediately decided to make it possible to transfer an ally only during the organization phase, and only at a haven. While the ability to transfer an ally would be a great boon, it should be balanced with the restriction of sacrificing a turn to change the ally's controller.

Now that you have a basic structure for a card, it's time to think about pros and cons. Cons? This card can definitely become abused even with the haven restriction, so you must decide how to limit its use to the intended effect, something that can be VERY difficult to accomplish. You might require a dice roll for the transfer to occur, and that the ally would discard with an unsuccessful roll. You might require that the character receiving the ally be of same mind or higher.

Pros? You have a card that can allow you a bit more freedom with your game plan, and will allow you to avoid painting yourself into a corner if you

happen to get stuck with an ally that you weren't fully prepared for.

You also need to consider the effect of uniqueness. Does it need to be unique? Perhaps, perhaps not. Does it need to be a short-event or a long-event? How about a permanent-event? Let's look at how the card has evolved as I have created it:

A New Best Friend

Hero Resource Permanent-Event
Playable on a haven. As long as this card remains in play, you may transfer a hero ally to another character of the same or higher mind. Cannot be duplicated on a haven. Discard if the haven leaves play.

Well, so far it seems ok, but there is one ambiguity that I can see right off the bat. We need to state that the ability to transfer an ally is the only thing affected by this card. Once a transfer is made, it is permanent and cannot be affected by the discarding of this permanent-event.

Well, I hope this small example gave you some food for thought as you are thinking of new cards to create for the game. If you think of any cards, please feel free to send them to me and I will put them in a file to send to ICE. Be sure to get your friend's advice on the card as well. You might be surprised about what they think of your idea!

Tournament Report: Beach Con '98

Due to time (and memory constraints) the BeachCon '98 report will be short this issue. The attendance was fair, with about 8 people per tournament.

There were three tournaments: A Challenge Deck tournament, a 2-deck General Opponent tournament, and a Lidless Eye sealed deck tournament.

The winner of the Challenge Deck tournament was Benjamin Shanks from South Carolina. The winner of the 2-deck General Opponent tournament was Mike Twitchell, also from South Carolina, and the winner of the Lidless Eye sealed deck tournament was Patrick Cochran from the sunny state of Florida.

Next issue will definitely feature a full report from the U.S. Nationals, with pictures.

If you have any tournament reports that you would like me to print, please feel free to email me your report.

Thanks!

More Liz Danforth Art



Ent in search of the Entwives,
illustrated by Liz Danforth, 1997
for Middle Earth: Lidless Eye
© 1997 Iron Crown Enterprises

Never Refuse
illustrated by Liz Danforth, 1997
for Middle Earth: White Hand
© 1997 Iron Crown Enterprises





Ents of Fangorn Forest illustrated by Liz Danforth 1987
from Ents of Fangorn MERP Sourcebook, © 1987 ICE



The Mouth of Sauron illustrated by Liz Danforth 1990
from Dol Guldur MERP Sourcebook 2nd Ed. © 1995 ICE



Ancalagon the Black illustrated by Liz Danforth 1989
from Middle Earth Adventure Guidebook II, © 1989 ICE



Éanfled illustrated by Liz Danforth 1989
from Dark Mage of Rhudaur, © 1989 ICE

MECCG Council of Lórien © Championship Information & National Rankings

**Council of Lórien
Championship Information**

Here is all of the information we have at the moment concerning the 1998 Middle-earth Collectible Card Game Council of Lórien Championships:

1998 Council of Lórien season began September 1, 1997 and ended August 9, 1998.

For more information on get an MECCG tournament sanctioned, contact events@ironcrown.com. Several tournament results were not reported. Results received late will be applied to next season's rankings. Please contact your tournament coordinator if you suspect your tournament has not been reported to ICE.

Players gain or lose points based solely on where they place in sanctioned tournaments. Players start this season with 500 points plus 20% of their points over 500 from last season. A player must have played in a sanctioned MECCG tournament during the given dates to be ranked this season. Several qualifiers are scheduled to follow this season's ending date. These winners are invited to this year's championship, but otherwise, these tournaments are reported in next year's rankings.

See Council of Lórien Championship for information on how rankings apply to participation in this event. If you are designated by this list as qualified for the semi-final or preliminary round, you should receive an invitation by September 16. If you do not receive an invitation by this date, contact Mike at ICE at metwice@aol.com or (804) 295-4280.

1-42 (Semi-final round qualification)

- 1) * Kight, James Winston-Salem NC 27104 660.5
- 2) * Kuhlman, Keith Warrensburg MO 64093 646.5
- 3) * Thompson, Phil Warrensburg MO 64093 633
- 4) Brooks, Steve Warrensburg MO 64043 631.5
- 5) Twitchell, Mike Greenville SC 29615 620.5
- 6) * Brown, Steve Fairfax VA 22032 616
- 7) * Silverman, Eric Cockeysville MD 21030 612
- 8) Hollowell, Steven Independence MO 64052 602

- 9) * Cable, Chris Pittsburgh PA 15220 596
- 9) * Bruinooge, Nathan Silver Spring MD 20910 596
- 11) Rice, David Ortonville MI 48462 593
- 12) * Bonneville, Alexander Rochester Hills MI 48309 583
- 13) * Mineman, Ed Houston TX 77079 574
- 14) Coble, John Huntersville NC 28078 571
- 15) Rice, Michael Owosso MI 48867 569
- 16) Williamson, Sean Greenville SC 29615 562
- 17) Umphlett, Randy New Hope MN 55428 561
- 18) * Rae, Dan Hanwell NB E3C 1M6 560
- 19) * Wong, Brian Whistler BC V0N 1B8 558
- 20) * Satterley, Brian Statesville NC 28677 557.5
- 21) * Kenyon, William Douglasville GA 30135 555
- 22) Lancaster, Forrest Belfast MO 04915 553
- 22) * Bisz, Joseph Binghamton NY 13905 553
- 24) * Grace, Joshua Duluth MN 55804 551
- 25) Feth, Gary Pittsburgh PA 15203 550
- 26) * Sokolowski, Matthew Knob Noster MO 65336 548
- 27) Robinson, Michael Sedalia MO 65302 547
- 27) Bryan, Jason Glen Ellyn IL 60137 547
- 29) Margolese-Malin, Eli Chapel Hill NC 27514 546
- 29) McDuffee, Jason Lombard IL 60148 546
- 31) Jones, Ken Rusagons NB E3B 8H6 545
- 32) Langiniais, Scott Dallas TX 75240 543
- 33) * Shallue, Andrew Blaine MN 55449 542
- 34) Sanders, Bill Oklahoma City OK 73159 541
- 35) Comer, Isaac Warrensburg MO 64093 540.5
- 36) * Cox, Jeff Greenville SC 29615 540
- 37) Carney, Spencer High Point NC 27265 537
- 38) Finley, Chris Spokane WA 99203 535
- 39) Cook, David Montréal QC 534
- 40) Franklin, Skip Grand Rapids MI 49503 533
- 41) Mortell, Max Ellicott City MD 21043 530
- 42) Wilkinson, Kelly Raytown MO 64133 529
- 42) Meyers, Joel Yukon OK 73099 529

44-70 Preliminary round qualification

- 44) Wuller, Steve Fort Worth TX 76120 528
- 44) * Machen, Jimmie New Kensington PA 15068 528
- 46) Gerherdt, Stephen Thomasville NC 27262 527.5
- 47) * Coyle, Ryan Vancouver BC V6G 1R7 527
- 47) * Lund, Douglas Ham Lake MN 55304 527
- 49) * Miller, Andrew Mississauga ON L5H 4B3 526
- 50) Bialota, Joshua Belfast ME 04915 525.5
- 51) Pittek, Michael Pittsburgh PA 15210 525
- 52) Sanders, Jason Oklahoma City OK 73159 524
- 53) Sutherland, Tony Ann Arbor MI 48104 523
- 54) Hayes, Kris Pittsburgh PA 19221 522
- 54) Heiss, Nathan Pittsburgh PA 15217 522
- 54) Norton, Van Taylors SC 29687 522
- 57) Tuell, Matthew Lansing MI 48911 521
- 57) Klank, Jason Taylors SC 29687 521
- 57) Bryan, Joe Glen Ellyn IL 60134 521
- 60) Bishop, King Belfast ME 04915 520
- 60) Bock, George Dayton OH 45440 520
- 60) Hirt, Shawn Ham Lake MN 55304 520
- 60) Jarvis, Newell Dallas TX 75228 520
- 64) LeClair, Ken Riverview NB 519
- 65) Wilson, Paul Spokane WA 99203 517
- 65) Crawford, Ronald Seattle WA 98166 517
- 65) Denman, Eric Round Rock TX 78681 517
- 68) Robb, John Lower Kingsclear NB E3B 1M6 516
- 68) Medrano, Andrés Austin TX 78751 516
- 70) Escott, James St. John's NF A1B 1H4 515
- 70) Flynn, Rich Wayne NJ 07470 515
- 70) Heim, Billy Spokane WA 99207 515

Players 73-91

- 73) Weeks, Matthias Chicago IL 60622 514
- 73) Hughes, Matt Pittsburgh PA 152203 514
- 73) Rose, Jeremy Moncton NB E1C 5K8 514
- 73) Averett, Edward Chapel Hill NC 27514 514
- 73) Spinner, Jon KC MO 64410 514
- 73) * Chick, Kevin E3B 1N8 514
- 73) Oxford, Larry Belgrade MT 59714 514
- 73) Pecchioli, Joel Lakewood NJ 18701 514
- 81) * Lemanski, Demetrius East Lansing MI 48823 513
- 81) Gorski, Gary Pittsburgh PA 15228 513
- 81) Kenefick, Bill Tampa FL 33704 513
- 81) Berry, Gene Union City CA 94587 513
- 81) Walker, Joe Piscataway NJ 08854 513
- 81) * Lanphear, Tom Phoenix AZ 85008 513
- 81) Rozenfarb, Mark Montréal QC H2C 2B9 513
- 88) Gardner, Chris Raleigh NC 27612 512
- 88) Derderion, Vaughn Southfield MI 48075 512
- 88) Fink, Adam Selden NY 11784 512
- 91) Perry, Darren St. John's NF A1A 4L7 511
- 91) Caron, Kris Fredericton NB 511
- 91) Bryant, Alexander Chehalis WA 98532 511
- 91) Lyons, Bryan Iowa Park TX 76367 511
- 91) * Burke, Chris Littleton NC 27850 511
- 91) Griego, Robert Live Oak TX 78233 511
- 91) Riegner, Nicholas Pittsburgh PA 15237 511
- 91) Brooks, Carl Nyack NY 10560 511
- 91) Senden, Mayk Eindhoven Netherlands 5613 DD 511
- 91) * Schaubel, Martin Milwaukee WI 53219 511

* player has already qualified for the semi-final round at the 1997/98 season Council of Lórien Championship

Qualified Players

SEMI-FINAL ROUND QUALIFIED PLAYERS

Qualified from 1997 Council of Lórien Championship

- Andrew Potter (NY)
- Cliff Yahne (IL)
- Nathan Bruinooge (MD)
- Brian Satterly (NC)
- Keith Busbee (FL)
- Brian Wong (BC)
- Matt Sokolowski (MO)
- Ris Misner (OH)
- Demetrius Lemanski (MI)

Qualified from Qualifiers

- Steven Brown (VA)
- Keith Kuhlman (MO)
- James Kight (NC)
- Jeff Cox (SC)
- Tom Lanphear (AZ)

PRELIMINARY-FINAL ROUND QUALIFIED PLAYERS

- Eric Silverman (VA)
- Stephen Brooks (MO)
- Chris Burke (NC)
- Sean Williamson (SC)
- Scott Palmer (CO)

To get the latest rankings and updates, visit the following site:
<http://www.ironcrown.com>

Moon Letters



Test of Lore by Donato Giancola © 1995 Tolkien Enterprises

Mike Siggins

Thanks for sending the newsletters. Superb. Just about ideal with one slight hitch - they are way too short! I especially enjoyed the interviews and artists features, though the best part are your discursive pieces.

My only comment is a slight puzzlement at your comments on the Balrog. You seem to be clinging to the notion that collectibility in METW is a positive feature. This is the complete opposite to my, and many other's experience. If there is one factor that has put off many players over here in the UK it is the collectible aspect, even more than the learning curve. I can name at least six gamers who will not touch the game (or any other CCG), however good it may be, because of the collectible aspect. "Why should I buy a game that is effectively incomplete, and purposely denies me access to the very characters I want. And why would I spend hundreds of pounds on that game?" Tough to answer eh? So, I too applaud the change of tack - from a personal financial basis, and from the chance to recruit new players. Can you explain why you think it is a good thing (apart from retaining 'value' in our existing collections)?

Mike Siggins

Mike, thanks for your letter and your comments. The amount of effort it takes to produce, edit and print this newsletter is probably more than a lot of people are aware of. That is not to say that it is impossible, far from it. Most of the time the first few issues serve as a guideline to see how much information can comfortably be passed on each issue without overwhelming both the publisher (myself) and the reader (you).

This issue is as big as the first two combined, however, it is probably not going to get any bigger (I hope not). That and the fact that I am also otherwise employed limits my ability to take in too much information.

The Balrog issue is a bit different here in the States. For the most part, the collectible aspect of the game (of ANY ccg, really) is part of the fun. Most of the cards that are hard to get are less than \$10. In a sense, it promotes players to either buy more, or interact with other traders and build a bigger player base. Not that the lack of this has stopped games like Trivial Pursuit or Monopoly. I can see both sides of the issue, but MECCG was a collectible card game first. I don't necessarily think it is a "good" or "bad" thing, just a harbinger of things to come. We will see.

James,

Received issue 2 today and was very happy with the content. In my opinion, if you are able to sustain the magazine long enough, it will be a significant aid in promoting METW c(c)g. I would still like to see an article or two on how to attract and teach new players the game. I would also like to suggest an area for a controversial subject. One that springs to mind (and is popular) is do minions have it too easy. With the new agent ruling is ICE pro-orcs? Just a thought. If content could include deck examples to support said opinion, that would be very informative for people like me I think. Anyway, whichever way you take this magazine, I really appreciate your efforts.

Regards

Alan

Alan, I have been contemplating how to incorporate bringing new players into my newsletter without letting it become a teaching guide. I think perhaps the best way to approach it would be to give examples and guidelines each issue on different aspects of the game; one issue devoted to movement, one to resources, one to hazards, etc. How to implement? I'm not sure, but I will be working on it.

I don't think ICE is pro-orcs as much anti-hose. I don't necessarily agree with ICE on the agent rulings, but for the most part, the ruling won't have that much affect on the game as a whole as far as minions are concerned. There are far greater issues to attack with minions.

Dear James,

Congratulations on gaining official status for CRMN from ICE. It is to be hoped that ICE will take advantage of CRMN to pass along inside information about MECCG products.

Once again I am delighted with the latest issue of CRMN. In fact, the increased number of pages and surprises (who'da thought I could get a Craig "Ichabod" O'Brien interview just by asking?) made me feel that Christmas had come early this year.

I thoroughly enjoyed your interview with Craig O'Brien (who should I ask for next?). The only thing that you might have missed was an explanation for his remark that he'd "like to take the automatic-attack out of the site phase." I really would hate to see that go. Automatic-attacks are the basis for my favorite hazard strategy. Being able to create and multiply automatic attacks, force my opponent to face them early with Tidings of Bold Spies and then play an on-guard creature (even at sites which normally don't have automatic attacks) has proven to be very effective for me.

I also enjoyed Audrey Corman as the Featured Artist. If I can't have Angus McBride, Audrey Corman will do just as well. In fact, Audrey's artwork is closer to that of my favorite fantasy artists, Tim and Greg Hildebrandt and Darrell K. Sweet. Be sure to let us know where we might find more of the Featured Artist's work.

I found this issue's Card Review very enlightening and am encourage to give Riddling Talk and Flatter a foe a serious try. It's been rolling around in the back of my mind for a while. I have the cards and with the advice offered in your article, I think I can give it a good whirl now.

I found the Fallen-Radagast Deck Tip article highly informative. I've only played Fallen-Gandalf and - Saruman decks to this point. Armed with your thorough analysis of the resources available to Fallen-Radagast, I'll have much less trouble giving this one a try sometime soon.

The title change for your commentary column came as another pleasant surprise (I haven't had so much fun reading a newsletter in quite a while); however, all the moaning over the 'net about MECCG's ever-ballooning errata has left me so jaded that I all but fell asleep reading Ruminations. I hesitate to say that since there is some good information in there, though I was expecting something a little spicier, deeper or at least genuinely new to me (hey, it is supposed to be a "news"letter).

Thanks for the Fluxx game review. You're the first to offer enough details to actually make the game sound interesting to me. I'm hoping to find it somewhere in the area later this week and introduce it to my family. It sounds like something they might enjoy.

Moon Letters (cont.)

(Continued from page 37)

Finally, in response to your Final Word, I don't mind change; however, I fear that the new formats inaugurated by the forthcoming The Balrog release will make it a bit harder for me to find good trades. We shall see.

Since I haven't been able to get to the online version of CRMN yet, I am (along with many others I'm sure) wondering how the newsletter looks in color. Would it be possible to make the newsletter available for download and printing in color for those of us who have the appropriate equipment?

Thanks again for your efforts with the newsletter. Keep the issues coming!

Bob Moss

Bob, thanks for the support. As far as Craig's comments on removing the automatic-attack from the site phase, I believe that needs clearing up. It is my opinion that he was interested in allocating the automatic-attack to another part of the turn other than site phase to eliminate confusion as to what could and could not be done during the site phase.

So far, only Quinton has a web site to speak of (of the first two) and I listed his web site in Issue 1. Liz's web site is listed with her interview.

The Ruminations column is my pulpit, so to speak, and really serves as a vehicle for my thought summaries. Many times I am commenting on talk from the mailing list, and many times adding my own thoughts. It's definitely not a news article. But perhaps it would be good to mix opinion with news. We'll see. Don't hold your breath, though.

Jason Klank has the .pdf formats of my newsletters on his web page located at www.therealm.org. The .pdf format is in color, so those of you who wish to print the issues in color are encouraged to look there.

Hi James,

I got your newsletter in the mail; thanks a lot! I had a lot of fun picking my mind on the quiz! I went through it again today and still did not get them all right. That was fun.

I liked the article with Craig... too bad he is sort of gone now. I have not read the interview with A. Corman. Some of her artwork always caught my eye but I never noticed her style that is always present. It would be nice if we could buy a 'catalog' or some kind of book with enlargements of the artwork. The Great Shield of Rohan must

be quite impressive full size. Anyways... that's my first impression: I will finish it off later on this evening.

Thanks Again !!

Gary

Gary, thanks for your comments. I myself enjoyed taking the quiz, and actually missed a few when Spence sent me the questions.. Hopefully this issue's quiz will test your MECCG knowledge even more!

As far as buying art or collections of art, I am afraid that I will have to direct you to the artists themselves. Some artists do have such collections, some don't. If there is a particular artist you would like to find out more about, contact either the artist directly or Jason Hawkins at ICE (1-877-423-4263). I plan to have some contact information in the future than I can pass on to those that are interested.

James,

Just wanted to let you know what a wonderful job I think you have done on the Newsletter. I started doing something similar in the local Chicago-area (modeled after Dave Rice's Hobbiton Herald), but it only lasted one issue really and then it sort of turned in to my website (When You Know More). It was called the Iron Mountains Argus.

It is good to see there is still this level of interest so far along down the road. It has become rather difficult to keep the website updated as much as I would like - after 7 issues you start to run out of fresh ideas and energy - but after reading through Newsletters 1 and 2 in .pdf form the other night I sort of had a burst of inspiration. I should have a ton of new articles up right after the Nationals (see you there!). I look forward to seeing Issue 3 - it sounds like a monster.

Keep up the good work,
Matthias

Matthias, I have always enjoyed your online 'zine, and I used it as the impetus to put this newsletter together. I had always thought that there were people who didn't have access to the internet or did not have computers. For those of you who haven't had the chance to visit Matthias' web 'zine, I highly recommend it. It can be found at:

www.xsite.net/~mweeks/meccg/

James,

I recently received #'s 1 & 2 and have enjoyed reading them -- great job! Looking forward to

#3 and I hope you can put in complete listings of the best decks at Nationals in #4. Since your MECCG's official newsletter now, may I suggest that you drop "CarolinaCon Regional" from the name or perhaps change it (maybe to "Council of Lorien") to reflect that this is a nationwide (worldwide?) publication.

Thanks,
Martin Toggweiler

Martin, I do intend to include the information from the US nationals, as well as (hopefully) some pictures. I have planned to take a bunch of disposable cameras to give everyone to help take lots and lots of pictures. And as you can see, the name of the newsletter has changed.

(Incidentally, this newsletter is sent to readers in: Germany, Spain, Japan, Australia, Canada, England, Denmark, The Netherlands, Italy, Ireland, Hungary, New Zealand and Sweden.)

Hi James,

I just receive the Issue #1, #2 Newsletters. What a surprise! Great work, fine articles... Congratulations to you for this amazing stuff. I cannot wait for the #3!

Thank you for your work and best regards.

Csongor (Boromir II)

Thanks! Issue 3 should be mailed out the week or so following the US Nationals, so hopefully you will get it around the end of October.

Hi James!

Thanks for publishing a great newsletter about a great CCG! This is exactly what we needed. I particularly enjoy the deck building tips and strategies. The interviews are informative, too. I'd like to see some columns on solitaire decks and casual play decks. Also, maybe you could convince Julian Wilson to do a column on the statistics of MECCG.

Tim Buege

As luck would have it, I managed to convince Julian to put together an article for this very newsletter! Although I am not a fan of math, I really enjoyed his article. Hopefully his introduction to the numbers in MECCG will serve as a beginning to a long run of articles for every issue!

Moon Letters (cont.)

(Continued from page 38)

James

Excellent work... that's all I can say. Perhaps an article about organizing tourneys, getting ICE onboard with local events, Crown Guard (exactly what it is), and that sort of thing.

Keep up the excellent work, and thanks for the free postage from the states.

???

Well, I appreciate your kind words. That is a very good suggestion, so I will contact Todd McGovern at ICE and ask him to put something together for me. Many people have asked how they can join the Crown's Guard and help bring more tournaments to their area.

James,

I think one of the best additions you could have to your newsletter, would be reader-created scenarios for the game. Home made add-ons work on computer games, I would think that would be ideal for the scenario concept in Middle Earth as well. Keep up the hard work, your newsletter is great.

Thanks,
Carl Hotchkiss

Carl, definitely a good idea. I'm sure that there are plenty of good scenarios out there, and perhaps some of the readers will contribute some (hint, hint).

Hi James,

I think the newsletter is excellent. I really don't care about seeing this printed as a letter, but I did have a couple of comments.

I would suggest that ICE and other players help you make a comprehensive list of upcoming tourneys. I know you already try to do that, but I don't know how much effort goes into that. The ICE website is very weak and is slow to be updated, and for the sake of ME we all need to make sure we don't miss any events and that people have as much advanced warning as possible. It would be great to have one source to look to for a really comprehensive list of upcoming events.

Regarding other things I want to see, I really don't

have much interest in the artists, and on the other hand I would like to see more info/gossip about where the game is headed. But these are just my personal preferences.

Thanks, Ed Mineman

Ed, I do indeed strive to maintain an updated tournament list. While I would like to have a truly updated list, I cannot presume to take ICE's place. The tournaments listed on their website are ones that they at least have written down, and I would not want information from anyone that has not been taken by ICE. The true source for updated information is ICE.

As far as information, I have spoken with Bob Mohny about putting together an occasional article to let us know the official word as far as where the game is headed, and he has indicated to me that he might be putting something in Issue #4.

James,

CRMN #2 was awesome! The interviews, as always, were informative and interesting, and the card review was insightful (Toss in those Flatter a Foes in Gondor -- can't believe I didn't think of it before).

I love the concept of reviewing other, non-MECCG games as part of the newsletter. I also liked the quiz; it stops and makes you think (and I was surprised to find out how much I really knew).

Keep up the good work, and I am looking forward to #3!!

Philip Carroll

P.S. As long as the print quality is maintained, I can live with black and white (wouldn't you expect the college student to look for the cheap way out).

Thanks Phil. Hopefully this issue's quiz will stump you. Someone recently has suggested duo-tone as a possible alternative. I briefly considered it before, but decided against it as it still does not display the color of the art I include in the issues, which is my main reason for considering color.

James

Another pat on the back for your newsletter, it was better than the no.1 issue and that's how its supposed to be!

Do include more of the NetMetw league scene as Charles Bouldin proposed, that would be great! You can show rankings, interview people from a different country every time, see what cards are played in different countries, ask how the tournament scene is there, etc. Continue the great job you are doing, and if u rock an' roll at the nationals I'll probably see u at Worlds!

See ya!
Daniel Spronk.

Daniel, as luck would have it, I was also able to get Charles to give us a brief (for Charles, anyway) introduction to NetMECCG. Hopefully he can continue to give me insights and information from the NetMECCG arena.

Hi!

Just wanted to thank you for sending me copies of the ME newsletter. It was great! I think you did a real nice job on the interviews. If you need any artwork, please don't hesitate to ask.

I enjoyed doing the interview and I hope your newsletter continues on.

Keep in touch,
Audrey Corman

Thanks Audrey. I really enjoyed the interview as well. It has become a learning process to try and bring some of each artist out for the reader to see. Nothing beats a face to face interview, but hopefully I can give them a brief look.

James,

Thanks for the newsletters, I enjoyed them a great deal. I particularly liked the article on Flatter a Foe and Riddling Talk, two cards that I had previously dismissed as worthless but whose value I have now reconsidered. Keep up the good work.

Craig Mellare

I myself overlooked Flatter a Foe and Riddling Talk. Small wonder that I decided to review them after someone using them totally wrecked my hazard strategy.

Thanks to everyone for their letters and kind words! I will continue to bring to you insights and tips about the game as well as other information about MECCG! See you next issue!

The Official MECCG Newsletter

CREDITS

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Editor & Designer - James Kight
Chief Writer – James Kight
Featured Artist - Liz Danforth
Contributing Writers - Charles E. Bouldin, Esq., Julian Wilson, Jason Klank,
Mike Reynolds and Spencer Carney

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The Official MECCG Newsletter

The Final Word

James Kight

2nd Edition? Finally!!

Well, all the recent talk on the net seems to be concerning a revised edition of MECCG. Everything from card suggestion to rules suggestions to phase reconstruction and everything in between.

I for one have been shouting for a revised edition for months. Most of the troublesome errata and rulings seems to be because of the convoluted mish-mash of rules left over from all the new rules additions. Add that to the fact that the rules are hard enough to begin with.

From what I understand, ICE will begin working on the "Revised Edition" (as they prefer it to be called)

sometime next year, between the Dwarf-Lords and Elf-Lords expansion. Currently they are taking suggestion for any revisions to be made (metwice@aol.com), and I for one hope the game tightens up a bit.

There have been suggestions as varied as removal of the long-event phase to elimination of agents altogether. Whatever course they choose, it is obvious that ICE need to choose something to keep its game going. There are plenty of players out there, and plenty of new, potential players as well, and hopefully ICE can re-tool the game to satisfy a majority of both.

I haven't really sat down to think about what could be changed, but on first reflection, I would say that the rules themselves need to be simplified. It never fails to amaze me how many

times I myself have referenced a rulebook to see whether or not I am executing a rule correctly or not. Now, complicated rules aren't necessarily a bad thing, but convoluted ones are.

The less text involved per card, the better. I like the suggestion recently posted on the internet about putting indicators on cards for things like: **combat** or **organization** phase, so that the player has a better idea of when the card should be played.

Whatever the direction is, I will probably be there more as a result of inertia and genuine interest than card play. It's still a fun game for me.

The Final Word for this issue:

Simplicity!