

OTHER HANDS


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EDITORIAL: FULL CIRCLE

earning to live with the realities of non-profit publishing means (among other things) that the editor always assumes deadlines will never be met. And so it is that it is practically July and our April issue has only just come out. But the good news is that, for the first time in this journal's history, we actually have a backlog of materials ready to go for the next — maybe even the next two — issues. Now that's progress!

So much has happened since last issue. Where to begin? Most of the product news can be saved for "Frontlines;" but on top of all that, I am very pleased to announce that Jessica Ney-Grimm has appointed me as her "Assistant Series Editor" for the Middle-earth Role Playing series. Holding down both the series editorship and the art direction position at ICE as she does (and with the huge amount of energy ICE has had to put into the ME:TW card game), Jessica's ability to devote time to current MERP projects has been whittled away. So I will be playing a much more active role in bringing the vari-

ous new modules to completion. Other Hands will, of course, remain an independent publication, as that is one of its main reasons for existence, but it will also better be able to serve its function as a forum between ICE and its audience. OH has certainly come full circle from being a prophet crying in the wilderness.

As those of you with Internet access have probably discovered, the on-line version of OH 12 promised last issue has not yet appeared. The reason for the delay (as I have recently learned) is that the managers of the site have decided not to release any of their materials until ALL of them are operational. I have no firm release date to give you as I write this, but I wouldn't be surprised if we are on-line by the time you read this. Just so no one forgets, we will be available at: www.vas-tus.com. I have already taken a peek at the finished product, and it is WELL worth the wait. Everything is in color, a new logo has been designed, and in all humility it rocks!

Enough of my gloating. In this issue we offer the second installment of our "Taste of Things to Come" module

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SUBMISSION
DEADLINE
for issue 15

Sept 1, 1996

preview series, in which Mike Campbell, author of the soon-to-be finished Southern Rhûn realm module, gives us the dirt. Mike is part of our on-line network of collaborating MERP authors, who can all vouch for the quality of his work. A bold step eastwards for Middle-earth Role Playing!

Next in line, we are honored to have OH newcomer Michael Martinez give us a fine sample of his scholarly work on the First Age realm of Hithlum. While not involved in Middle-earth gaming per se, Michael has for some time been researching the “History of Middle-earth” series (as well as the previously published sources) with a view to eventually publishing a book on the history of Tolkien’s world and its peoples—surely something of immense value to fantasy role players who want to explore Middle-earth in depth! Hithlum seemed a particularly apt choice for OH, since I very much want to encourage interest in and development of a First Age game setting. We look forward to seeing more pieces of Michael’s work in future issues.

Speaking of full circles, we now bring our “Making of MERP” interview series to a close by having a talk with none other than Jessica Ney-

Grimm herself. Having worked on the line from many angles — layout design, editing, and art direction — Jessica is well-qualified to offer us “the big picture” of MERP: how it emerged, how it developed, and where it is going.

Finally (in addition to all our usual offerings) we are graced with a very innovative and thought-provoking article by Martin Baker (the gentleman responsible for those amazing calendar concordances in Southern Gondor) on the topic of relating the “fictional” history of Middle-earth to our own “real” history, a motif that Tolkien himself developed in his treatment of The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit as “translations” from the mysterious Red Book of Westmarch. Even if the Fourth Age (or the Fifth, or the Sixth) is not your cup of tea, you will be missing an incredibly enjoyable read if you skip this article.

Finally, we have included in this issue a map...a map that should have appeared in Southern Gondor: The Land, but doesn’t. Without it, a good chunk of that module will be cryptic. This is the map of Harondor, the South-kingdom’s desert frontier with Umbar and Near Harad. So consider yourselves lucky to own a copy, since Pete Fenlon’s color map of this region

is unlikely to appear until the publication of Wes Frank’s Near Harad module sometime early next year.

Oh yes, I almost forgot to mention that due to popular demand (read “Mark Thorne”) we have run a limited edition reprinting of all back issues of OH, so if you are missing a few (or if you are tired of those annoying xeroxes) this is your one chance to set matters right. The reprinted issues are priced at \$1.00 more than the usual subscription price (i.e., \$4.00 in the US and Canada; \$4.50 or \$5.50 overseas). Be advised that this is indeed a limited edition, and issues are going like hotcakes (We are completely out of #12.), so ORDER NOW! Chris Pheby in England also still has some original back issues that he can sell at a substantially lower price for those of you in England or Europe, so be sure to check with him as well (Hadspen Cottage, Hadspen, Castle Cary, Somerset, BA7 7LR, England, chris.pheby@ukonline.co.uk).

There’s lots of great stuff lined up for our (hopefully on-schedule) July issue, so for once you will not have long to wait for your OH fix! Until then...

Chris Seeman
May 23, 1996

BIBLIOGRAPHY ADDENDUM

“Erfarenhetspoäng” [Experience points] by Niklas Nilsson, Olórin II, October 1992.

“Modifikationer till SRR” [MERP modifications] by Johan Soderberg, Olórin II, October 1992, MERP > D&D conversion table.

“Nya yrken till SRR” [New MERP professions] by

Johan Söderberg, Olórin III, February 1995.

“Skräck och ondska i Midgård” [Horror and Evil in Middle-earth] by Johan Söderberg, Olórin IV, October 1993.

“Magi i Midgård” [Magic in Middle-earth] by Johan Söderberg, Olórin V, May 1994 (also published in Danish in Athelas 10)

FINE PRINT

Other Hands is an international gaming journal devoted to fantasy role-playing set in J.R.R. Tolkien's secondary world of Middle-earth. It is a quarterly, nonprofit publication welcoming submissions dealing with any aspect of gaming in the context of Tolkien's world: scenario ideas, rule suggestions, gaming product reviews, gamemastering aids, bibliographic resources, essays on Middle-earth, and whatever else our readership would like to see in print. In a word, Other Hands aims to be the definitive Tolkien-related gaming journal for a worldwide role-playing community: Within the pages of Other Hands, the interested gamer may publish materials with reference to any game mechanics he or she chooses (including Rolemaster and Middle-earth Role Playing). Such gaming material may deal with any time period of Tolkien's world, and need not be bound to what has already seen print in Iron Crown's modules. Other Hands provides this freedom because it is a nonprofit publication. Subscription rates are as follows: inside the USA—1 issue \$3/4 issues \$12; outside the USA—surface 1 issue \$3.50/4 issues \$18. Payment should be made to Chris Seeman: PO Box 1213, Novato, CA 94948, USA. No Eurochcks, please!

Submissions are welcome in any form (preferably legible), but are easiest to edit when received on a floppy disk. Word for Windows is the editing software currently in use, so if there is any question as to the readability of your disk, please save your document in ASCII or text-only format and include a hard copy. All submitted materials remain the copyright of the author unless we are otherwise informed. All submissions must be sent to Chris Seeman: PO Box 1213, Novato, CA 94948 (USA). Please write me or call if you encounter any difficulties, my phone number is (415) 892—9066. Please note also that I may be reached over Internet: chris1224@aol.com

COMMUNICATIONS

Mark Thorne:

Let me begin with the obligatory congratulations on a wonderful magazine. Other Hands comes as close as I've ever seen to being exactly what I was looking for in a gaming magazine. Not only are the articles, adventures, and reviews contained within intelligent and interesting, but the whole periodical deals almost specifically with Middle-earth! What more could a guy like me want? Well, I'll save that for later...

I recently received Other Hands 12, and was rather impressed with the quality of the articles. I found it slightly humorous that Other Hands 10/11, which was a "double-issue," was shorter in length than #12! I take this as a positive sign of the growth of this venue for Middle-earth gaming.

Anyway, first I'd like to make some comments concerning the new column "Digital Hands" by Fredrik Ekman. At first glance, it seemed to me that the concept of this column was out of place. But then I looked at the cover again and noticed that it said, "The International Journal for Middle-earth Gaming."

Considering that computer games are just that, I guess that "Digital Hands" fits after all. However, for some reason I still feel that the column as it is now is perhaps too limited. I have this unfortunate vision of "Digital Hands" stagnating in the future, where it falls into a rut of supplying old and rather useless information about games no one plays anymore. Hopefully, however, Mr. Ekman will be resourceful enough to not let that happen. I'm not really criticizing the column or the concept itself, but I just hope that it continues to stay as lively and useful as it is now.

Moving on to Bernie Roessler's piece concerning aggressiveness and morale in Middle-earth, I would like to say that it was truly one of my favorite articles in #12. The beginning brought to light many of my concerns about the over-eagerness of PCs to jump into a fight at the slightest provocation. A very good article, in my opinion; useful as well. It even gave me an idea for a new adventure.

I thought it was very interesting to note that in the interview, Pete Fenlon still managed to make allusions to the strong future of the MERP line, even in the context of talking about his map-making skill. Truly remarkable. For a moment, I saw a brief glimpse of the same Pete Fenlon Other Hands readers saw back in the premier issue in his "Open Letter."

Finally, I would like to voice my concerns for the future of Other Hands. It has obviously grown by leaps and bounds since its inception.

This is an excellent thing for everybody, as Chris even mentioned in #12



that a number of OH articles have been translated into other languages. However, whenever a publication such as this experiences good fortune, it is all too easy to lose the original vision that made the magazine so attractive to people in the first place. As direct examples, look at Shadis magazine or the now-deceased Inphobia. For those familiar with the above, you know that what can happen to once-good publications when the original vision is lost. To Chris, and to everyone who reads this, I urge you to keep up the excellent work in making Middle-earth the best place in Arda to adventure.

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Bernie Roessler:

Wow! Best issue yet (#12). Congratulations to all involved. My one reservation would be my own article on "Aggressiveness and Morale for Non-player Characters." In my effort to

complete the article on time, I must admit that I sinned in terms of rule development. First of all, I believe I should have explained under what circumstances the rules were meant to be used.

My intention was to present a set of rules for determining the response of hostile NPCs in a more or less random encounter (e.g. your party is detected by an Easterling patrol). The rules as they exist now were not designed to simulate what the NPCs' reaction would be if they had a personal grievance against your party. For example, even Hobbits would respond aggressively if you broke into Great Smials and tried to kidnap the Thain's daughter. Perhaps I need to come up with a table for those motivational factors. Until then, as always, the gamemaster's discretion will have to be used.

I also overlooked the fact that Orcs and Trolls usually have negative Presence modifiers due to their race. This will tend to make them a bit less aggressive than I feel they should be. Perhaps one can ignore the racial modifiers when determining the Presence bonus for these races in this circumstance, or use the secondary skill of leadership as a modifier instead.

Now that that's said, I think the "Arda Lore" section is a terrific concept. I think Chris' points regarding the Cult of Melkor/Sauron there and in the reviews are quite important. As he suggests, one aspect that needs to be further explored is just what it is that made this worship of darkness so damn appealing (or, one could say, so appealing to be damned) to so many for so long. One would think that, even if a people were slyly seduced by Sauron or his minions, if the cult did not produce positive results, its promoters would meet a similar fate to that which Luke Potter depicts for the Cult of Maladûm in his fine article on the Balchoth.

Looking forward to next issue and my compliments to the artists.

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DIGITAL HANDS

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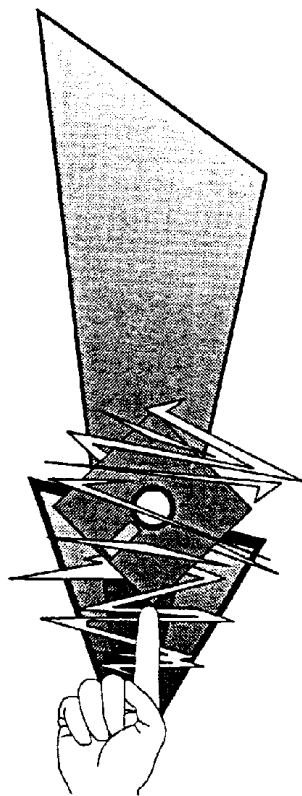
In Other Hands 12, I mentioned Interplay's The Lord of the Rings, Vol. I, which was first released in 1990. The game received quite a bit of attention at the time and had its share of both positive and negative reviews. The game has survived to this day and is still in production, partly because of the release of new versions, most notably a CD-ROM version in 1993. This is a look at how the game looks by today's standards.

The review is based on the MS-DOS disk and CD-ROM versions. There is also a very similar disk version for Amiga (which is out of production) and a completely different version for Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES). Unfortunately, I have not played the SNES version, but if any reader has played it, send me a review of it and it will be published here in "Digital Hands."

The game presents the player with a view from above. The Fellowship can be moved about Middle-earth by means of mouse or keyboard. Special actions, such as handling objects, fighting, communicating, using magic and so on are controlled from an icon menu that can be called up, or by keystrokes. The interface is generally very intuitive, although some of the icons are not consistent with the fantasy theme.

Fighting and other actions are dealt with by standard role-playing rules. Thus, there are skills, abilities, weapons, armor and so on. I feel that these rules could be more advanced, but they suffice for their purpose.

Character interaction is always a problem in computer role-playing, and will continue to be so until the day when we get truly intelligent computers. The method chosen for this game is, however, one of the better I have seen. The player who chooses to talk to a NPC, will be



Elrond's house is the place to learn new skills.

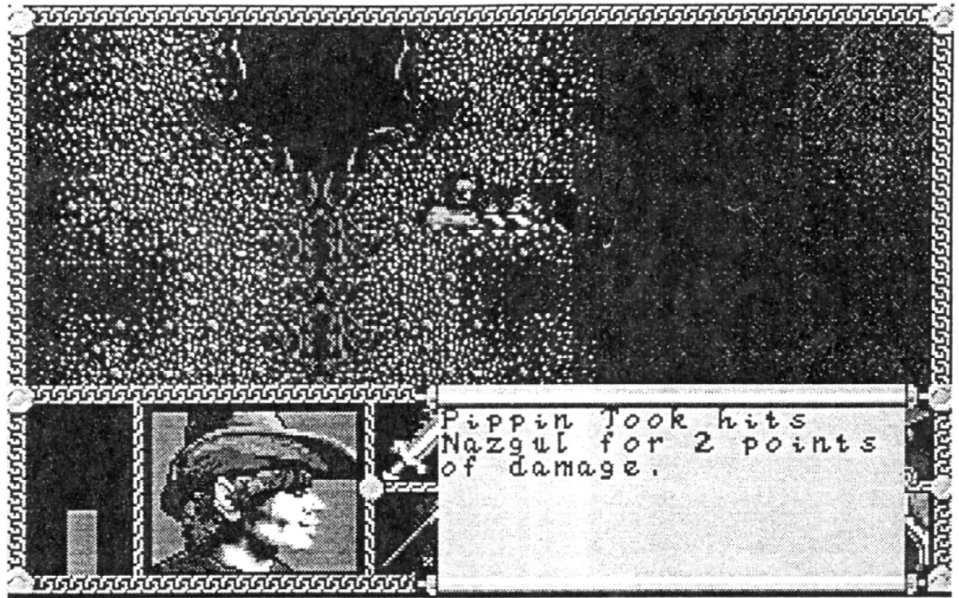


queried about what he wants to ask the NPC. One or two keywords can then be submitted, such as "news," "black riders" or whatever.

The main plot generally follows the original quite well. There are some differences, but the main challenge for the Tolkien fan lies in a wealth of different quests besides the main one. These, which can involve saving someone in trouble or finding an object, are usually not necessary for completing the game, but give experience and are very involving, too. The quests often also involve other characters which temporarily join the Fellowship. Sometimes it is possible to trick the computer into letting these character stay with the Fellowship even after the subquest is solved.

Technically, the game is acceptable in spite of its age. The MCGA graphics are nice and colorful, albeit a bit chunky. Most popular soundcards are supported and sound is adequate and can be turned off if the player wishes. Between different sections there are additional text and pictures to move the plot forwards. In the CD-ROM versions, these have been replaced with animation from Ralph Bakshi's movie. I think this is unfortunate, partly because I do not like the movie and partly because the quality becomes very poor on the computer, but mostly because the character portraits and the music of the movie are completely different from those of the game.

The manual is fairly thick and contains not only instructions for playing the game, but also a history of Middle-earth, a short bestiary, a presentation of Tolkien, and a map of the Shire. This map is needed, for the geography of the game differs



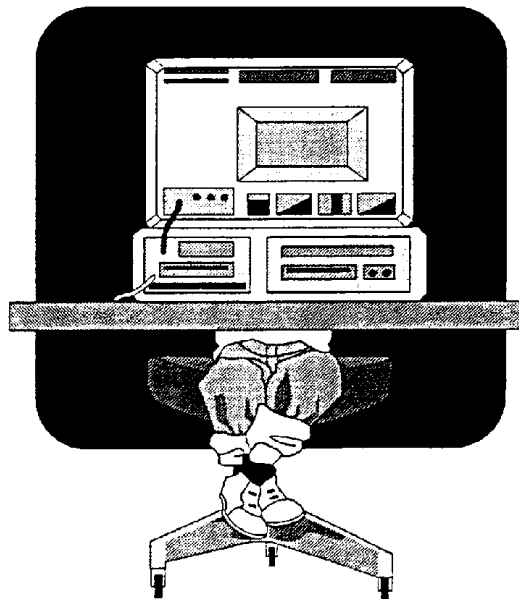
The Fellowship fights a Nazgûl at the Forde of Isen

quite a lot from that of the book (mostly because distances between towns are much shorter for obvious reasons). Half the manual is taken up by text paragraphs, which the player is sometimes prompted to read. I suppose this is mainly a sort of copy protection.

What version should be bought, then? Well, the CD-ROM version contains the above-mentioned animation, a very nice tutorial featuring the characters in the books (I smile every time Gandalf says "The key to understanding how to play The Lord of the Rings is understanding the interface" in nearly faultless British English), better music and sound effects and the text paragraphs from the manual.

The game-play itself is practically identical. I have not played the latest disk version and so cannot comment on the details but the differences are very minor indeed. I personally do not feel that these extras justify a more than double price. The fact that the thing is on CD-ROM rather than disk is not, in my opinion, an advantage, since all the game files have to be copied to hard disk anyway.

In conclusion, I advise any game-loving Tolkien enthusiast who happens to have access to a PC to buy the game. Considering its age, it is a very good game. The game is extremely rich in detail and it is not likely that anyone will tire of it very quickly, especially not since there are always more subquests to be solved. Be prepared, however, that the game does not in every respect remain perfectly true to Tolkien and his world.





FRONTLINES

By the time you read this, *Southern Gondor: The Land* should be arriving at your local game store. As I write this I have not yet seen the module, but Jessica has confirmed for me that the two 17" x 22" color maps accompanying the text have edges that finally match, giving a panoramic view of southern Gondor from Andrast to Ithilien (and there was MUCH rejoicing...).

Next in store for us is the second edition of the massive Amor realm module (now divided into Land and People volumes, just like SG). The new edition will feature better maps, better artwork, and a grammatically perfect text. The People is scheduled for release this September; The Land will follow in October. An Athelas & Other Herbs sourcebook may be ready by December.

The tentative schedule for 1997 begins with Wes Frank's Near Harad realm module and (we hope) that full-color Harondor map we are eagerly awaiting. With luck, Mike Campbell's Rhûn realm module should be out in April. Newcoming MERP author Randy Maxwell has now completed a first draft for an ambitious Forodwaith realm module, due out in June. Meanwhile I have been assembling a team of authors to write THE most Gothic citadel module ever: *The Paths of the Dead*, which we hope to have published by August. Finally, Luke Potter (author of the "Balchoth" article from last issue) has been recruited to write a Dorwinion realm module for a November release date. Still further on the horizon (1998) we hope to see Jesse Dallin's Khand realm module as well as the companion Northern Gondor land and people books.

This list is incomplete, and reflects only those projects for which publication deadlines have been firmly set. As for others, Jason Beresford has decided to treat Umbar in an extended people/land format, and hopes to have his first draft ready early next year. There is a Mithlond citadel manuscript awaiting editorial evaluation at ICE, and Jason Vester has begun work on his Ringwraiths people book (six month ETA for first draft), and research and development work continues to go into Pete Fenlon's own Rohirrim & Other Northmen people book. Among other things, we hope to include an appendix on how to use Gothic, Old Norse, and Old English as "translation" languages for the speech of the Northmen at different historical periods.

Last (though anything but least) is a sourcebook on the invented languages of Tolkien's world (Sindarin, Quenya, Khuzdul, Adûnaic, etc.), a project that will be undertaken by "the dream team" of Middle-earth linguistics: Chris Gilson, Pat Wynne, Carl Hostetter, and Arden Smith (the same folks that Christopher Tolkien has entrusted with his father's linguistic legacy, most recently manifested in their publication of Tolkien's *Goldogrin Dictionary*). When this language guide is published (hopefully sometime next year) you can all throw away your copy of Ruth Noel's *Languages of Middle-earth* — this will surpass it and everything else that has been published on the subject.

Lots to look forward to.

Reporter: Chris Seeman



SOUTHERN RHÛN

Southern Rhûn began with a letter. I have been an avid fan of *The Lord of the Rings* since reading the books as a kid in late elementary-school, and have read and reread them numerous times. When I came into contact with ICE, I was astounded, and gobbled up all of their products I could find, reading them as quickly as *Southern Rhûn* began with a letter. I have been an avid fan of *The Lord of the Rings* since reading the books as a kid in late elementary school, and have read and reread them numerous times. When I came into contact with ICE, I was astounded, and gobbled up all of their products I could find, reading them as quickly as I could. It was a dream come true — Middle-earth still lived on — except for one problem: there was no module for Rhûn. I'd spent hours looking at maps of the place, and wondered what the region must've been like, and simply couldn't wait for more on it to be released. After purchasing and consuming several ICE modules, I decided to write and let them know how much I appreciated their products.

To my surprise, I received a nice letter back from Jessica Ney-Grimm (this was back in '89) that thanked me for my correspondence — and also told me about several hopeful proposals. She mentioned that a couple were for Rhûn, so I decided to help out. I collected all of the information that I could find about the area, compiled a timeline and several notes on the people, and then called ICE. I was only eighteen at the time, and was so nervous when I talked to Jessica that I figured I would die. Luckily I didn't; I even managed to inform her of all my endeavors in the region of Rhûn without (in my opinion) sounding like

too much of an idiot. When I informed her that I would be willing to send her my research, she asked why I didn't just write a module myself. It sounded like a great idea.

And that's where it started. From there, I set about writing. In my eagerness to use all of the information that I had gathered, I had initially planned on covering the entire area in one module (I know, what a mistake). Jessica informed me that that simply wouldn't work, and that I needed to narrow my focus. Shortly thereafter we decided that I should focus on the Odhriags of southern Rhûn, and the shrines or temples that they had built to their fallen heroes.

Over the next few years I continued researching, and working on "Shrines of Rhûn," (as we were attempting to call it at the time), and had it near completion a number of times, but always found myself altering it. Several of these revisions were instigated by myself, and two revisions were to incorporate the works of other authors in the area, until I finally was ready for ICE's first glimpse at it. Jessica was very busy at the time, and didn't get a chance to look it over for quite a while. In fact, she

finally turned it over to her assistant, Jason Hawkins, who helped me with the revisions.

After making the changes Jason suggested, I started a major overhaul of "Shrines of Rhûn," to transform it into Southern Rhûn. My original manuscript was based on the older "campaign" format (i.e., about 80 pages with around 60,000-62,000 words). At present, I'm trying to limit myself to making Southern Rhûn come in at around 130 pages with about 110,000 words, but I'm very-pleased with this new format. It feels like the best medium that I've come across to accurately describe the region.

Not only am I excited about the new format and the depth it will allow me to give this area, but I'm also glad to be working with a number of new authors working in adjoining regions. As Mr. Rogers would say: "It's a wonderful day in the neighborhood." Jesse Dallin is currently working on Khand; and Chris Seeman, having just completed Southern Gondor, has moved next door to Northern Gondor; while the man responsible for the last issue of OH's Balchoth article, Luke Potter, recently signed on to cover Dorwinion and (hopefully) Northern Rhûn. We've got a bit of a "conspiracy" going over the Net as we E-mail each other constantly to make all of our ideas mesh. Personally, I think that this correspondence will not only provide a much greater richness in all of our respective works, but in other future ICE products as well. Anyhow, enough about the history of the module's construction, and on to a few details about it.

THEMES

Aly major premise for Southern Rhûn has been a simple one. The lands of Rhun are, even by virtue of their name, part of the "East." Apart from most of the other places that were mapped by Professor Tolkien (Khand and the Harad being the obvious examples), this area was intended to be truly wild, and to a great extent, uncivilized. A place from whence hailed many of Gondor's enemies — Men who frequently served Sauron of Mordor, and made war upon his enemies at his bequest.

OTHER HANDS

Yet while Rhûn may be part of the “Eastlands,” its name is Sindarin, thus adding a bit of a “western” spin to everything. While the Rhúnaer (S. “Sea of Rhun”) may be surrounded by lands inhabited, for the most part, by Easterlings, it is still relatively close to Gondor and the West. In fact, one of Gondor’s Third Age acquisitions, the region named Dor Rhúnen, encompassed the western shores of the Rhúnaer.

It has therefore been my aim, from the beginning, to present the lands of southern Rhûn as the frontier between East and West. Consequently, some of the traditions and values from both “worlds” will be represented here. Some will clash with their occidental or oriental counterparts, while other concepts and lifestyles will mesh and enjoin one another, thus creating an intricately woven fabric that could only be southern Rhun.

OBJECTIVES

In designing Southern Rhun, I am firstly intending to have it provide a good and accurate timeline of the region. Since this region has never been detailed before, it has been a bit of an adventure pulling tidbits here and there from Tolkien’s material and previous ICE products. The real fun has been in “fill-

ing in the gaps.” While preparing the timeline, I’ve had two goals in mind: to explain why and how this region and its inhabitants are different from those of the “West,” and to detail how they have interacted throughout the ages with their occidental neighbors.

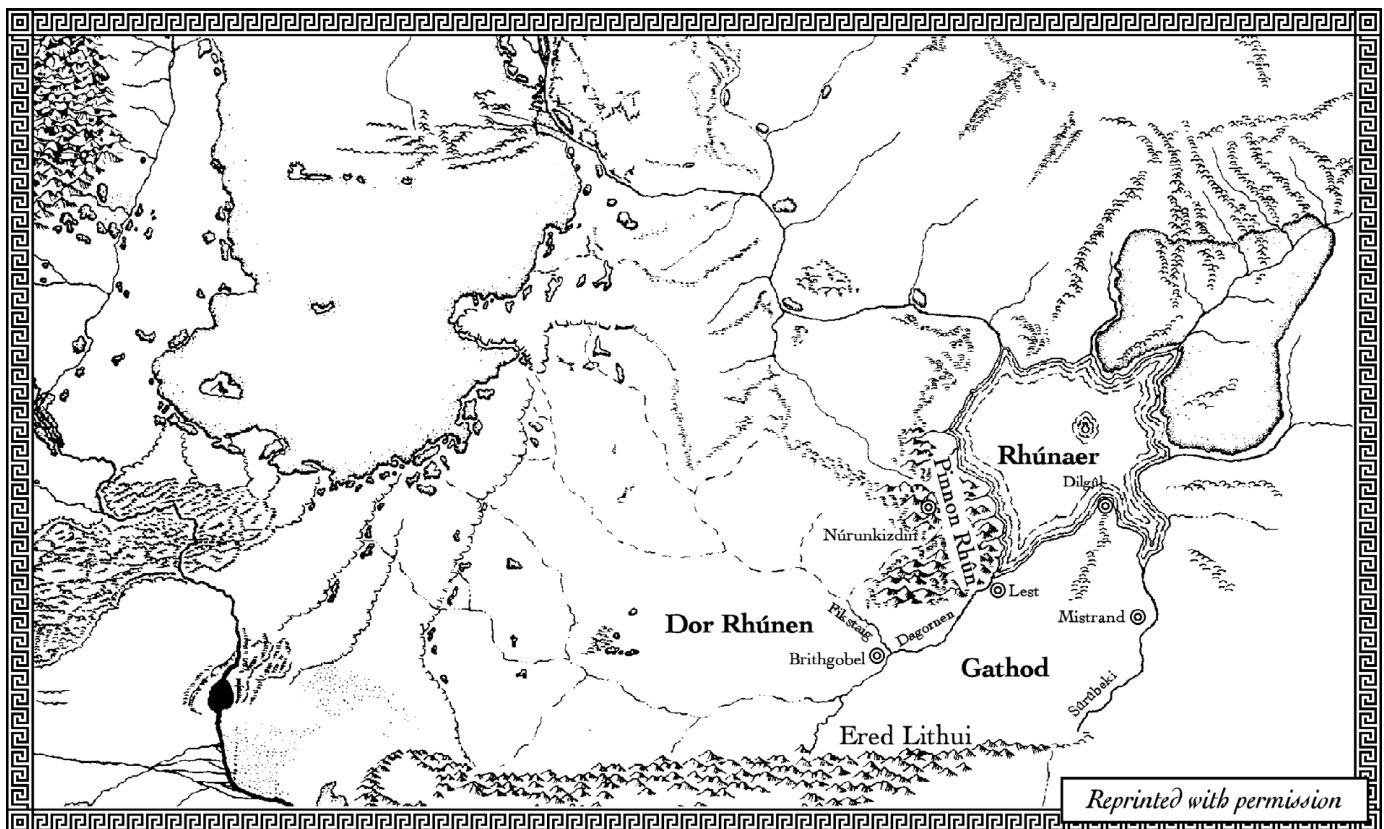
Since this is going to be one of the first Realm modules set in the “East” (I know, its not that far east), I feel it of particular importance to give detailed treatment to an Easterling tribe. In fact, my main focus has been to describe the Odhriags and how they fit into the mesh of peoples and politics that make up their home region of Gathod (Od. “Home Place”) in Southern Rhun. Hopefully, the attention given to this tribe will provide a bit of a stepping stone for GMs who later want to adventure in the East. In addition, I’ll be focusing a good part of Southern Rhun to the details of the other Easterling tribes of the region, but not to the same extent.

Along these same lines, I envision providing a bit of a background for “campaigning” in the east. While there will be a multitude of fun things to do in Rhûn and many of the other eastern lands, there is definitely a shortage of the traditional keeps, lairs, and other sites found in the West. There will be, on the

contrary, an ample supply of wide open spaces, hills, roaming Easterlings and a myriad of other things. My task, therefore, has been to provide a campaign environment where GMs will be able to get a good “feel” of the region, and be able to easily create fun and exciting “eastern” adventures.

SOURCES

Without a doubt, my primary sources for Southern Rhûn are Professor Tolkien’s works. Of course, it needs to be mentioned that, while I’ve read *The Lord of the Rings* more than 20 times, and *The Silmarillion* at least 3 times, I’ve never been much of a big fan of some of the releases made by Christopher Tolkien. While I’ve perused *Unfinished Tales* and some of the publications detailing Tolkien’s creation of Middle-earth, I’ve never made it a point to study them. I think that I’ve always preferred to simply enjoy Middle-earth’s magic, instead of learning about how that magic came into being. (That’s also why I like ICE’s productions —the magic continues; I can simply read about Middle-earth as if it were real.) To this end, I’m very grateful to have a



couple of very capable Tolkien scholars working in regions adjacent to southern Rhûn. Their comments have been very helpful in filling in my gaps of knowledge.

Apart from Tolkien's works and ICE productions, I've thoroughly enjoyed researching "real world" counterparts and histories for the peoples and regions I'm covering. The major linguistic bases for the region are from the Altaic and Slavic language families (with a bit of Gothic), so I've been tickled pink to learn as much as I can about those regions. One of my major foci has been on the Uighurs, a Central Asian people conquered by the Mongols. They've proven a perfect "base" for my main focus—the Odhriags, a group of part Ioriag and part Aharin tribes living in the southern region of the land between the Dagornen (S. "Warwater") and the Suriibeki.

OVERVIEW

Now, as for what Southern Rhûn will cover, that would probably be best described geographically. For starters, we'll begin in the Pinnon Rhûn (S. "Spine of Rhun"). While Luke Potter will be detailing the northern expanses of these old and weather-worn hills, we are both excited about what lies beneath them. At this point we're planning on putting a number of fissures—natural and Morgothic—under this chain. Most of these caverns and caves were flooded by the cataclysmic destruction visited upon the region at the end of the First Age. In my mind, these "submerged" Underdeeps will fit rather well near the Rhúnaer, especially after we throw in a few old and dynamic Water Drakes.

Other inhabitants of this ancient mountain chain will include (among others) the Dwarves of Thelór's line who reside in a series of incredibly well-crafted caverns beneath a small lake near Dol Calemir (approximately near the center of the Pinnon Rhûn). Named Núrunkizdin, these subterranean halls have been the home of two Dwarven Tribes. During the First Age, they were discovered and enlarged by a small group of Drúin's folk. This group later fled east after being attacked by a group of Orcs who called themselves the Uruk-marzguram (Or. "Orcs of the Crushed Skull"). The Orcs then took possession

of the halls until they were ousted by Thelór's folk in the Second Age.

After conversing with Jessica, we've decided to give these Dwarves a bit of a different treatment than has been done in the past. While they'll still be sober, possessive, and industrious, Southern Rhûn will detail how a series of strange disasters has made them a bit more eschatological than many of their kindred.

To the west of the mountains that the Dwarves call the Zinûramahal, is a large expanse of grass covered plains and undulating hills known as the Talath Harroch. Much of this region came under the control of Gondor and its Northman allies in the Third Age, and therefore will be covered by Chris Seeman in Northern Gondor.

Situated at the junction of the cloudy waters of the Dagornen and the Fikstaig (the small river that drains most of the Talath Harroch), is a small town by the name of Brithgobel (S. "Gravel-town"). Most of its inhabitants are the descendants of Eriadonan Northmen who made their way here after their participation in the war waged upon Sauron by the Last Alliance of Elves and Men in the Second Age. Added to their number are a small population of mixed-blooded Gondorians, most of whom who flocked here after tiring of persecution in their homelands because of their non-Dúnadan heritage. While Brithgobel is no metropolis, it is a bustling little town, and profits well from trade in the area.

Upriver from this easternmost Gondorian settlement is Lest, a small town situated at the confluence of the Dagornen and the Rhúnaer. Numerous ships frequent its harbors, and passage to any of the Rhúnaer's other harbors can be easily obtained for the right price. Its inhabitants are a strange mixture of Northmen related to the founders of Brithgobel, and a strain of Daen who call themselves the Donath. Here, as with the population of much of the Rhúnaer's southern shores, the lineage of these Northmen and Daen have merged so completely as to leave little trace of either heritage prior to their contact.

One of the largest concentrations of these Daen/Northmen can be found just northeast of the small port of Lest, in the city of Dilgûl. Located near the tip of the great southern peninsula that juts into

the Rhúnaer, this city has a rich history. Originally, its Donath founders dwelt in natural caves that they enlarged in the cliffs of a natural "horse-shoe" shaped enclosure discovered in the rugged and rocky cliffs that make up the majority of the shores between Lest and Dilgûl. There they lived relatively unmolested for centuries, until contacted by adventurous Dorwinron explorers. Some trade was initiated, but their quiet lives of fishing and farming the lush fields in the cliffs above the Rhúnaer didn't drastically change until the early Third Age. Relatives of the Eriadorian Northmen who founded the town that would later be called Brithgobel ventured to the southern shores of Rhúnaer seeking a new life for themselves. There they encountered the peaceful Donath, whom they were welcomed to join. Join they did, and slowly the cultures and posterity of these two groups fused.

Of interest in Dilgûl are its shops and other sites, as well as an ancient tower perched atop a rock outcropping near the center of town. For centuries, this town has been surrounded by mystery, and Southern Rhûn will explain why.

One more city on Rhunaer's southern coast that will make its way into pages of Southern Rhûn is the city-state of Mistrand. Like Lest and Dilgûl, its original inhabitants were the Donath, but the people of this town were later joined by a tribe of Urgath nomads who had been ostracized by their people because of their refusal to worship Khargûl, god of the plains. The Donath and the Urgath of this town fared well until it fell to Úvatha of Khand in T.A. 1249. After its conquest, not only was a Variag overlord placed in control of the city with a large contingent of forces, but shortly after its fall, a large number of rebellious Variag farmers and herds-men were deported to the city en masse to help quell internal problems in Khand, and provide an adequate agrarian base in the north to feed the Variag war machine. As the Horselord's conquests drew his attention elsewhere, the Variags of Khand in Mistrand (both soldiers and common folk) slowly intermingled with the Daen/Urgath peoples of Mistrand, creating a number of interesting social conditions and

customs among a new culture of people who called themselves the Gathmarig.

Later, they would break free from the yoke of Variag oppression and taxation, and turn to trading and, at times, large scale piracy on the Rhunaer. Speaking of the Men of Khand, I feel it of importance to mention that while Khand may be rather far removed from the southern shores of Rhúnaer, its politics (especially its campaigns — Ha, ha, a little word play there) do have tangible effects upon the inhabitants of southern Rhûn, as do the affairs of the Gondonans to west. Southern Rhûn is a land that is caught between two rather large and prominent empires — that of the Variags to the southeast and the Gondorians to the west.

Perhaps, the part of Southern Rhûn that will best detail this conflict between East and West will be the section devoted to the Odhriags. As a people, the Odhriags would be happiest if they were simply allowed to carry on with their lives without any outside influence. They have no aspirations for conquest or protracted conflicts — but they are perfectly capable of defending themselves, and seem to take pride in being able to do so. In fact, warcraft has become a tradition to them. The history of these people is a lengthy one, with interesting origins. Strangely enough, it starts with the Númenóreans.

During the early Second Age, when the Men of Westerness were busy exploring the shores of Endor, an interesting bay was discovered near Acaana inside of the Shay Bight (near M 19-20 on the Middle-earth poster map, the area encompassing Shay, Jojojopo, and Lodeny). An outpost was later founded to trade with, educate, and converse with the natives of the land. Colonists subsequently followed, slowly made their way up the Acaana Rush, or Kizil Irmak, and began laying claim to lands that had long been held sacred by the Otyassi tribe of the region. Many of this proud tribes' people decided to lash out at these invaders from the Sea in S.A. 1624, but were betrayed by others within their clan.

Escaping with their lives, this small group of Aharin speaking natives fled

north and west along the Ered Harmal, until they encountered a tribe of Ioriags seven years later. Both groups were having tremendous problems, and after a three day council, they decided to unite despite their differences. Their decision to confederate came at dusk, and as such, they have been known as the Odhriags (Io. "Twilight/Dusk Tribe") ever since. Later, due to Variag aggression, this tribe was pushed the land of Gathod, a place that their people would call home for many generations. There they fared well, nestled between the Dagornen and the Sûrûbeki, and sheltered by the Ered Lithui ("Yeshev Dôrul," in the tongue of the Odhriags) to the south.

One of the goals of Southern Rhûn will be to detail how this people broke free from Sauron's grasp in the late Second Age, and how this freedom lead to a change from a patriarchal system to a matriarchal one — as well as influencing many of the tribes around it to make this change as well. Also, the relationship between the Odhriags and their fallen heroes, whom they call their Hur-kûdri (Od. "Guardians") will be covered.

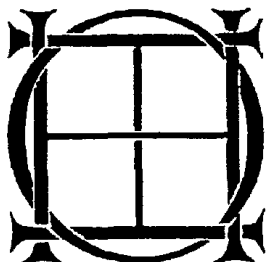
A number of other things are planned as well, and hopefully, I should complete Southern Rhûn by the end of this summer. And then with a little luck, it might be published before the end of the year

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE KINGDOM OF HITHLUM

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This material is derived from a work-in-progress which examines in depth the history of the peoples of Middle-earth as revealed in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, both finished and unfinished. Although the details of Middle-earth are often obscured in vague passages, Tolkien usually provides information about events, peoples, and countries in several places, revealing bit-by-bit the enchanted lands he envisioned in a subtle yet consistent manner.

One of the most interesting kingdoms in Tolkien's world is Hithlum. There is no hint in either The Hobbit or The Lord of the Rings that this land ever existed, or that it was the first home of the Noldor-in-exile after their tragic return to Middle-earth. And yet much of the material in The Silmarillion concerns Elves and Men who lived in this land: Fëanor, Fingolfin, Fingon, Hador, Húrin, Túrin, Huor, and Tuor. Even many of the incomplete chronicles deal with events and people in Hithlum, and yet no echo of this storied dominion of the Elves is heard in the nostalgic passages of Tolkien's best-known books where are mentioned Gondolin, Doriath, and Beleriand.

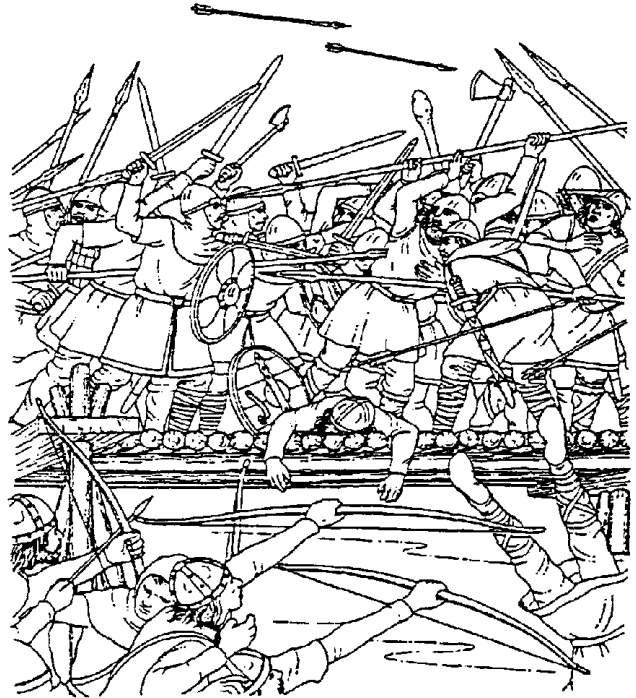


Hithlum was the coldest of the Elven lands of the

First Age, a buffer between the bitter the colds of the north and the warm, cheery lands of Beleriand. Surrounded by mountains, Hithlum's climate was most strongly affected by the cold winds that passed down from the north, but the region itself was named for the mists that Melkor sent out from Angband. Sindarin Elves, probably Falathrim, had dwelt there for many years, living out their long lives under the stars, little concerned with the dark things of Melkor the Valar had left crawling in the eastern lands beyond Ered Luin.

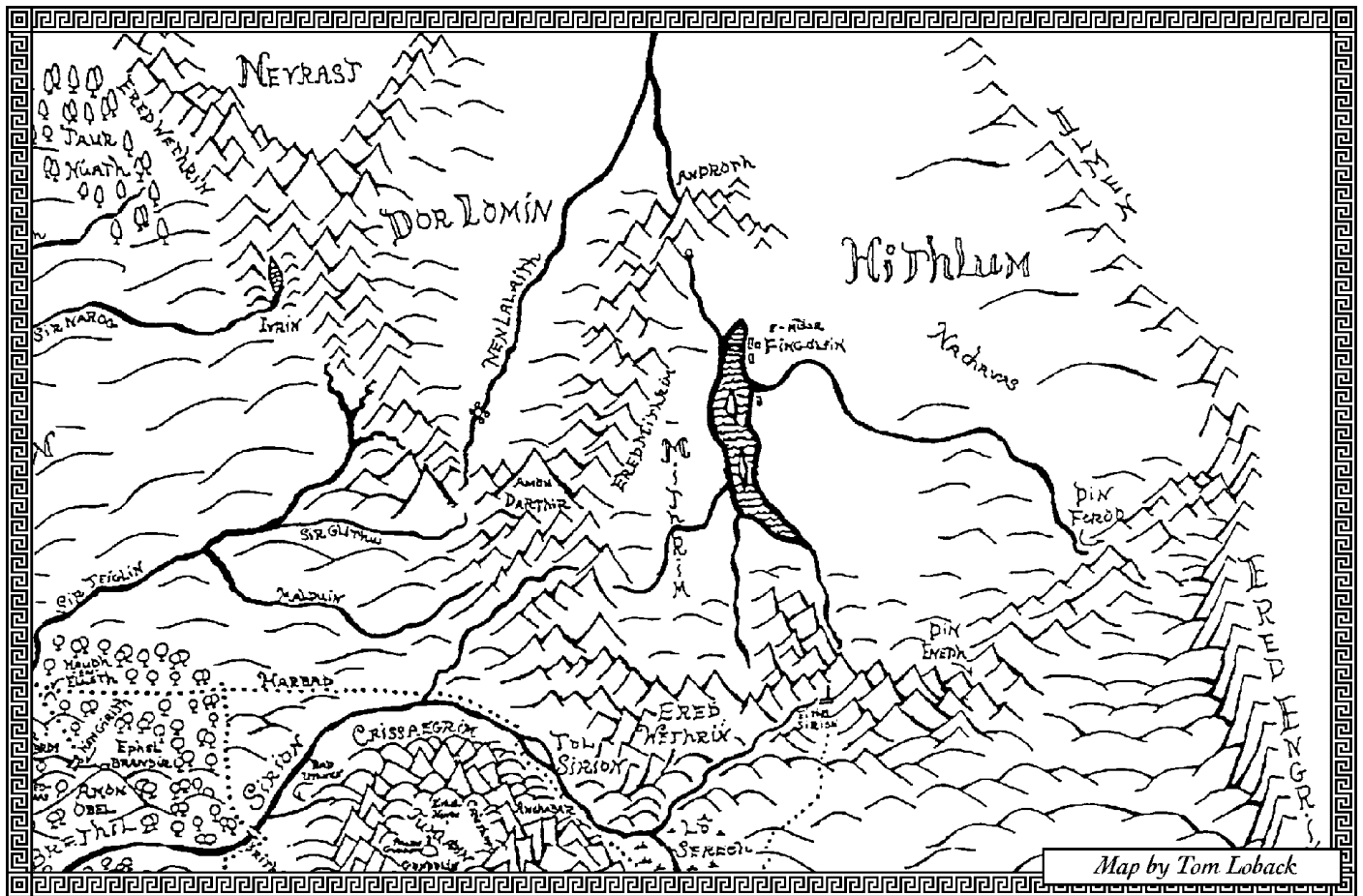
The High Kings of the Noldor-in-exile ruled in Hithlum until Melkor's victory over the Eldar, Edain, and Dwarves in the Nirnaeth Arnoediad. The fusion of Noldor and Sindar began in Mithrim where Fëanors people and later Fingolfin's first encountered the Sindar. The synthesis of these two kindreds was never fully realized but it produced a rich and powerful culture that very nearly toppled Melkor from his throne despite the curse of the Valar.

Fingolfin achieved more in Middle-earth against Melkor than any other Noldorin lord. Although he followed Fëanor into exile and thus came under the Curse of Mandos, he was not weak-willed. He, too, had lost a father to Melkor and thus had strong cause to seek revenge against the Enemy. The memory of the passage of the Grinding Ice would have weighed heavily upon



him, for many Noldor were lost there, never to share in the beauty of Middle-earth and the sadness of its great conflicts. Fingolfin was not simply a player on the stage, but also was a power to be reckoned with. He led the greater host of the Noldor, and he alone of all the Eldar wounded Melkor in single combat.¹

Fëanor and his eldest son Maedhros ruled Hithlum prior to Fingolfin's arrival, but only when Thingol acknowledged Fingolfin did the realm become legitimate. Nonetheless, the early years under Fëanor saw the first victories of the Noldor against Melkor's armies, and Hithlum was central to this part of the unfolding drama. The Noldor were still building their encampment by the northern shore of Lake Mithrim when Melkor's army from Angband crossed the Ered Wethrin and attacked them from the east. Dagor-nuin-Giliath, the Battle-under-Stars, proved to be a foreshadowing of the many victories that lay ahead



for the Noldor before their final defeat. A second battle in Ard-galen saw the Fëanorians defeat Melkor's southern army, which came rushing north from the Falas through the Vale of Sirion to their master's aid. Flush with victory from the first battle and unaware of what lay before him, Fëanor rushed to his doom upon the borders of Melkor's realm while Celegorm slaughtered enemy forces in the Fens of Serech.

Maedhros was captured soon after Fëanor's death near Eithel Sirion. Thus bereft of two leaders in so short a time, the Fëanorian Noldor prudently withdrew to Mithrim, where they fortified a new camp farther from the eastern mountains. There they waited and watched as Fingolfin's host passed by and marched upon Dor Daedeloth, but when Fingolfin led his people back to Mithrim the Fëanorians moved to the southern side of the lake. There the Noldor stayed, two embittered hosts separated by a bit of water, while the early years of the age stole by. News of the return of the Noldor had by this time spread throughout Beleriand. But though they began to learn the Sindarin

language and to explore Beleriand, the Noldor accomplished nothing in their war against Melkor until Fingon risked all to rescue Maedhros and restore some semblance of friendship among their people, which Maedhros nurtured by ceding the Kingship to Fingolfin in partial atonement for the betrayal in Araman.

After Fingolfin and Maedhros were reconciled, the Noldor spread out across northern Beleriand. Turgon settled in Nevrast with a third of his father's people, where in time they merged with the local Sindar; Maedhros took the Fëanorian Noldor east to Himring, Thargelion, and the lands south of Himring; and the sons of Finarfin led part of the Noldor to Dorthonion and the vale of Sirion. This diffusion across the lands prevented a civil war among the Noldor, yet what could have been a mighty kingdom thereby became little more than a border state.

Despite its initial diminishment, Hithlum played a major role in the war against Melkor. He feared Hithlum more than any of his other foes, and tested the Hithlum Noldor first by send-

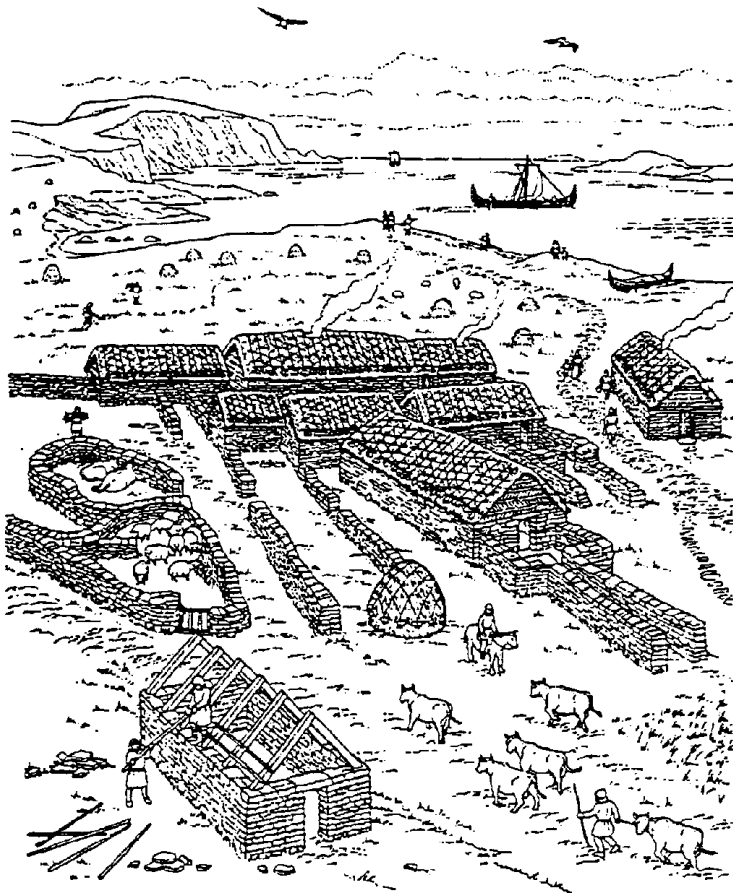
ing an army south along the coast, but Fingon destroyed it with little trouble. And Fingolfin not only built great fortresses in the Ered Wethrin, he established camps out upon Ard-galen. Thus when Glaurung first revealed himself it was Fingon and the cavalry of Hithlum, encamped upon the plain, who won the day. And even after these camps were destroyed in the Dagor Bragollach, Melkor continued to concentrate on Hithlum, for much of the fighting continued around Eithel Sirion even as an army invaded the kingdom from the north. Melkor was finally able to destroy the Hithlum Noldor in the disastrous Nirnaeth. In that battle Fingon held back no reserves, and there remained no army to prevent Melkor's weakened forces from seizing the kingdom.

Hithlum reached the height of its power just prior to the Dagor Bragollach, when it was populated by three peoples: the Hithlum Noldor; the Sindar of Mithrim; and the Marachians, the third group of Edain to enter Beleriand. After the Dagor Bragollach, the Marachians were

reinforced by two groups of Bëorian refugees. Although the Sindar favored woodlands over the highlands, many of those who dwelt in Mithrim apparently settled in the southern and western hills after the return of the Noldor, who mostly dwelt near Lake Mithrim. In Hador's day, the Edain settled in Dor-lómin, the western region of Hithlum.²

Tolkien did not provide much information about how the Elves lived in Hithlum. The Sindar there wove grey clothing, probably very similar to the grey cloaks that the Elves of Lorien gave to Aragorn and his companions.³ The *Silmarillion* mentions fortified encampments on the northern shores of Lake Mithrim. With their penchant for building cities, the Hithlum Noldor probably did not just dwell in tents and sod-huts for the next 400 years.

Fingolfin, upon reentering Hithlum after his march through Ard-galen and Dor Daedeloeth, settled in a camp to the east of the Fëanorians.⁴ He probably built a city there, though Tolkien only says that most of Fingolfin's people dwelt around the shores of the lake.⁵ The *Silmarillion* says that "behind the guard of their armies in the north the Noldor built their dwellings and their towers, and many fair things they made in those days, and poems and histories and books of lore."⁶ And, "the Noldor...built with stone, and loved the hill-slopes and open lands."⁷ There was the great fortress of Eithel Sirion, built on the eastern slopes of the Ered Wethrin overlooking Ard-galen and Angband. But few other places are mentioned, and none in Hithlum except for Fëanor's camp, the two fortified camps his sons made, and Fingolfin's own camp. The three surviving fortified camps may have been transformed into cities by the Noldor. *Unfinished Tales* (p. 17) says that Rían was taken by Sindar to their dwellings in the mountains west of Lake Mithrim. These were Annael's people, who later fled to



the Caves of Androth in Dor-lómin.

Fingon ambushed a small army of Orcs coming down the coast to the Firth of Drengist;⁸ we may thus infer an Elvish presence in the seaward Ered Lómin that detected the enemy and sent word to Dor-lómin. Perhaps a watchtower was positioned there, overlooking Losgar where Fëanor had landed.⁹ We can also infer the Noldor built other types of dwellings from what we know of the Edain. For instance, Húrin's house possessed a courtyard and out-buildings. The lesser Elvish nobility probably lived similarly, since the Edain are said to have learned much from the Eldar in Beleriand. The Hithlum Noldor must also have worked mines in the mountains, practicing the skills they had learned in Valinor. *Unfinished Tales* says "...many (of the Númenóreans) had great skill with stone and with metals...since the Edain of old had learned much of the Noldor" (p. 190).

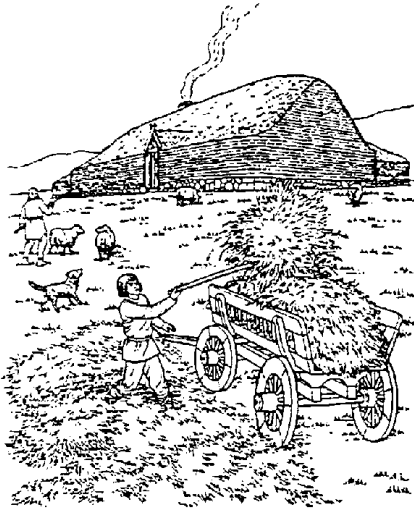
The texts mention several roads in Beleriand, but only one road in Hithlum itself. Still, the Noldor would have required roads to speed their armies and messengers, and to support trade with

other lands. When he was defending the western marches, the passes through the northern Ered Lómin were Fingons easiest route into the Firth of Drengist, whereas Annon-in-Gelydh opened upon the road leading to Nevrast. The Noldor must have built a road from the camps or cities by Lake Mithrim to Annon-in-Gelydh and probably up into the mountains where Sindar like Annael's people had their homes. There was also a road running south along the western side of the Ered Mithrim. Húrin's estate lay near the bridge over Nen Lailaith in the southeast corner of Dor-lómin. The road apparently turned west near Húrin's house and followed the Ered Wethrin's foothills to the southern Ered Lómin. In the east, there had to be a road over the pass leading to Barad Eithel. Roads probably ran

throughout Mithrim as most of Fingolfin's people dwelt there. The Noldor and Sindar must also have used boats on Lake Mithrim and along the rivers, though this is not stated in the texts.

The mountains and hills of Mithrim and Dor-lómin appear to have been well-wooded, whereas the open lands were grasslands. Mithrim with its great lake and four rivers nestled among the valleys of the Ered Mithrim and Ered Wethrin would not have offered much range land for pasturing horses, but northern Dor-lómin was well suited for raising the horses of Fingon's renowned cavalry. The region north of Dor-lómin was home to few Elves and may also have been used for pasturage, especially after the arrival of the Marachians, who herded cattle (*Unfinished Tales*, p. 69).

Hithlum could not exist in a political and economic vacuum. Fingolfin and Fingon treated with the other realms of Beleriand. They appear to have been allied with the Falathrim since Círdan sent soldiers to Hithlum on at least two occasions. From



“Narn i Hîn Húrin” we learn that Fingon and Maedhros frequently exchanged gifts,¹⁰ and Fingolfin sent messengers to Estolad when the Edain first settled there. The relationship between Hithlum and Doriath appears to have been cool but not unfriendly. Thingol permitted Mablung and Beleg to go to the Nirnaeth on the condition that they served in Fingon’s army though none of Fingolfin’s House were admitted to Doriath.

After the Dagor Bragollach, when the Noldor first began to seem vulnerable before Melkor’s increasing power, Fingon sent his son Ereinion to the Falas.¹¹ Communications between Fingon and Círdan must have been swift, for several years later Círdan sent a fleet north to land an army to aid Fingon;¹² Fingon would have had to send messengers south to ask for such aid. Perhaps Hithlum used ships for such needs, although communication with the south could also have passed through Nevrast.¹³ Círdan could have taught the Hithlum Noldor something about building ships, but there was no need for naval warfare. Perhaps, then, if any ships were held in the Firth of Drengist they were manned by Círdan’s people only.

Though Turgon engaged in secret communication with Círdan late in the age, his appearance with an army at the Nirnaeth surprised even Fingon, so there probably was no communication between Hithlum and Gondolin. But during Finrod’s day Nargothrond was on friendly relations with Hithlum. Their marches lay side-by-side (until the Dagor Bragollach and its aftermath), and Orodreth later on permitted Gwindor to

lead a company of Nargothrondrim under Fingon’s banner in the Nirnaeth.¹⁴

We know very little about Hithlum’s army. Fingon preferred to lead mounted archers in battle, as when he faced Glaurung, but the fortress of Barad Eithel was well-manned long before the Marachians were given responsibility for its defense, and the Noldor were noted for their magnificent and deadly swords. Even in Hithlum the Sindar appear to have favored the great ax, and they continued to fight with these weapons (and long bows) up until the Nirnaeth.¹⁵ If Húrin’s skill was in any way typical of his people, the Marachians also used great axes, though they seem to have preferred swords (at least the fifty men whom Húrin assembled in his courtyard bore swords). Yet though they held Barad Eithel for the kings, the Marachians had no regular army of their own, serving instead under the king’s banner. Húrin’s muster for the Nirnaeth may be the only occasion when all the men of the Third House went to war.¹⁶

Fingolfin and Fingon probably did not maintain large standing armies. Barad Eithel, any watch-towers on the borders, the camps on Ard-galen,¹⁷ and perhaps the settlement north of Mithrim alone would have required regular troops. The long periods of peace would not have seen large musterings, and the Hithlum Noldor probably raised large armies only at need. Even so, as it was customary among the Edain to take service in the King’s Host for some length of years, the Elves and Men of Hithlum probably trained regularly for the wars.¹⁸

Dating events in the history of Hithlum is a bit challenging. Tolkien revised his dates extensively, and the best records come from works published in *Morgoth’s Ring* and *The War of the Jewels*. According to the *Grey Annals*, Fingolfin took up the High Kingship in Hithlum in F.A. 7, and the legitimized kingdom existed until F.A. 473. Hithlum was the first home of the Noldor upon their return to Middle-earth and the first realm they established. In *Years of the Sun* Fëanor probably dwelt in Hithlum for 40-50 years. Because the *Years of the Trees* do not easily translate into *Years of the Sun*, and because so many events could occur in a given Year of the Trees, it is impossible to include a coherent chronology for the early years of Hith-

lum in the table given below.

The events in Hithlum’s history worth noting include:

- 1 Fingolfin’s host passes through Mithrim.
- 2 Fingolfin leads his people back to Mithrim. The Fëanorians remove to the southern shores of the lake.
- 5 Fingon rescues Maedhros and heals the division between the Noldor.
- 6 Angrod visits Thingol in Doriath.
- 7 Maedhros cedes the High Kingship and rule of Hithlum to Fingolfin. Angrod returns bearing Thingol’s welcome and recognition of the Noldorin realm in Hithlum.
- c.8 About this time, the Fëanorians move to East Beleriand. Finrod and his brothers establish themselves in Dorthonion and the Vale of Sirion about Tol Sirion.
- 20 Finsolfin holds Mereth Aderthad at Eithel Ivrin. Círdan swears oaths of alliance with Fingolfin and Finrod.
- 60 The Dagor Aglareb upon Ard-galen. Fingolfin and Maedhros together destroy Melkor’s armies.
- c.63 About this time, Sindarin is formally adopted by the Noldor after Thingol bans Quenya throughout Beleriand.
- 155 The battle in the Firth of Drengist.
- 260 Glaurung’s rampage is stopped by Fingon.
- c.315 Fingolfin sends messengers to welcome the Edain to Beleriand and Malach Aradan comes to Hithlum. From about this time, the Marachians begin to settle in and near Hithlum.
- c.420 Fingolfin grants the lordship of Dor-lómin to Hador and most of the Marachians settle there.
- 455 The Dagor Bragollach. Deaths of Hador and Fingolfin. Fingon sends Ereinion to Círdan. Most of the surviving Bëorians enter Dor-lómin.
- c.458 About this time, the second wave of Bëorians reaches Hithlum by way of Brethil. Húrin and Huor are brought to Dor-lómin by Thorondor.
- 462 Orcs attack Hithlum in the north and east. Death of Galdor.
- c.468 About this time, Fingon joins the Union of Maedhros.
- 473 The Nimaeth Arnoediad. End of the Kingdom of Hithlum.

NOTES

1. Fingolfin's combat with Morgoth is described in *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Ruin of Beleriand."
2. Fingolfin made Hador the Lord of Dor-lómin (*The Silmarillion*, p. 144), and "Narn i Hîn Húrin" says Húrin's house was in the southeast corner of Dor-lómin (*Unfinished Tales*, p. 68). It may be that some Elves continued to live in portions of Dor-lómin, for "Narn i Hîn Húrin" says only that Hador was given "wide lands in that region of Hithlum which was called Dor-lómin" (*ibid.*, p. 57). Fingon and many Elven lords ride past Húrin's house (*ibid.*, p. 59). As Tuor searched for Annon-in-Gelydh, he spoke with Sindar dwelling in the hills (*ibid.*, p. 20).
3. In the essay "Quendi and Eldar" J.R.R. Tolkien writes: "...It is said also that the folk of the North were clad much in grey, especially after the return of Morgoth when secrecy became needed; and the Mithrim had the art of weaving a grey cloth that made its wearers almost invisible in shadowy places or in a stony land. This art was later used even in the southern lands as the dangers of the War increased." *The War of Jewels*, Note 11 to "Quendi and Eldar" (pp. 410-11).
4. It is not explicitly written that Fingolfin settled east of the Fëanorians, but the map of Hithlum given in *The War of the Jewels* on page 182 shows the names "Fingolfin & Fingon" in the region to the northeast or Lake Mithrim. Since that Fingolfin first entered Hithlum from the west, passed through Mithrim, crossed the Ered Wethrin, and approached Angband, but then withdrew back to Mithrim, it seems logical he came down into the region where the map places him. The Fëanorians, who had already moved their encampment once, then removed to the southern shores of Mithrim. This movement may have been most easily accomplished if they were then on the northwest shores of the lake and Fingolfin closer to the mountains.
5. The *Grey Annals* state that Fingolfin and Fingon dwelt at Eithel Sirion (*The War of the Jewels*, p. 38), but this datum was not included in *The Silmarillion*.
6. *The Silmarillion*, p. 111.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 110-1.
9. Alternatively, perhaps Círdan's mariners patrolled the coast of Lammoth and sent word to Fingon of the approaching Orcs.
10. See the history of the Dragon-helm of Dor-lómin (*Unfinished Tales*, p. 75).
11. After the Dagor Bragollach (*The Silmarillion*, p. 151).
12. In the year 462, 7 years after the Dagor Bragollach. Melkor sent an army into northern Hithlum (*The Silmarillion*, p. 156-7).
13. Though not mariners, the Noldor had a little seacraft. The Fëanorians obviously sailed in their stolen swan ships across Belegaer. Some of Finrod's people built ships with the aid of the Falathrim and explored Balar (*The Silmarillion*, p. 116). Turgon sent Elves to the Mouths of Sirion to build ships (*ibid.*, p. 156). The kindreds of Finrod and Turgon's mariners are not mentioned so it may be they were Sindar (being akin to or of the Falathrim originally).
14. In "Of Tuor and His Coming to Gondolin" Voronwë tells Tuor that "after the Bragollach and the breaking of the Siege of Angband doubt first came into Turgon's heart that Morgoth might prove too strong. In that year he sent out the first of his folk that passed his gates from within: a few only, upon a secret errand. They went down Sirion to the shores about the Mouths, and there built ships. But it availed them nothing, save to come to the great Isle of Balar and there establish lonely dwellings, far from the reach of Morgoth. For the Noldor have not the art of building ships that will long endure the waves of Belegaer the Great." (*Unfinished Tales*, p. 54).
15. Christopher Tolkien notes in reference to the above that "in one of the 'constituent texts' of *The Silmarillion* it is said that although the Noldor 'had not the art of ship-building, and all the craft that they built foundered or were driven back by the winds,' yet after the Dagor Bragollach Turgon ever maintained a secret refuge upon the Isle of Balar," and when after the Nirnaeth Arnoediad Círdan and the remnant of his people fled from Brithombar and Eglarest to Balar, 'they mingled with Turgon's outpost there.' But this element in the story was rejected, and thus in the published text of *The Silmarillion* there is no reference to the establishment of dwellings on Balar by Elves of Gondolin." (*Unfinished Tales*, p. 53).
16. Voronwë's words about "lonely dwellings" on the Isle of Balar seem to conflict with *The Silmarillion*, which states (p. 156) that Turgon sent some of his people "to the mouths of Sirion and the Isle of Balar." The Gondolindrim don't seem to have stayed or returned to Balar, which at that time was probably occupied only by a few Falathrim (*The War of the Jewels*, p. 8) from whom Círdan received the pearls he gave to Thingol (*The Silmarillion*, p. 6) and perhaps Turgon (*Unfinished Tales*, p. 49; also p. 55, note 28).
17. Hithlum had to coordinate the Siege of Angband with Nargothrond and the March of Maedhros until it was broken in 455, when Finrod lost Dorthonion and Tol Sirion. Communication between Hithlum and Himring would have become perilous and taken longer to effect.
18. *Unfinished Tales*, p. 18. Annael, a veteran of the Nirnaeth, taught Tuor to use both bow and ax.
19. In "Narn i Hîn Húrin," Sador tells Túrin that he went to Eithel Sirion at the Dagor Bragollach, but his company arrived in time only to bring back Hador's body (*Unfinished Tales*, p. 60).
20. *The Silmarillion*, p. 147.
21. Malach Aradan and many young Edain began this tradition by taking service in the Elven armies soon after the Marachians settled in Estolad (*The Silmarillion*, p. 139). Malach's nephew Amlach served Maedhros for many years after the Council of the Edain in Estolad (*ibid.*, p. 141). Sador told Túrin he served in Fingon's army for many years after the Dagor Bragollach (*Unfinished Tales*, p. 60). In fact, Hador, Gundor, and Galdor all died serving in the army of Hithlum.

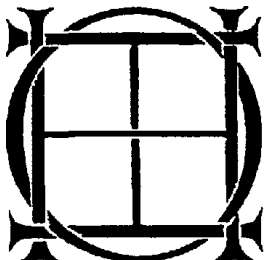
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AN INTERVIEW WITH JESSICA NEY-GRIMM

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I thought it fitting to conclude my "Making of MERP" series by interviewing Jessica Ney-Grimm who, as both series editor and art director, stands more than anyone else at the center of things. Here we get a glimpse at "the big picture"—how Middle-earth Role Playing has developed and where it is going, an updating of Pete Fenlon's letter to US three years back (OH 1:5-6). We've all come a long way since then...



Chris: I've noticed that your name doesn't appear in the credits for some of the older MERP modules. Could you tell us how you first got involved with ICE, and what led you to your current position as both the MERP series editor and art director?

Jessica: I became acquainted with Coleman Charlton, Terry Amthor, and Bruce Niedlinger in Terry's Middle-earth game while attending the University of Virginia. When I finished school I went to Iron Crown's offices and said: "I have seven years of training in drafting and graphic presentation, I have been role playing and GMing since 1976, and I have read *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* more times than I can count. I think you should hire me." That was in 1982 when the first modules were just starting to get published. Before then (when I was in high school), I had done some play-testing on *Arms Law*. They did not hire me then, because at that time they were not hiring anyone or paying anyone any money. (They were all working at ICE and doing other jobs on the side to survive.) Two years later they came back to me and asked if I would draw some floor plans for Moria. My formal training and my degree were in architecture. So if you look in the credits of some of those early modules, you will see my name under the credits for maps and floor plans. I did the graphics and production work for a couple of years and then moved into the editing side of things with the Narnia product line. We obtained a license for Narnia and published five solo game books in that line before it came to an end. Having seen what I could do with the Narnia line, they knew I had the skills for the Middle-earth editorship and asked if I would be interested. Who would say no to that question? Thus I came to be the series editor.

Chris: Was the art direction a more recent development?

Jessica: I took on the duties of art director about five years ago.

Chris: How have the publication goals and overall concept of ICE's Middle-earth line changed over time, or have they?

Jessica: They definitely have evolved and changed to a large degree in relation to our perception of what the market place and the

customer wanted. When I initially took over the line, the perception was that the customer wanted shorter books that were very action-oriented.

Chris: Hence, the Ready-to-Run adventure series.

Jessica: Exactly. Then, as time went on, we began to perceive a desire for longer books, more source material, and action integrated into that context. ICE's Middle-earth has continued moving in that direction for several years. You can see the most extreme expression of that trend in *Arnor* with its 400 pages. We might still be publishing 300 and 400 page books were it not for one important economic reality. Paper prices tripled in 1994, making 250 pages the upper limit for most of our books. Currently, I am perceiving more interest in our customers in the scholarship behind the products. Many Middle-earth fans have begun to write us letters inquiring into the particulars of Tolkien's early notes (generously being made available to the public over time by his son in volumes such as *The Book of Lost Tales*, etc.) as they touch on Angmar, Gondor, and other subjects. Others engage in extensive dialogs on the net. Scholarship was always a foundational element for Middle-earth modules, but now it is gaining an up-front appeal.

Chris: Does that focus tend to attract other (non-gaming) Tolkien fans?

Jessica: I think the line has always had that dual appeal — to the role player and to the Middle-earth aficionado.

Chris: In the early years, there was no Middle-earth Role Playing system. Was this planned from the beginning, or did the idea of having a set of game mechanics specific to the line also evolve over time?

Jessica: It did evolve over time. The original rules that Iron Crown created were the Rolemaster rules. Some people may not realize that Rolemaster originally emerged in a Middle-earth context — in campaigns run by Pete Fenlon and one other GM. The later impetus to create a system separate from Rolemaster grew out of the complexity of the existing rules.

Chris: So, in actuality, MERP was born more out of a logistic concern to simplify an existing system that had itself been designed with Tolkien's world in mind.

Jessica: Since then there have, of course, been refinements to MERP, based on the need to re-examine its concepts and to make them truer to the world. In the future there will probably be further refinements.

Chris: What audience was *The Lord of the Rings Adventure Game* directed towards?

Jessica: I wrote "Dawn Comes Early" (the adventure in LOR) with a particular family in mind — an acquaintance of mine, her husband, and their 3 kids (two 13-year old twins and a 9-year old younger sib). It was intended to appeal as a family game or to a slightly younger audience or to a more sophisticated adult one that had never done role playing before — whereas MERP was for people who already had some role playing experience using another system. We envisioned that a broad spectrum of people might play LOR. Those who had done role playing for a long time might want to switch emphasis away from a rule-heavy system to one in which the rules were fewer and more submerged and thus more friendly to role playing.

Chris: What are your current thoughts about the goals of the Middle-earth series with respect to northwestern Endor as opposed to the rest of the continent? What are you looking for in terms of materials from authors?

Jessica: I want to complete northwestern Middle-earth per se geographically. Near Harad, Northern Gondor, and Rhûn are being written even as we speak. I'd like books covering Mordor and Barad-dûr. Lindon could be a magical, mystical module, if we could find the right author to tackle it. In addition to the geopolitical viewpoint, there is the thematic focus. For example, the prominent peoples in Middle-earth should be explored in a more in-depth and complete fashion. Other themes include the Wainrider Response to Chris Pheby: What is the Nature of Magic in Middle-earth?

Chris: So it is conceived as a bounded campaign with a beginning and an end.

Jessica: Yes. The adventures in LOR are well-defined and more directed than in a normal MERP module. The gamemaster is literally directed to passages of prose to read aloud to the players. The idea is that a novice is led through the LOR ad-

ventures, essentially giving him or her a self-teaching experience. By the time the new GM is done, he or she will know how to gamemaster and will not need further directed modules. He or she will be ready to read a MERP module and use it. That is part of the reason we have been including LOR stats in our MERP modules. Just because LOR GMs and players have finished our six-part series does not mean that they are finished with Middle-earth. They are merely ready to take on the less directive sourcebooks.

Chris: As ICE's art director, how do you go about locating artists?

Jessica: Basically there are two processes. In the more common one, artists send us their portfolios or samples of work and I evaluate those. If they fit in with our vision of what is suitable for one or more of ICE's product lines, I contact the artist to see if he or she is agreeable to our terms and with our scheduling. The card game, *Middle-earth: The Wizards*, created a whole new demand, requiring a lot of color art — almost 500 pieces. I did not have sufficient resources among the freelancers who regularly drew for ICE. So I looked through many artist venues and tried to track down more painters. Now that METW is out, we have a lot more artists that do color work. There are some artists who do both. Liz Danforth is one of the more notable.

Chris: Do you see artwork as a way of creating cross-overs between the MERP series and *Wizards*?

Jessica: We do expect that some people who play the card game will be introduced for the first time to the idea of games set in Middle-earth. Some of them will probably try MERP or LOR. I expect many more who do role playing in Middle-earth will try METW. In terms of the visual presentation, I want consistency.

Chris: What goes into the concepts for the color covers of the MERP modules? They all tend to share an action theme.

Jessica: You may have noticed that the earlier covers were primarily action scenes derived from book content. Currently I am looking for scenes directly from *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Hobbit* that also relate to book subject material. The visual images on existing covers have been influenced heavily by Angus McBride's vision of Middle-earth. When he tackles a cover painting, we discuss the view point from which I wish it to be portrayed, touch on a few of the more unusual details, and leave the rest up to Mr. McBride.

Chris: Do you plan to continue to rely primarily on Angus for the cover art?

Jessica: Yes. We can trust Mr. McBride: we know that this is a subject about which he is very passionate and that he has pondered carefully. His vision of Middle-earth parallels my own. We make a good team, and I wouldn't want to want to break it up.

Chris: Is there any plan to republish at a later date the *Characters of Middle-earth*, essentially a book of his artwork?

Jessica: People who bought the book seemed to love it, but I wonder if we offered it to the market place a little too early. The popularity of collectible cards games may be showing a resurgent interest in art, so a book like that might be more enthusiastically received than it was at the time. It would be well to study the market again with re-publication of *Characters of Middle-earth* (or perhaps *Characters of Middle-earth 2*) in mind.

Chris: Anything else about the art work or art direction?

Jessica: First, I'd like to say a bit more on the editorial side. When I look at manuscripts, I look not only for adherence to Tolkien's legacy, but also for clean prose and strong story lines. One of the things that makes MERP special is the fact that Middle-earth was presented to us within a work of literature. I want the role playing aids to have some of the elegance and presentation of a novel. That of course depends on each author's talent; fortunately, we do have some very talented authors working for ICE. To return to the subject of art directing: there is a lot of enthusiasm about illustrating Middle-earth. Most artists leap at the chance, but possess varying degrees of familiarity with Tolkien's world. To many, I send photocopies from *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, photocopies from MERP products, maps, and even polaroids showing the positioning and postures of characters in a scene. I tell artists, "Your vision of Frodo is going to be different than that of other artists, but pretend that you're painting a portrait of the same person." We try to adhere closely to *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. If we are portraying a scene from one of those works, I want to make sure that the artist does a fairly accurate rendition. Art work in the Middle-earth line does have some special constraints to be faithful to the Tolkien legacy.

Chris: Thank you very much for your time.



ARDA LORE



Response to Chris Pheby:

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MAGIC IN MIDDLE-EARTH?

In the “Arda Lore” section of OH 12: 47-48, Chris Pheby rightly criticized me for not being more explicit on how extremely rare Words of Command would be in a Middle-earth setting, particularly when it comes to the Third Age. If, however, I failed to make myself sufficiently clear on this subject, the reason for this was not that I ever pondered the possibility of any actually “petty” magic existing in Middle-earth, a thing I was certainly not trying to suggest at any point of my argument. Rather I perhaps took too much for granted my own understanding of the extremely rare nature of magic in Middle-earth, which Tolkien in his works draws so vivid a picture of. To me, as to Chris, any magic in Middle-earth would be a really serious matter, and not “petty” by any means, always involving a chance of the most dire consequences for anybody tapping on pools of magical energy.

Even most “petty” spells would require some more or less careful preparation in advance, in order to give them a more than remote chance of success.¹ To the need for such careful preparation I indeed did make reference at some point of my earlier article, and I would share Chris Pheby’s view that preparation in advance is a crucial factor—crucial even in not getting yourself killed on the spot while trying to ad hoc handle a spell which could do anything more than, say, light a couple of pine-cones, and even that’s for advanced magic-users only. This also may be part of the explanation of why there are hardly any human magic-users to speak of in Tolkien’s tales. Their limited lifespan might simply not allow for the kind of preparation

that really powerful spells would require.

Where I don’t follow Chris’ argument as I understood it, is when he tries to interpret spells as mere “passwords” to activate a specific magical mechanism which is already present. Quite on the contrary, a spell, as I read it, always involves an active molding and directing of magical energies which, granted, are present outside the caster, but in a raw, undefined state. So a spell in my view can never just be a password.

On the other hand, I would not want to suggest that normal spells relied exclusively on energy drawn from outside the person casting it, as this would render void the common concept of magical artifacts which don’t require any magical skill or magic-related knowledge by a person to use it, a notion also used by Tolkien on a number of occasions (e.g., the elven cloaks given to the Fellowship in Lothlórien or the blades from Gondolin which Bilbo and the Dwarves encounter in the trolls’ lair). So with a spell, to get things started, you still would always need to use some of your own energy to act as an impetus.

But even if I don’t share Chris’ view on the artifact-related nature of spells in general, for the later Third Age I should claim pretty much the same effects, as by then there would be very little “free” magical energy left in Middle-earth to be manipulated by spells. For the Second Age however, and particularly for the Elder Days, if adopting the above view, things would then turn out quite different of course.

So while I don’t believe that spells are a mere means of activating magic previously worked and embedded in artifacts, they certainly do involve much more of the magic-user’s own skill and knowledge to manipulate energies present outside of him than do Words of Command, which indeed could be understood as magical artifacts with no physi-

cal matter to them.² When activating such a device, there thus would be nothing to draw previously stored magical energy from. So a magic-user casting a Word of Command would have to rely entirely on his own personal pool of energy, and to some degree perhaps on energy stored in his personal focus. However, as Chris Pheby has rightly pointed out, the efficiency of such foci in general remains highly questionable.

Words of Command then, as I already tried to point out in my earlier article, in comparison to normal spells actually would appear to be easier to trigger. The trick here is that you still have to know the trick. So it is easily understood why Words of Command are kept so secret by those who already do know the trick, and the latter would be very few indeed, because, while they may be fast and comparatively easy to trigger, to craft a non-material magical artifact in the first place requires far more skill and knowledge than the casting of most spells. The fruit of such a labor, you don’t usually give away for free, especially if this also means sharing a power which hitherto was exclusively yours.

Still, when I say “comparatively easy to trigger” I would not wish to imply that once old Fatty Bolger has been told the trick, he can now take on the Lord of the Nazgûl single-handedly. Some familiarity with basic concepts of how magic works, I suggest, would still be required on behalf of the caster, in order to successfully channel one’s own magical energy into a Word of Command. Having mastered this, still the resulting drain of energy probably would bleed poor Fatty before he could say “supper,” even if he wasn’t confronted by any conflicting Word of Command or counter spell, as was Gandalf in the chamber of Mazarbul.

To utter a Word of Command while you are in no position to give an informed estimate at least of the amount of energy required, is nothing less than suicidal. The use of an appropriate focus again may help to prevent the worst, but evidently here also you would have to know how to use it for such a purpose. However, to stress it once more: if while casting a spell you fail to properly control the flux of magical energy surrounding you, be it for lack of skill or preparation, you may also experience catastrophic, even fatal results.

If you accept the concept of limited innate magical energy for living beings, as drawn up by Michael Saunders and Chris Pheby in their article in OH 6/7: 4-6, which, like Chris' article in OH 1: 20-22, for no reason whatsoever apparent to myself now, I failed to mention in the introduction to my article in issue 10/11 (oops, sorry folks, no offense meant), here's another reason even for very powerful magic-users to be extremely reluctant in resorting to a Word of Command.

Despite those pitfalls, one real advantage of Words of Command over spells to me would seem to lie in the fact of them producing rather uniform results, whereas the outcome of a spell not only depends on your skill, but also on the amount and structure of magical energy available. Handling this problem could well be, I suggest, one of the things where careful preparation on the part of the caster does play a crucial part.

From Tolkien's writings it would appear to be clear that Middle-earth was experiencing a considerable decline in available magical energy over time.

Chris Pheby in his contribution to OH 12 also emphasizes the notion that there most likely is not only temporal, but also some spatial variation to be observed in the distribution of magical energy. He would explain this as a consequence of past efforts to tie magical energy to a certain place, a notion certainly worthwhile pondering. However, quite apart from such phenomena, the original distribution of "free" magical energies need not be uniform in the first place, and "natural" variation may occur. The building of Dol Guldur or Barad-dûr for example certainly altered the quality of these places in terms of magical energies, but some particular "magical" features already present might have been involved in the original choice of these locations.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the Orodruin with the Cracks of Doom could perhaps be read as one example of a site possessing such particular qualities. Here alone it is that the One Ring may be destroyed, and this certainly is not because of something that Sauron did to the mountain, he also just would have taken advantage of something already present when he came there to craft the Ruling Ring.

If all such irregularities in the distribution of magical energy are to be understood as due to remnants of the Elder Days, buried in the deep places of the world, is open to debate. Some of them probably are, and personally I'm not sure if it was only the search for true-silver that made the Dwarves tunnel deeper and deeper beneath Zirak-zigil.

Initially it might have been just the search for mithril, as well as for other minerals, but at some point they would probably have sensed the presence of some major reservoir of magical energy in the depth beneath the mountains. So it's perhaps not too unreasonable to assume that, led by their desire to exploit this even greater treasure for their works, foolishly they broke the bonds of the Balrog, who, taking notice of the mining activity above him, even may have lured the Dwarves upon him by the deliberate leaking of magical energy.

FOOTNOTES

1. "Petty" meant here to indicate the type of magic completely uncommon to everyday life in pretty much most of Middle-earth, i. e. the kind of magic known to normal folk, if at all, by hearsay only, as opposed to the really ultra-ultra-ultra-rare and really ultra-ultra-ultra-secret Words of Command.

2. The notion of Words of Command as non-material magical artifacts is not my own invention, but was inspired by a similar concept taken from a combined rulebook-treatise on magic in role-playing games by Jörg Hertwich and Stefan Stadler-Ley: *Zauberei, Magieregeln für Rollenspiele* 2nd Edition. Zirndorf: G & S Verlag 1995 (ISBN 3-925698-58-2).

NEW MIDDLE-EARTH: EXPLORING BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS

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*This article presents a new and original environment for exploring J.R.R. Tolkien's sub-created realm of Middle-earth; in particular its relationship to the primary world. New Middle-earth itself is a secondary, sub-created world. To all intents and purposes it is identical to the primary world we all inhabit, with one important exception: within it the 'Middle-earth' related by the late Professor J.R.R. Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings* is not fiction, but historically true. The concept asserts Tolkien's self-professed role as editor of authentic texts originating in a remote — and previously unknown — period of world history. The consequences of this assertion provide the scope and inspiration for whatever intellectual, role-play, and creative endeavors may be enacted within it.*

New Middle-earth has arisen out of the current debate concerning the validity — or otherwise — of seeking to explore beyond the boundaries of the published Tolkien canon, which is limited to northwestern Middle-earth in the first three Ages of the World. In some respects, the debate is not new at all. From its beginnings, fantasy role-play has been viewed by the mainstream of Tolkien fandom with suspicion, precisely because it dared venture beyond the canvas upon which Tolkien painted his masterpiece.

It must be said that not all the suspicion was ill-judged. It has been cogently argued, from both sides of the RPG 'fence', that early attempts at role-playing within Middle-earth paid little more than lip service to the creative legacy upon which it claimed to be based. That said, the literary dogmatism present (perhaps inevitably) within Tolkien organizations has tended to intellectual snobbery, rejecting anything that seems to challenge their 'Tolkien As Literature' stance. In recent months, the

*'heretical' label has also been applied to artwork and creative fiction, with the most scathing condemnations raised at anything suggesting that Tolkien might just have been telling the truth when he wrote in the Preface to *The Lord of the Rings*: 'This account of the end of the Third Age is drawn mainly from the Red Book of Westmarch ...'*

THE TELLER OF LOST TALES

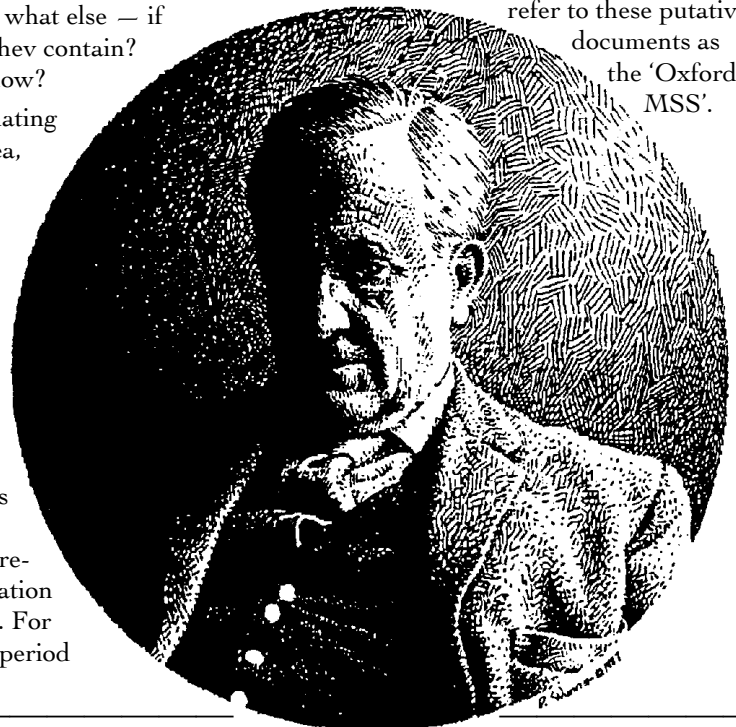
The *New Middle-earth* scenario begs far-reaching questions concerning both Tolkien's role as translator of ancient texts, and the texts themselves, from which he worked. Where, when, and by whom were they originally written? How and in what form did they come down to the present day? How and when did they pass into Tolkien's possession? How was he able to translate them? Aside from the published works, what else — if anything — did they contain? Where are they now?

This is a fascinating and uncertain area, and one in which much further research is needed. No portion of the original manuscripts from which Tolkien worked has been released. Their present location is unknown. Nevertheless, a preliminary identification can be attempted. For convenience, the period

between 1911 — the year Tolkien started at Oxford — and 1949, when he completed writing *Lord of the Rings*, has been divided into six 'phases'. Each phase is marked by a distinct change of emphasis within Tolkien's writings.

1) 1911-1914: the 'Oxford MSS'

Before the close of 1912, whilst still an undergraduate at Oxford, Tolkien had begun working with an Elven language related to Quenya (Biography: 67). This, the earliest mention of Elven language in relation to Tolkien, begs the question of its origins. It seems probable that he came into the possession of one or more manuscripts containing fragments of legend in some Elven tongue, possibly one spoken by the *ylfe* (OE 'elves') of Anglo-Saxon England. At this stage it is unlikely that Tolkien understood fully either the content or significance of the material he was learning to translate. For convenience I refer to these putative documents as the 'Oxford MSS'.



2) **1914-1917: the Cornish legends** In the summer of 1914 Tolkien spent a long vacation on the Lizard peninsula which affected him deeply. Shortly after leaving Cornwall he wrote a poem entitled 'The Voyage of Earendel the Evening Star' which, according to Carpenter, marked the beginning of Tolkien's own mythology (Biography: 79). I suggest that whilst exploring Cornwall Tolkien heard stories derived orally from what we may call the 'Eriol/Elfwine tradition' (see below). These enabled him to begin making sense of the strange works he had been translating. In 1915 he graduated from Oxford and took up a commission in the British army. Married in March 1916, by the end of June Tolkien was on the Somme, where he remained until forced to return in November with trench fever. The poems of this period may have been translated out of the Oxford MSS. However, the strong personal references in such pieces as 'The Wanderer's Allegiance' suggest that they were Tolkien's own work, albeit inspired by the Oxford MSS material and by his visit to Cornwall.

3) **1917-1920: the 'Book of Lost Tales'/Eriol of Heligoland** For almost the whole of 1917 Tolkien was convalescing in England. The earliest 'Book of Lost Tales' appeared at this time, probably the first Elven lore rendered into English for nine hundred years. There seems little doubt that the Tales were translated out of the Oxford MSS: Tolkien's knowledge of Elven language was by now 'very sophisticated' (Biography: 101). The relative stability of the Tales themselves is to be contrasted with the many incomplete, changing, and frequently contradictory versions that exist of the parenthetical 'Eriol Story' (see chapter VI of *The Book of Lost Tales* vol. 2). Eriol — the supposed narrator of the Tales — is a mariner from Heligoland (a small island off the west coast of Schleswig-Holstein, northern Germany) during the period 'preceding the Anglo-Saxon invasions of Britain' (*Lost Tales* I: 24). Sailing west, Eriol arrives on Tol Eressëa, the Elven island hidden from all but few mortals. Eriol learns much lore from the Elves of that isle, which he (or his son) records in a book. Already exhibiting a certain 'mythic gloss', the 'Eriol Story' becomes historically untenable when Tol Eressea is drawn across the sea, finally achieving the position (and identity) of England. I propose that the 'Eriol story' was an early attempt by Tolkien to draw aspects of Cornish legend, relating a bold mariner who learned the lore of the ylfe and journeyed into the West, around the corpus of

the Tales proper.

4) **1920-1925: the 'Leeds MSS'/Elfwine of Warwick** During this period Tolkien was at Leeds University: first as Reader and subsequently (from 1924) as Professor in English Language. About this time his work on the 'Book of Lost Tales' — or specifically its narrative framework — underwent significant development, with the appearance of a new character: Ælfwine of Warwick. Precise dating is uncertain. Christopher Tolkien considers one version of the Ælfwine story 'unlikely to be much later than 1920' (*Lost Tales* II: 322), while Carpenter dates the change in emphasis from Eriol to Ælfwine to Tolkien's return to Oxford in 1925 (Biography: 172). Certainly, modern translations of texts credited to Ælfwine were not made until after Tolkien's return to Oxford. However, the Old English manuscripts from which these translations were made probably came into Tolkien's possession during his time in Leeds. These 'Leeds MSS' contained Elven history and lore which Tolkien clearly considered more authoritative than his translations from the Oxford MSS. By 1926 he had abandoned the 'Book of Lost Tales' as originally conceived, and the later 'Silmarillion' texts (see below) all derive from Ælfwine. This is interesting, as the Oxford material was in an Elven tongue, and thus might be imagined the more accurate account. However, Tolkien (presumably) could not call upon the ylfe for assistance, as Ælfwine seems to have done. Various accounts exist of the 'Ælfwine Story' (see *Lost Tales* II, chapter VI), all more historically credible than the 'Eriol Story' (note that several of the Leeds texts equate the names 'Eriol and Ælfwine'). The core of the 'Ælfwine Story' is further supported by the recently translated Tresco MS, see below, Ælfwine was a man of the Anglo-Saxon period. His mother came from 'the lost land beyond Belerion whence the Elves at times set sail' (*Lost Tales* II: 313). The 'lost land' is not identified; the most likely candidate is Scilly, the group of islands lying 28 miles off Lands End (the ancient name of Lands End was Belerium). Ælfwine was taken prisoner by Vikings after they sacked Warwick. Some years later he escaped, and made his way south and west, seeking the lands of his mother's birth. Sailing west, after many adventures Ælfwine came at last in sight of Tol Eressëa. In one version, unable to land, Ælfwine returns east with his companions. This would imply that references to Tol Eressëa, present in the Leeds MSS texts, were 'elaborations' added either by the

author or by later hands. According to another tradition Ælfwine cast himself overboard and was never seen again by his companions: he is presumed to have reached Eressëa. The 'Eressëan' references are in this scenario explained, but not how Ælfwine's writings were returned to England.

5) **1925-1930: the Silmarillion** Tolkien returned to Oxford in 1925 as Professor of Anglo-Saxon. In the next year the 'Sketch of the Mythology' was written: 'a new starting point in the history of "The Silmarillion"' (*Shaping of Middle-earth*: 12). The Sketch was intended by Tolkien as a summary document for later reference: 'the entire narrative framework of the *Lost Tales* has disappeared' (op. cit.). In this period Tolkien wrote a large body of material, including the *Quenta Noldorinwa* ('History of the Noldor', the first part of which was later reworked as the *Valaquenta* 'Account of the Valar'); *Ambar-kanta* ('The Shape of the World') and the *Annals of Valinor* and of *Beleriand*. All these are explicitly translations out of Ælfwine.

6) **1930-1949: translations from the Red Book** MSS Tolkien's achievement in translating from the Westron 'Red Book MSS' was unprecedented in modern times, and cannot be underestimated. Begun around 1930, his version of volume Ia, 'There and Back Again', was completed by 1936 and published a year later, as *The Hobbit*. By this time, Tolkien was professing doubts over his earlier translations, and further work on the 'Quenta Silmarillion' was interrupted. Instead, he continued with the Red Book, translating volume Ib, Frodo's account of the War of the Ring, between 1937 and 1949. The *Lord of the Rings* was not published until 1954-55: in the interim period Tolkien undertook a major reappraisal of his earlier work. A revision of the 'Lay of Leithian' was begun (but not completed). The 'Annals of Aman' were begun — a 'major new work' (*Shaping of Middle-earth*: 262) which retold Ælfwine's 'Annals of Valinor'. The 'Annals of Beleriand' were similarly revisited as the 'Grey Annals'. These — and the many subsequent — revisions arose from Tolkien's attempts to integrate volumes II-IV of the Red Book MSS, Bilbo's 'Translations From the Elvish', into the existing opus. Despite his son's valuable — indeed valiant — reconstructions, it must remain our regret that Tolkien's perfectionism ultimately doomed his vision: namely to achieve a full English translation of the only authenticated Middle-earth texts extant in the modern world.

RETELLING THE TALES: THE NEW MIDDLE-EARTH CANON

How is our understanding of *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* affected by the realization that these are translations by Tolkien of much more ancient texts? Wrongly, though perhaps inevitably, these works have come to assume something of the status of holy writ. Exorbitant effort has at times been expended to circumnavigate apparent contention or contradiction between the accounts, or between the accounts and our Primary world. Bernie Roessler expressed this eloquently in his recent essay “The Streets of Minas Tirith:”

If we do not choose to ignore those inconsistencies...then the role of translator of *The Red Book of Westmarch*, which Tolkien assumed, allows us two other choices: 1) we can say that the chronicler of *The Red Book* has erred, or 2) we can engage in further subcreation to somehow explain the inconsistency (*Other Hands* 10/11:6).

Whilst the results of such ‘further subcreation’ are frequently fascinating, we should be wary of ignoring the first choice: to say, heretical though it may seem to some, that here and there, someone got it wrong. *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* are not the ineffable words of Eru. Their authors were neither all-knowing nor infallible. Neither, for that matter, was Tolkien. Within New Middle-earth, this point is far from moot. The first, and perhaps the most important point is to appreciate that the works differ widely in style, purpose and authorship.

The similarities and differences between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* have frequently been commented upon, the former generally having been seen as a preliminary draft for the greater work to follow. To take the differences first, it is undoubtedly true that Tolkien’s narrative skill and style developed with time. It is also clear that he regretted targeting *The Hobbit* so obviously for children. In this light, Tolkien may deliberately have ‘written up’ to his

audience with *The Lord of the Rings*.

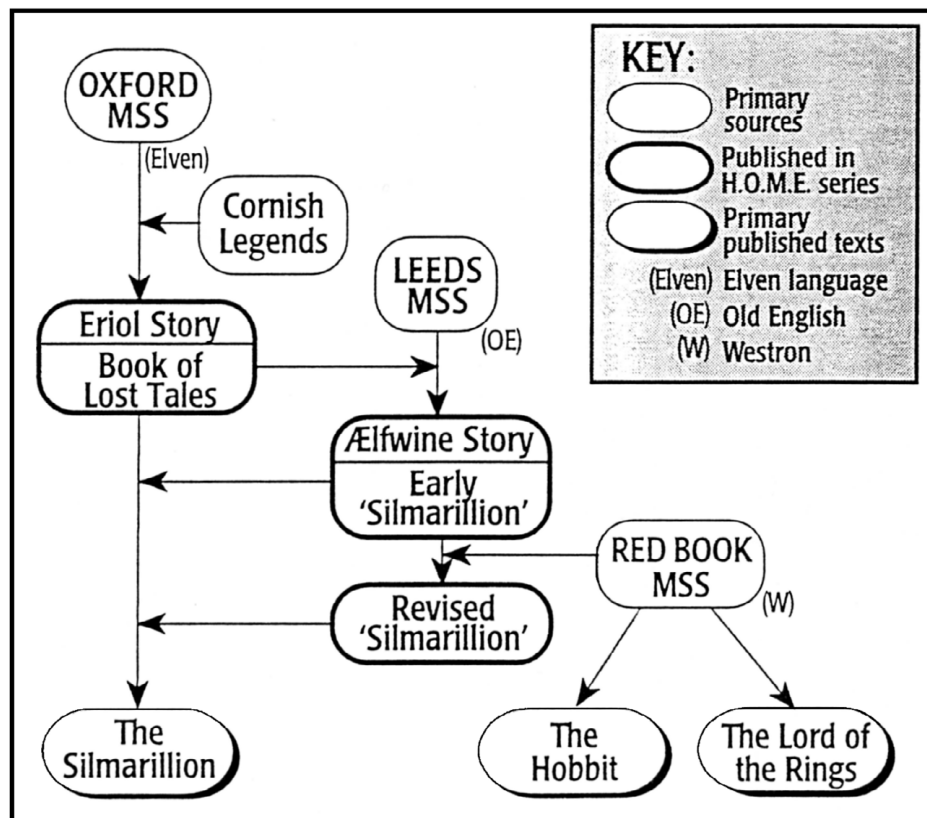
However, the fundamental point, which seems to have eluded every commentator to date, is that the two tales were actually written by different people!

Although the original texts of *The Hobbit* (*There And Back Again*) and *The Lord of the Rings* received subsequent annotation in Gondor, there is no reason to doubt that each represents the work of one author, respectively Bilbo and Frodo Baggins of the Shire. Both texts are explicitly autobiographical. When reading them, we should look less for historical veracity than the honest attempts of simple folk to record their own parts in the unfolding of momentous events. In the absence of the source manuscripts we cannot be certain, but just possibly—and heretical though it may sound to some — Frodo was simply a better writer than his cousin.

Less learned, perhaps, but since when has erudition been a guarantor of effective communication skills? As to similarities, there are certainly many structural parallels between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In part, this may be explained by both having passed through Tolkien’s hands in his role as translator and compiler. That said, many

of the similarities can be traced back to the original authors. Bilbo and Frodo were of the same, Halfling, race. Until the events related in their accounts neither had experienced much of the world beyond the cozy confines of the Shire. More significantly, Frodo was ‘taught his letters’ by Bilbo, and was familiar with both his cousin’s adventures and storytelling style. Bilbo’s writings, the original ‘Red Book’, were indeed entrusted into the care of Frodo after their completion (and before Frodo wrote the bulk of his own story). Given all this, it would be remarkable if there were not a degree of similarity between the two accounts.

In contrast. *The Silmarillion* is explicitly a compilation of works. Certain of the texts, most notably the *Ainulindalë* and the *Valaquenta*, are distinctly mythic in style, although presented historically—indeed, as firsthand accounts of the earliest periods of Creation. Elsewhere, in the *Quenta Noldorinwa*, the *Annals of Belenand* and the *Akallabêth*, we find detailed political histories of the peoples of Valinor, Beleriand and Númenor throughout the First and Second Ages of the World. The differences in style, compared to the earlier-published works, is unmistakable. In this regard, we need to



appreciate the convoluted provenance of the material. As shown in the accompanying figure, *The Silmarillion* as published is the distillation of material from three distinct sources. We need also to acknowledge the editorial hand of C. J.R. Tolkien (see Book of Lost Tales I).

THE TRESCOMS

At least one other body of material originating in the Fourth Age has come down to the present day. This is the so-called 'Tresco MS', named for the island of Tresco upon which it was found in or around VI 1835. This remarkable document, entitled by its author Boc þæra Hehsighðana ('The Book of Visions'), comprises a revised English translation of the 'ancient book of Finan'. Although the original work is lost—as also are the intermediate Old English translations—it seems certain that Finan's Book was written, in Westron, sometime after IV 1485.

The Tresco MS is the work of one Hundred Elf-friend (*Ælfwine*) of Warwick. The autobiographical details provided in the Preface to the manuscript leave little doubt that in Hundred we have the historical Eriol/Ælfwine, the author/compiler of the 'Leeds MSS', and thus also the progenitor of the entire 'Silmarillion' tradition. The Boc itself provides much valuable information concerning the historical and political development of the Reunited Kingdom, over the first fifteen centuries of the Fourth Age (see timeline), as seen through the eyes of the Man Aerlinn, of the House of the Wise of Dol Amroth. The remainder of the work describes in detail the workings of various Mannish divinatory and wisdom traditions over this period, including the concerns and practices of the Wise.

WHERE BE DRAGONS?

Reassessing The Maps of New Middle-earth

There is a temptation to take the published maps of Middle-earth as accurate and complete, as though they were drawn up by the Middle-earth equivalent of the Ordnance Survey. Sadly, perhaps, this is not the case. The maps vary significantly in origin, style and purpose. An appreciation of this fact is essential if we are to employ them as they were intended. Our primary sources are those maps prepared by J.R.R. and C. J.R. Tolkien:

The Hobbit:

Map A. Thrór's map

Map B. Wilderland

The Lord of the Rings:

Map C. The Shire

Map D. North-western Middle-earth

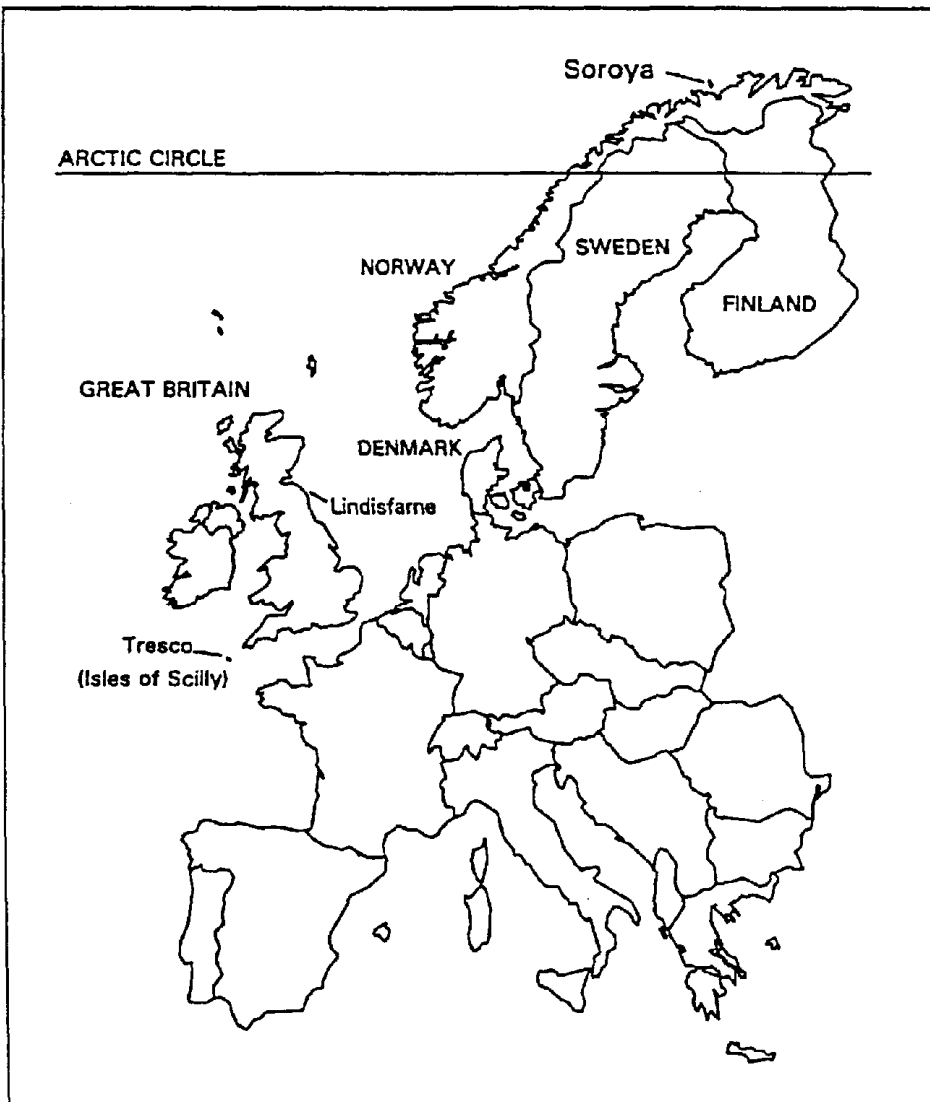
Map E. Rohan/Gondor/Mordor

The Silmarillion:

Map F. First Age Beleriand

These are supplemented by a number of rough or unfinished maps and diagrams, published by C.J.R. Tolkien with the History of Middle-earth series. Of particular interest are the cosmological representations of Arda in its earliest development, published in *The Shaping of Middle-earth*, and the map of Númenor in *Unfinished Tales*.

As with the published texts, the maps which accompany them differ markedly in style and purpose. For example, the Hobbit maps A and B differ in being more pictorial than cartographic in style. The map of Beleriand printed within chapter 15 of *The Silmarillion* is essentially political, in that it shows the realms of the Noldor and Sindar races, as well as the dwellings of the most important figures in the narrative. The maps as published are clearly not of Third Age origin, being labelled in modern English. Even Thrór's map uses European Futhork runes in place of the original cirth (see opening page to *The Hobbit*), although the authentic letters were known to Tolkien and are reproduced in Appendix E of *The Lord of the Rings*. Furthermore, the distance scales included with the *Lord of the Rings* maps are marked in miles. It should be noted that these are the only Middle-earth maps to be provided with a scale of any sort.



— OTHER HANDS —

There can be no doubt that the published maps were drawn by J.R.R. and C.J.R. Tolkien. The issue is rather upon what their cartography was based. It is possible that they redrew and relettered maps contained within the source manuscripts. Alternatively, the maps might have been based upon information contained within the narrative itself. In the former case we should find as great, but no greater, accuracy and detail than we might expect of First to Third Age

cartography. In the latter we should expect the degree of detail to mirror that found in the texts, given that the text as published may have been condensed to a greater or lesser degree. Of course, these options are not exclusive. Given the Halflings' recorded predilection for map-making it is likely that Bilbo and Frodo included maps of some sort covering their journeys. The There And Back Again maps A and B, with their distinctive pictorial style, may well be relettered

facsimiles of originals by Bilbo himself.

The more detailed Shire map C is clearly not the work of the same hand. It is probably based upon an original by Frodo, or perhaps a 'standard' Halfling map of their land, incorporated into the manuscript for illustration when the Thain's Book copy of the Red Book was prepared for the King's court (Halfling readers would not have needed a general map of their own lands). Conversely, some



representation of the wider world beyond the Shire would have been necessary to illustrate Frodos narrative. The Lord of the Rings maps D and E are thus probably based upon originals, no doubt amended in light of the textual evidence (some of which represents subsequent additions by scholars of Gondor). The Silmarillion maps are probably of the same origin, although here the situation is less clear, not least because of the uncertain pedigree of the source texts themselves.

Maps of Middle-earth have been published by other artists, mostly renderings of the Lord of the Rings map D. Of particular note is Pauline Baynes' version, published in poster form in 1970. Created in collaboration with J.R.R. Tolkien, this map contains certain additions and amendments to the original. More recently, C.J.R. Tolkien has himself produced a revised 'official' version of map D, reproduced (poorly) in post-Centenary editions of *The Lord of the Rings*. Karen Wynn Fonstad's *Atlas of Middle-earth* has extensively elaborated the cartography of Middle-earth. The canonical maps have been enlarged, extended and annotated with close regard to the published texts.

Iron Crown Enterprise's Middle-earth Role Playing (MERP) products provide a wealth of cartographic detail otherwise unavailable to the traveler in New Middle-earth. The MERP version of map D is of particular value, and undoubted artistic merit. Despite this profusion of charts there is a need for maps covering areas of the New Middle-earth realm not previously considered. These may include 'new' geographical areas of Middle-earth in the first three Ages of the World, but more fundamentally there is need for charting the eons of geographical development from the end of the Third Age to the present day.

THE NEW MIDDLE-EARTH TIMESCAPE

The primary source must be Appendix B in *The Lord of the Rings*, also *The Silmarillion*. Iron Crown Enterprises' MERP modules provide a wealth of additional information covering the Second and Third Ages of the World. A partial Sixth Age timeline is provided below. However, with a few exceptions, almost nothing is known of any other period in the history of New Middle-earth from the end of the Third Age. It follows from the above discussion that the New Middle-earth timescape, up to and including the 'present day' (i.e. late C20, Sixth Age), differs little from what is known of primary world history. Note, however, the use of the word 'known'. Discoveries coming to light may — indeed, inevitably will — shatter theories and assumptions hitherto cherished by Sixth Age historians, scientists, Tolkienists and the general populace.

THE AGES OF THE LAMPS, TREES, AND STARS

The epochs from the Creation to the overthrow of the Two Lamps by Melkor are uncharted, and essentially unchartable: the measurement of 'Time' itself only begins with the creation of Two Trees. An unknown period then passes until the Kindling of the Stars by Elbereth. The Ages of Stars begin with the awakening of the Elves. They encompass the Elves' exodus into the West, the creation and theft of the Silmarils, the subsequent exile of the Noldor and the first Wars in Beleriand. The Ages of Stars end with the creation of the Moon and Sun.

THE AGES OF THE SUN

With the exception of those marked (*), the following dates are presently unverified:

Age	Approx. start	Approx. duration	Notes
First	c 11,850 BCE	c 600 yrs.	Men awaken; Siege of Angband; Wars of Beleriand. Ends with defeat of Morgoth.
Second	11,242 BCE	3,441 yrs.*	Rise and fall of Númenor; assault on Blessed Realm; Drowning of Númenor and changing of World. Ends with overthrow of Sauron by Last Alliance.
Third	7,801 BCE	3,021 yrs.*	Rise of Arnor & Gondor; return of Sauron & Nazgûl. Ends with the WotR.
Fourth	4,780 BCE	2,600 yrs.	The 'Age of Men'; Most Elves pass into the West.
Fifth	2,180 BCE	2,180 yrs.	
Sixth	1 CE	2,000 yrs.	The present Age (AD, or Common Era)
Seventh	2,000 CE	(unknown)	The 'New Age'

THE FOURTH AGE

The following Fourth Age timeline is taken from material contained in the Tresco MS. Although for the most part unverified by external evidence, it should for the present be taken as historically true.

- c. 50 Celeborn removes to Rivendell.
- 64 The Thain's Book, a copy of the Red Book of Westmarch, is taken to Minas Tirith and is subsequently amended and annotated in Gondor.
- c. 100 Celeborn passes into the West. Gelydion (Rómendil) is retained by Elessar as Master of Lore.

OTHER HANDS

- 120 The passing of King Elessar. Eldarion succeeds to the throne of the Reunited Kingdom.
- 172 Findegil's copy of the annotated Thain's Book is taken to Great Smials in the Shire.
- 183 Rómendil completes the Parma Taratirion.
- c. 187 (Quenya) copies of the Parma Taratirion are established at Annúminas and Dol Amroth.
- 227 The passing of King Eldarion. Rómendil leaves the Court.
- c. 500 The illustrated Commentaries first appear in the North.
- 512 Scholars of Annúminas record the appearance of the Commentaries (cited by Aerlinn).
- c. 970 Unrest begins throughout the Reunited Kingdom.
- 976 Southron invasion of Eriador during the reign of Arbelbeth, thirteenth king of the Reunited Kingdom.
- c 977 The death of Arbelbeth and division of the kingdom. Arbalad becomes southern king: a northern throne is established at Annúminas. The civil disruption reawakens interest in the Book of Visions. The Wise of both kingdoms integrate the Parma with their star-lore and calendrical traditions. Amongst the populace the Westron Book of Visions and Commentaries give rise to new systems of divination: lassi ('leaves', i.e. cards) in the North, serni ('stones') in the South.
- 1223 The library of Minas Tirith transfers to Dol Amroth.
- c. 1280 Following the loss by fire of the library of Annúminas, Dol Amroth becomes the principal center of learning in the Two Kingdoms.
- c. 1420 Birth of Aerlinn of Tol Falas.
- c. 1434 At age fourteen, Aerlinn begins his studies at Dol Amroth.
- c. 1445 Aerlinn discovers a 'lost' copy of the Commentaries. Recognizing it as the link between the 'Wisdom of Life' and the popular 'Lore of Life, Leaf & Stone', Aerlinn works over some forty years to prove his conviction.
- 1485 Aerlinn completes his Notes on the History of the Parma Taratirion & the Commentaries of Rómendil at Dol Amroth.
- At some later point the Parma Taratirion, Commentaries and Aerlinn's Notes became integrated into a single work, together with the unattributed text 'The Lore of Life, Leaf & Stone' which was most likely composed after 1485. A copy of this composite work comprised the 'ancient book' which arrived on Lindisfarne in the seventh century of the Common Era.

THE SIXTH AGE

The following Sixth Age timeline is to be taken as historically true, except those marked (?), the dates of which remain speculative at this time.

- 651-661 Finan, second bishop of Lindisfarne. In this time the 'ancient book' arrives on Lindisfarne. Finan is succeeded by Colman.
- c. 680 Herefrid, abbot of Lindisfarne, translates much of the Parma Taratirion and Commentaries into Old English (Anglo-Saxon) in the Grey Book of Lindisfarne.
- c. 870 Wirmaer, monk of Lindisfarne, completes Herefrid's translations in the Grey Book. He also translates Aerlinn's Notes in the Green Book of Lindisfarne.
- 860-c. 910 Life of Hundred ('Ælfwine') of Warwick.
- c. 882 Hundred obtains the Grey and the Green Books of Lindisfarne, from the monk Witmaer.
- c. 892 With the aid of the ylfe, Hundred completes his Boc þæara Hehsighðana. Some time after this (but before 915), Hundred sails 'into the west', taking with him the Grey and Green Books. The Boc þæara Hehsighðana is left on Scilly, probably with Christian hermits.
- 1834-72 Augustus Smith Governor of Scilly.
- c. 1835 The 'Tresco MS' is discovered during the building of Tresco Abbey or the excavation of its gardens on the site of the old priory.
- 1872-1918 Thomas Algernon Dorrien Smith Governor of Scilly.
- 1883 The Tresco MS is acquired by Rev G Bennett from T.A. Dorrien Smith.
- 1885-6 Bennett translates Hundred's Preface and the first part of Aerlinn's Notes, and also writes brief notes on the manuscript's discovery.
- 1892 Birth of J.R.R. Tolkien.
- ? c. 1911 Discovery by Tolkien of the 'Oxford MSS'.
- ? c 1920 Discovery by Tolkien of the 'Leeds MSS'.
- ? pre 1930 Discovery by Tolkien of the 'Red Book MSS'.
- 1937 Publication of The Hobbit.
- 1954-5 Publication of The Lord of the Rings.
- 1968 The Tresco MS and associated material is obtained by Alice Bailey.
- c. 1970 First realisation by Alice Bailey that the Tresco MS provides historical verification of the tales translated and published by Tolkien.
- 1973 Death of J.R.R. Tolkien.
- 1977 Publication of The Silmarillion.
- 1990-5 First full translation of the Tresco MS into modern English (present author, currently unpublished).
- 1992-3 Archaeological excavations at Sørøya, northern Norway (see New Scientist April 17 1993, page 4).
- 1995 Pottery shards and silver jewelry found at the primary Sørøya site are identified as artifacts from the lost northern kingdom of Arnor (unpublished communication to the author).

EXPLORING NEW MIDDLE-EARTH

Exploration within New Middle-earth is limited only by the imaginations of those wishing to explore. Readers of *Other Hands* are no doubt wondering about the opportunities for role-play. Up to and including late Third Age Middle-earth, the arena is little different from the existing MERP realm. So what is so new about New Middle-earth? Just think about it for a moment. Some 6,500 years link the world described by Tolkien to the present day. Such a period spans almost the whole of human history from the close of the New Stone Age onwards, yet in terms of its relevance to Middle-earth (and, indeed, Middle-earth's relevance to it) almost nothing of this period is known or has been explored. Tolkien's *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers* offer almost the only foray into this arena. Much work needs to be done here — and 6,500 years ought to provide enough scope for anyone!

The late ninth to early tenth centuries of the Sixth Age are particularly interesting: this is the period in which Hundred/Ælfwine lived and worked. According to the evidence (the 'Ælfwine Story' contained in *Lost Tales II*, and Hundred's Preface to the *Tresco MS*), this was a pivotal moment in the history of men and Elves. Britain was under attack and occupation by the 'Viking' Norse and Danes. Up until this time, it would seem that the ylfe had occupied a number of sites throughout Britain, in at least some cases living alongside men. However, in face of the Northron invasion, they seem to have abandoned their former habitations, moving ever south and west. This disengagement led to resentment on the part of the English, who the ylfe considered little better than invaders themselves: their natural sympathies lying much more with the British.

Only west of the river Tamar, in modern day Cornwall, did (British) men and ylfe continue to live together in mutual

From there, the ylfe mostly seem to have sailed west to Súli (the Isles of Scilly), probably their last major habitation in the northwest of Middle-earth, and thence set sail into the West.

Those interested might pursue their investigations in the primary world, visiting and exploring locations significant to the developing New Middle-earth timescape. At present, the majority of these are in the UK and western Europe, but who knows where the Quest may lead. Where, in the modern world, would you look for further evidence? Another possibility exists for those interested in guided meditations, or Pathworking. Consider exploring some corner of the New Middle-earth world-scape, and see where your investigations lead you.

As examples (only), the following scenarios might be undertaken by individuals or groups to explore and enhance the New Middle-earth Realm. The first concerns the archaeological findings at Sørøya in northern Norway. Note that the primary site is 450 kilometers inside the Arctic Circle!

1. You are part of the original archaeological team from the Tromsa Museum. As the excavations progress, artifacts and remains are Found which convince you of the objective truth of Tolkien's Middle-earth. Dating the finds is difficult: some seem to span the Third Age, with others more likely dating from the early Fourth Age. Conflicts arise over your deductions, both within the group and back at the museum. What are the artifacts, and how do you proceed/report your findings to the world? Then, reports come through of a large 'unidentified creature', buried in the ice north of

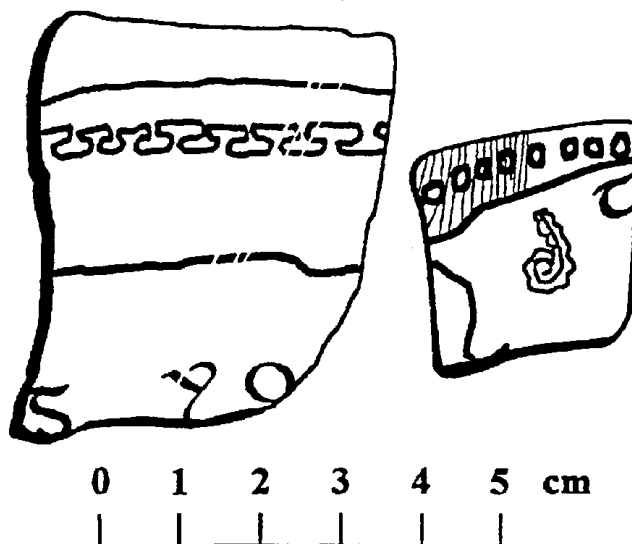
the Sørøya site...

2. You are part of an independent Psychic Questing group, investigating some aspect of the New Middle-earth timescape. Perhaps you are trying to locate a 'missing' manuscript or artifact. If this sounds at all dull read anything by Andrew Collins. Your quest may lead you into the supernatural realm of dreams, magic, mediums and visitations. You may find yourself beset by sinister forces. You may receive messages or apports (physical materialization of items valuable to your quest). At present, items 'known to be missing' include the manuscripts from which Tolkien worked; the three Old English books from which Hundred compiled the *Tresco MS*; also the *MS's* original Westron source text, last reported hidden in the ninth century VI upon the island of Lindisfarne.
3. A psychiatrist is found by walkers, almost dead from exposure, beside a huge weathered boulder on the Yorkshire moors. He recovers physically, but seems to have suffered a total breakdown and is now acutely psychotic, reporting visual and auditory hallucinations. His condition almost precisely echoes that of one of his former patients, Eric Stone, who has just been discharged from hospital following a sudden and total recovery. You are called in by the family of the deceased to investigate. A you read the tortured daily journal kept by Eric during his period of hospitalization, you begin to feel uneasy.

Out of the western sky, I am as I was made. A line of kings walked faithful to the gods across the sea. But kings forgot their gods and the seas were changed. Those who survived held me as a token of the world made round, and mapped their new lands upon me. Set me high in the bills. New kings laid hand upon me, vows of allegiance wrought in awe and in fear...

Just who — or what — is 'Eric Stone', and what the hell happened out there on the moors?

Whatever interests and skills you bring to bear, the important thing is to share your findings and ideas with others. *New Middle-earth* is not fixed. It unfolds as news, developments, and experiences are circulated and become available to others. Those who contribute have the satisfaction of taking part in the sub-



creation of a unique realm. It is envisaged that information will be circulated via occasional newsletters and articles (*The Journal of Middle-earth Studies*), distributed to contributors and any other interested parties. At the Editor's discretion, *New Middle-earth* contributions may be considered for inclusion in *Other Hands*.

Whilst people are free to explore New Middle-earth in whatever ways they wish, some light 'historical mediation' may prove necessary to avoid blatant contradictions between the 'findings' of different explorers. One important aspect is that the realm can only be explored in 'real time'. That is, explorations can shed light on the past or present of New Middle-earth (i.e. up to and including year VI 1996), but the future must remain a matter for conjecture. All that said, as in the Primary world, absolute consistency is neither necessary nor desirable. There must always be room for 'the Unexplained'.

CONCLUSIONS

The basic premises of New Middle-earth can be summarized as follows. These points have previously appeared in *Amon Hen*, the Bulletin of the Tolkien Society of Great Britain, Issue 135, September 1995.

1. Tolkien's true creative legacy is not Middle-earth, but a Secondary world that is the equivalent of our Primary world in all respects, except that within it, Middle-earth and The Lord of the Rings are history not fiction. For convenience, I propose the term 'New Middle-earth' for this broader Secondary world.
2. There are no monopolies on exploring reality in the Primary world. History, politics, science, literature and anthropology exist legitimately alongside fine arts, historical romance, fantasy, science fiction and reworkings of ancient lore. The full spectrum of disciplines should be available to those wishing to explore New Middle-earth. The scope of such explorations should be limited only by the imagination of those accepting the challenge.
3. In relation to such explorations, Tolkien's writing will always command great respect, yet they must not become too precious. Precious should carry its own warning for us all. Anyone wishing to contact the author for/with further details of New Middle-earth can do so at: 37 Marlborough Court, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 2YY, UK.

RECOMMENDED READING

Unless otherwise stated, page references in the text are to paperback editions.

1. The Lord of the Rings, by J.R.R. Tolkien, especially the Preface and Appendices. The Preface outlines Tolkien's role as translator: the Appendices contain much valuable information, in particular the annals of the first three Ages of the world.
2. The Ælfwine and Eriol stories, by J.R.R. Tolkien (in *The Book of Lost Tales II*).
3. The Lost Road, by J.R.R. Tolkien (in *The History of Middle-earth*, volume 5, *The Lost Road and other writings*).
4. The Notion Club Papers, by J.R.R. Tolkien (in *The History of Middle-earth*, volume 9, *Sauron Defeated*).
5. J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography, by H Carpenter (Unwin Paperbacks, 1978).
6. The Atlas of Middle-earth, by Karen Wynn Fonstad (HarperCollins, 1994)
7. The Seventh Sword, by Andrew Collins (Century Books, 1991). Factual account of modern day psychic questing in Britain.





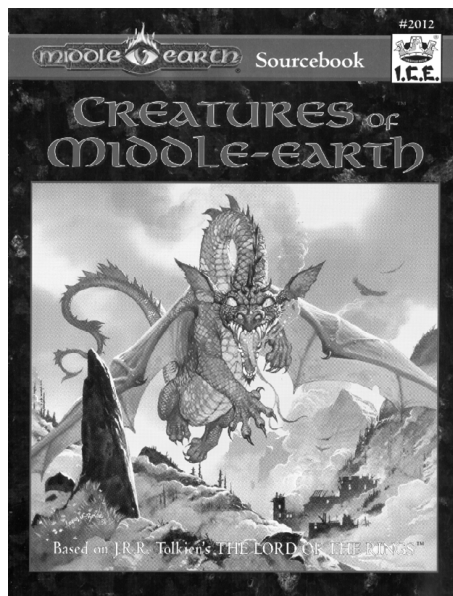
PRODUCT

Ruth Sochard Pitt
Jeff O'Hare
and Peter C. Fenlon, Jr.

Creatures of Middle-earth

(#2012)

Charlottesville, Virginia: Iron Crown Enterprises, 1995 [144 pgs; \$18.00]



Creatures of Middle-earth is a compilation of the various creatures and monsters that a traveler may encounter in Middle-earth. I am not able to tell if there is any information missing from previous MERP release(s), but will try to relate my views on how this may enhance your game (as is the purpose of such a book).

This sourcebook contains quite an expansive description of the origins of creatures and monsters, and is sufficiently detailed to give an idea of the conflict of interest among the Valar and Maiar who were their creators. So, even if you are new to Middle-earth, this introduction

should give enough information to be able to put some life into the animals (and monsters) described the chapters that follow it.

The difference between an animal and a monster is defined by its origins: all creatures of Arda were created by the Great Song. But in this song were included themes introduced by Melkor (Morgoth) who sought to corrupt the creation. Their part in the song produced the Drakes and the Balrogs, and other beings of great evil such as Werewolves. These are grouped as monsters, and are given good descriptions.

Creature descriptions are grouped according to type (e.g., flying animals are found in one section). The names for each creature are sometimes given in Quenya, and sometimes in plain English. This makes it a bit cumbersome to find what you are looking for at first, but shouldn't be a problem once you get used to it. All descriptions are supplied with codes that describe a creature's preferred climate and habitat. Encounter frequency in these surroundings is stated in terms of "easy" to "absurd," which, in the usual way, is converted to a modifier (+20 to -70) that should be applied to a general encounter table. No general encounter table, however, is included in this book. Sure, there's a table for animal encounters in Chapter 7, but this only helps you organize the various creatures with respect to climate, terrain, and temperature. If the general encounter table were left out intentionally, I feel there should be a clear reference telling you where to find it.

One reason why I bought this book was that it included maps showing where each creature-type lives. In my opinion,

however, these maps are the weakest part of the book. Since there's no cross-referencing between textual descriptions and map, the latter are somewhat difficult to make use of. The maps seem to appear to be independent of the textual descriptions, and some of the maps even have used the same symbols to represent the habitat of two species, (e.g., page 79, where Boars and Fen Boars are represented using the same symbols).

Is this a convenient sourcebook that may be useful to a GM? In many respects it is. The background information on the monsters (e.g. dragons) is extensive, and a GM may pick up lots of information regarding these creatures. On the other hand, however, it is not easy for a GM to check if a certain creature really exists in a given area. Let's say that a random encounter results in the sudden appearance of a group of wild sheep (Code M, 51-65 on the dice). The GM wants to check if these dangerous creatures really belong to this particular region, then he's in for some "free-text" searching. There is no general index in this book, but there is a creature index right after the table of contents. The GM looks up "wild sheep" in this creature index, but can only find "wild goats" and "wild horses." Well, go to the section where the "Leaf-eaters" are described, and see if there are any wild sheep described in this section...and, Yes! There are two possible choices: The Goral and the Rútorassi — Ahhh! Obviously, why didn't the GM look for these two in the first place?

In my opinion, the authors of *Creatures* could have done a better job to ease the GM's tasks, such as by including a comprehensive index of

all the creatures referred to in the text. They could also improve this book by making cross-references between the creature descriptions and the maps. Maybe even a map that showed the various climatic regions in Middle-earth?

One good thing, though: the authors have included detailed information on many of the monsters that play an important role in the history of Middle-earth. You can find detailed information about Smaug the Golden, Scatha the Worm, Glaurung Father of Dragons, Gothmog Lord of Balrogs, Carcharoth Mightiest Wolf of Arda, and many more. These are valuable for background information, but I would be very careful when introducing these into any campaign of mine — suppose a lucky PC actually managed to kill Smaug the Golden some years before Bilbo came to the Lonely mountain? What about the War of the Ring, then?

As in all previous sourcebooks from

ICE, *Creatures of Middle-earth* is designed to be compatible with Rolemaster. This proves to be the case if you still use the second edition of the rules. However, if you have acquired the Rolemaster Standard System (RMSS), you'll have to convert the power points for the creatures that make use of magic. Now, this shouldn't be much of a problem, really. Since we're talking monsters here (mostly, that is) you can use the creature descriptions as they are (hits and size are probably the same), and you can just triple the number of PP's to get the rough equivalent to what you would have in RMSS.

When it comes to the stats for creatures, bear in mind that RMSS has changed the bonus progression for stats. Where a 100 stat previously resulted in a +25 bonus, it should only give +10 if you use RMSS (look-up the RMSS rules to get the complete range for stat bonuses). Since you'll have to develop the stats for your creatures by yourself, this is most

important to remember when you are using one of the MERP adventure modules (where some stats are given for NPCs and creatures) with this sourcebook. My advise to ICE on the compatibility issue, is that they should be careful not to let MERP and RMSS develop independently for too long. This need (however small) for conversion should get the alarm bells going within ICE!

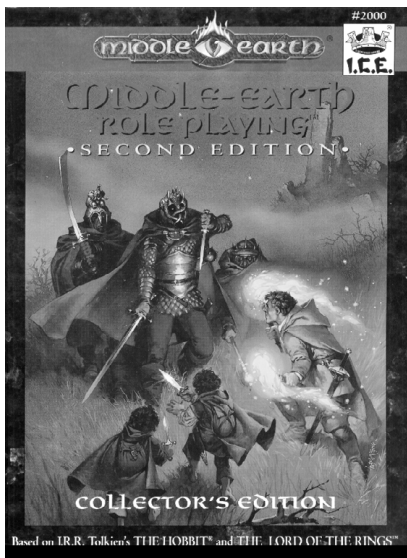
So, in my honest opinion, I regret buying this sourcebook. The mapping of creatures to regions in Middle-earth was my main reason for buying it, but that part is not satisfactory. (Were they in a hurry when they printed this book?) I keep telling myself that I should have put my money into something else...maybe the RMSS Creature companion, which includes more creatures and, in some respect, more information.

Reviewer Bjorn Asle Taranger



S. Coleman Charlton et al.
*Middle-earth
Role Playing:
Second Edition*
(#2001)

Charlottesville, Virginia
Iron Crown Enterprises, 1993
[270 pgs; \$20.00]



Iron Crown's MERP: Second Edition is a pleasant reincarnation of the original MERP game. The totally new cover by the talented Angus McBride, and the black marble bordering, give it a touch of class rarely found on the RPG shelf. Indeed, the pages are packed with art. McBride's familiar character studies are joined by over 100 assorted drawings from Elizabeth Danforth, another long-time MERP illustrator, while the old line sketches are thankfully purged.

However, except for the artwork, much of the Second Edition will be familiar to seasoned MERP players. The game designers at ICE wisely eschewed any radical rule revisions. Instead they focused on adding value to their successful product. The new material falls into three categories: 1) introductory material for new gamers and people not familiar with Middle-earth, 2) new or expanded discussion of various topics, and 3) optional supplementary rules.

In the first category, we are treated to plot summaries of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, similar to Tolkien's own recapitulations in each of the trilogy's books. For those who need a quick refresher of the Professor's epic, or for those who have never read it <gasp!>, this is an efficient survey or an effective spoiler. MERP newbies are further assisted in the task of character creation. Conversion guidelines ease the transition

from ICE's introductory Tolkien-based RPG, the *Lord of the Rings Adventure Game*. And for the truly lazy or uninspired, the Second Edition provides 16 ready-to-run characters of various professions and races, each of which is illustrated with a stock Danforth drawing.

In the second category we find greatly expanded discussion about Middle-earth's races and cultures, much of which is useful for detailing player characters and NPCs. A separate, entirely new section explores the economic attributes of the various cultures. All in all, the discussion is improved throughout the book, including (but not limited to) such topics as spell effects, magic, combat, and maneuvers.

The new optional rules are primarily a host of new character professions (with a few appropriate new skills), and a grab-bag of supplemental rules. At face value, the new professions nearly triple the number of character types available to MERP players. But if you consider the possible variants of the new Civilian profession, then the number is nearly quintupled! Needless to say, all are quite welcome in a game starved for character diversity.

Perhaps the Shape Changer is the most interesting of the new professions. It is quite useful for portraying characters in Tolkien's world — a primary goal of MERP. For example, the Shape Changer allows players to portray the Bejjabar, the

bear-men whom we met in *The Hobbit*. On the other hand, players with a less benevolent bent might remember that Sauron ruled the Isle of Werewolves before he became a big-shot ring-master in Mordor, and that the Noldorin King Finrod Felagund was killed by a werewolf in the dungeons of his tower.

The remaining optional material is composed mostly of mundane rule modifications. However, the new rules for using the herb athelas might spark some debate in the MERP community. As you probably remember, Aragorn used the leafy athelas to keep Frodo alive after the Witch-king stabbed him at Weathertop. Later, he again used the athelas after the Battle of the Pelennor Fields to heal Faramir, Éowyn and Merry in the Houses of Healing. The new rules explain that all Númenóreans have a slight chance of successfully using athelas for healing purposes, and that close relatives of the king have greater chances, with the king having the best chance. The new rules may seem to be supported by Tolkien's writings, but some MERP gamers might regard them as a shallow interpretation.

As we read in *The Return of the King*, the Gondorians had forgot how to fully utilize the athelas, whereas the knowledge was preserved in the North because of Elrond and his lore-masters' diligence. As Aragorn states in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, "it is not known in the North, except to some of those who wander in the wild." The wanderers were the Rangers, whose base was at Rivendell. The implication is that some of the Rangers used the athelas for healing purposes. Unlike the palantíri, the athelas was not an heirloom of Elendil's house, but instead was broadly associated with the men of Númenor, and it grew wherever they lived. Perhaps the reason why its usefulness was not remembered was because the Númenórean culture (along with the preceding Eldaric culture) was in decline. Aragorn's ascension to the throne marked the beginning of a cultural renewal, in which important parts of the Númenórean culture were restored, not the least of which was knowledge of how to use the athelas.

The athelas rules notwithstanding, I think the Second Edition is a better product. However, it is not flawless. For one obvious deficiency, look at the list of selected readings (page 226). It is exactly the same as the list printed in 1986, and entirely neglects Christopher Tolkien's highly relevant, eleven (soon to be twelve) volume series, *The History of Middle-earth*. This malady also afflicts the sample mini-adventure. Long-time

MERP players, who would probably feel compelled to buy the Second Edition for its optional professions, would be well served with a completely new mini-adventure.

One suggestion I would like to offer is for a new character profession: the Mariner (see below). Tolkien's stories are filled with tales of the sea and great mariners, such as Voronwë, Earendil, and Aldarion. In addition, several Middle-earth cultures are sea-faring folk, such as the Falathrim, the Númenóreans, and the dreaded Corsairs. Previous MERP modules (e.g., *Havens of Gondor*, and *Sea-lords of Gondor*) have dealt with the maritime aspects of adventuring in Middle-earth, so the Mariner profession is a natural extension of the rules.

Finally, the Second Edition rule-book must be assessed within the context of the entire series of new MERP products. In this light, the purpose of the revision is revealed not as a rule update, but as a repositioning of the entire product line. The first edition of MERP was created as a generic series of supplements usable with any game system. However, the Second Edition represents a retreat from that philosophy. The new focus is twofold: 1) to support ICE's other game systems. *Lord of the Rings Adventure Game* and *Rolemaster*, with the leverage afforded by their Middle-earth license, and 2) to make Middle-earth gaming more accessible to the existing players of those games.

Reviewer: Anarsil Istaratan

A NEW MERP PROFESSION: THE MARINER.

by Anarsil Istaratan

A Mariner is a character trained in the skills of ship navigation and surviving on the high seas or on large inland lakes. He knows how to plan and conduct sea voyages.

Prime Stat: Constitution.

Profession Bonuses:

- +1 per level on weapon skills.
- +3 per level on general skills.
- +2 per level on Sky Watching.
- +2 per level on Navigating.
- +2 per level on Boat Handling.

Spell Restrictions: May learn open spell lists from one realm (his choice). May cast only 1st, 2nd, and 3rd level spells.

A New Secondary Skill: Navigating

Stat Bonus Used: IT. This bonus is used for the various aspects of planning and conducting sea voyages. Among other things, it essentially involves the understanding of nautical maps, charts and devices, the assessment of a vessel's seaworthiness, and the administration of a crew of sailors.

Skill Type: SM

Related Skill Categories: Lore

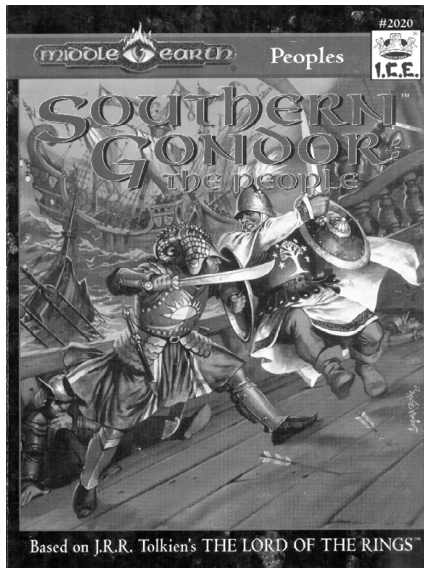


Anders Blixt,
Chris Seeman, et al.

Southern Gondor: The People

(#2020)

Charlottesville, Virginia: Iron
Crown Enterprises, 1996
[208 pgs; \$22.00]



Take heed ye who enter here! For some time, I had been looking forward to this module with great anticipation. I had run some campaigns there and was curious to see how this new ICE module would treat the wide expanses of southern Gondor. When I received my copy in the mail, I eagerly opened the package and proceeded to “ooh” and “aah” at the very cool McBride cover (a reprint off the old Sea-Lords of Gondor module, but cool nonetheless). Then, I opened the book and began to read. Cool things, man, cool things.

Southern Gondor: The People is the most recent installment in ICE’s Middle-earth line of role playing products, aptly placed in the “Peoples of Middle-earth” category. The full work was originally intended to be one massive book, but the content quickly grew beyond the bounds

of a single volume. This book then, as the title says, covers the various inhabitants of southern Gondor, both the renowned Dúnedain and the indigenous Daen cultures. It also summarizes the rich (if not convoluted) history of southern Gondor, followed by information about many of its social institutions. The following volume, Southern Gondor: The Land, will then provide information on the physical aspects of the South-kingdom.

Written by a veritable host of authors and edited by Anders Blixt and some crony named Chris Seeman (snipers? where?), SG:TP is a truly remarkable work, both in scope and in content. The bulk of the module’s writers also worked on the Kin-Strife sourcebook, proving that they are familiar with the region and are most certainly not brash newcomers to the field. From the beginning, I had worried that this module would fall prey to the disease that has so unfortunately afflicted some of the other recent MERP modules: reprint an old module with no real new material, fix a couple of spelling mistakes by accident, throw in some more artwork (not all of it good), provide the oh-so-useful LOR stats, and hike the price by 100%.

Rest assured, ladies and gentlemen, that nothing of the kind occurred in this instance. I own both the old modules Sea-Lords of Gondor and Havens of Gondor, yet SG:TP looked nothing like them! It appears as if Mr. Seeman made good on his promise that the Southern Gondor books will contain almost exclusively new material. This could be construed as both good and bad. It’s good in the sense that old-time MERPers like myself can buy SG:TP with the assurance that they aren’t purchasing a book of poorly-regurgitated facts. However, it could be bad in the sense that with this work the authors have essentially redefined and restructured the history, scope, and (in many places) the very content of the realm, presenting some very annoying logistical problems to any GM who may already have a campaign running in the region. But then, one can easily fall back on Rule #3 of the GM’s Creed: “If you don’t like it, throw it out to the rust monster!”

Since I have a fondness for structure,

I will go through the book section by section and comment on each one. Southern Gondor: The People opens with a brief introduction and a “statement of purpose” by the authors. One of the truly unique aspects of the SG modules is the fact that the authors have gone out of their way to cover all the periods of the realm (at least within the Third Age), so as to give the GM the most flexibility in establishing the temporal setting for their campaign. They still provide all the necessary information for a 1640 campaign, but give equal information on the other times as well, which is sure to please many people who enjoy playing during other times, such as the Second Age or the War of the Ring.

Then begins the history of the South-kingdom, which is quite impressive. Contrary to the mostly inadequate sketches the reader found in the older modules, the realm history presented in SG:TP covers it all, from the earliest migration of the Drughu to the reign of Eldarion in the Fourth Age. One can truly sense an epic sweep of history going on in Gondor throughout the ages. Unfortunately, at times the history narrative grew too compressed for my liking. As the authors tried to throw in every juicy detail they could, the text became slightly disjointed with an abundance of confusing facts. I’m sure if I read it a few more times it would make more sense. Another problem with this is the fact that without knowledge of some of the fundamental institutions and customs of southern Gondor, parts of the history simply failed to make sense without further investigation.

Culture descriptions came next, with each group receiving a whole page or two! That comprises a lot of cultural information for a campaign. I thought giving culture summaries for some of the Daen groups that no longer exist in the Third Age was a bit much, but they were probably included for the sake of completeness. The cultures described include the mysterious “Púkel-men,” all of the various Daen groups (including the haunted Oathbreakers), the elusive Elven populations, the proud Dúnedain, the common stock, and lastly the very different culture of the Haruze, or northern Haradrim. Throw all of these together and you

get the hodgepodge cultural tapestry that forms the population of southern Gondor. I expected to find a summary for the Corsairs of Umbar, given the fact that in the middle of the Third Age they represented the chief enemies to the Crown, but none was to be found.

A very illuminating section for me was the part that dealt with the "Politics and Power" of Gondor. I found the essays on the sacred nature of the kingship, the convoluted (and changing) definition of citizenship, and the realm's code of laws fascinating. The discussion of the kingdoms political organization was particularly helpful in understanding the interconnection of all its territories, provinces, etc.

Next came one of my favorite chapters: "Warcraft." As Gondor is almost never without enemies throughout the Third Age, it is necessary to know some details about the structure and composition of the realm's military forces. To this end, the book gives a short history of Gondorian military development, followed by notes on the organization, equipment, personnel, and tactics of both the army and the navy. After reading material like this, I always end up promising myself that I'll run a military campaign someday.

The earlier cultural information on the region's inhabitants is greatly enhanced by a whole section on the societal habits, customs, and institutions of the Stone-land's inhabitants. Here one finds the struggles and virtuous (most of the time) aspirations of the nobility, along with an overview of society for those people that make up the vast majority of southern Gondor's population: the peasantry. I personally found the information on village lifestyles most interesting; it always shows that the authors have done some good work when you can find sections on particular foods that the commoners eat, various pastimes and recreation that the villagers engage in, and the popular market and festival days. Town and city-dwellers are addressed with an emphasis on guild politics and operation; the famous healers of Gondor are also discussed. And lastly, what role playing sourcebook would be complete without its share of secret societies and malevolent cults (more INWO ideas!)? Mostly drawn from the Kin-Strife sourcebook, these groups

span from the insidious Cult of Benish Armon to the unnoticed spies of Tirith Dolen (S. "Hidden Guard").

The religious nature of southern Gondor cannot be ignored; indeed, it was Eru who made the existence of the Númenórean race possible in the first place. Thus, the traditional worship of Iluvatar was included as well as the more accessible veneration of the Valar. Actually, I found it interesting to read how much historical influence the authors placed upon the Maia Uinen. Although some purists might find it too much of a creative leap, I found that the placement of Uinen as the patroness of the princely line of Belfalas to be quite an innovative foundation block for the region's history and religious development.

Naturally, a "Peoples" book wouldn't be proper without its own section of people. Noted personages, both famous and infamous, that have at some time significantly interacted with the South-kingdom at some point are included in the "people" gazetteer. From Adûnaphel the Nazgûl to Morthech Gruan the Oathbreaker to Uinen the "Lady of the Seas," they're all here. Following the personal descriptions, game statistics are provided in both MERP and Rolemaster terms. For once, ICE actually put the LOR stats in a table in the back of the book! My only complaint with the people descriptions was the relatively minor fact that many of them do not include the information on how that person died. Although it may not be important to many, to me knowing when someone was born, lived, and died puts that person into their proper historical perspective. Maybe some were intentionally left vague so the creative GM could find a way to incorporate the individual's death into a campaign or such.

As it is my opinion that most of the "magical" power of Middle-earth resides in artifacts or other physical trappings, I found it appropriate that SG:TP should have its own collection of objects of power. Such notable items as the Covenant Stone of Isildur, the Elven-ring *Nenya*, and the mysterious *Mirror of Galadriel* are included along with others that are even more powerful.

At last comes the part where the GM gets to put all of the nuggets of informa-

tion found in this module to use: the adventure scenarios. Five longer adventures are included as well as four shorter scenario ideas. The two that caught my eye were "The Spy Hunt" in which the PCs have to escape false accusations of spying for Umbar, and "The Stolen Mûmak" in which the party is enlisted to retrieve a green mûmak figurine containing important military documents. To be sure, there are enough adventure ideas planted throughout SG:TP that any GM should have plenty to work an eager party of adventurers through.

It is worth pointing out that these adventures are nothing like your typical "find-and-kill" or your "invade lair and proceed to rob, loot, pillage, maim, what-have-you, etc." scenarios. From what I've read of them (I haven't actually played through any of them) the GM and his players can fully expect a lot of fast, on-your-feet thinking style of role playing with few combats (which can be good, since we all know just how deadly ICE's combat system can be). Although any extended campaign adventure is lacking, rest assured that they will be included in *Southern Gondor: The Land*.

Have you ever wanted to take your game to the open sea and make names for yourselves as you fight bloodthirsty pirates and cut-throats, all the while reaping mounds of booty? If you're like me, then you will be delighted with the section entitled "The Sea Eagles," which provides excellent details and guidelines for playing in a privateer campaign. The idea is that you command a small ship which is authorized by the King to attack or seize Umbarean merchant ships, in an attempt to strike back at the Corsair haven for their attacks on Gondor. Notes are given for both Corsair and Gondorian naval "hit-and-run" tactics, as well as loose guidelines for running coastal raids, attacking enemy ships, and dividing the loot among your hard-working crew. Plenty of useful tables are included, as well as "stats" on the most common ships used by both side. This type of material is exactly what I look for in gaming source-books. I'm not sure how well this would work with *Sea Law*, but it's definitely worth checking out.

In the appendices, a wealth of peripheral information could be

found to aid any prospective GM in the task of making his or her southern Gondor campaign more realistic and believable. Lists of all the kings and stewards throughout the Third Age are to be found here, as well as a marvelous list of all the princes of Belfalas. A treatment of Gondor's population at various times is followed by some rather meager notes on travel throughout the realm. One of the most interesting things in the appendices however was the inclusion of two complete calendars used by Gondor, one for normal years and one for leap years. All in all, they cover over 6 full pages! That's what I call completeness in a module. SG:TP rounds itself off with the ubiquitous section of charts and tables for the NPCs and military forces of southern Gondor.

As I said earlier, SG:TP is an excellent MERP module and a fascinating read. The reader definitely can get the sense that he or she is peeking in on Tolkien's magnificent world. It will definitely help revise the standard by which future MERP modules are measured, just as Wes Frank's Arnor first set the standard a few years ago. Seeman, Blixt, and crew have apparently pioneered the recent thrust towards cohesiveness and realism in the MERP line, and for that I am grateful. I have heard that the authors of the forthcoming Umbar and Near Harad modules both cooperated with the authors of SG:TP to create an elaborate and (mostly) seamless interweaving of history between these realms. This "unparalleled cohesiveness" is just what the MERP line has been missing all along! (Where was all of this Umbar vs. Gondor history in that old Umbar module?)

Yet, seemingly nothing can be without its share of imperfection, and SG:TP is no exception. Though the typos were kept down to a real minimum, which is amazing for an ICE product, there still was some bad referencing, pointing to sections that were eventually removed to be placed in The Land book. One of my biggest complaints is the fact that there is no good map of southern Gondor throughout the whole of the book, rendering many of the location-dependent references (such as most of the history section) incomprehensible. However, both of these criticisms are direct results of the fact that the work was split into

two volumes on relatively short notice. This meant that a lot of material got moved around with little concern for how much the rest of the material would make sense in that information's absence.

This leads me to my last real complaint: the fact that the buyer will have to buy both SG:TP and SG:TL to get the whole picture. It is obvious that both books originally comprised a single work; without the one, the reader will not understand half of the other. And at a total of \$52 for both books (American dollars), Southern Gondor is expensive. Even more so for our foreign readers. Although the authors surely didn't want to duplicate much if any material between the books, I think perhaps they should consider it if future works of similar magnitude (such as the anticipated Northern Gondor) are done.

As a final concern, it strikes me that there has been a definite shift recently in the MERP line. Today, we see less of the straight game-related material and more of Middle-earth scholarship. I'm not denouncing this shift towards extra realism and true-ness to Tolkien; on the contrary, I applaud it for the most part. However, I fear that it may prove too much for some GMs. For those more interested in just playing a fun role playing adventure than in totally immersing themselves in ICE's version of Middle-earth, there is now much, much more "peripheral information" for the GM to have to wade through. But to each their own.

Let me say that I wholeheartedly recommend SG:TP to both role players and Tolkien-fans everywhere as an outstanding piece of work. I see great things in store for the future of Middle-earth Role Playing, and I eagerly await the arrival of Southern Gondor: The Land. So if you can afford it, go and buy it. And if you can't afford it, convince a friend that they still owe you from last year. You'll feel better about yourself afterwards.

Reviewer: Mark Thorne



Southern Gondor: The People

...A second review

One of ICE's most anticipated publications, Southern Gondor: The People has finally found its way to the bookstores. To get an idea of the amount of effort that has gone into the production of this work, one need look no farther than the credits page where the names of the eleven contributing authors can be found. Together with its companion work Southern Gondor: The Land, this undoubtedly represents the most thorough treatment yet of Dúnadan society and politics. Though it draws upon previous ICE publications, it is the farthest thing from a simple repackaging of old material. Every passage from the old texts has been rewritten and every concept applied to a higher standard of consistency and realism. Southern Gondor: The People blends the works of previous authors into a definitive compendium of the cultures and individuals that comprise a diverse yet coherent kingdom.

As the second reviewer of SG, however, I'm going to focus more on the success of the work as a whole, and less on the historical specifics. If you're a gamemaster who wants to know what SG can add to your campaign, this is the review you want to read. The module's cover identifies it as a "Peoples" book, and that's exactly what it is. It is invaluable as a tool for adding color to those Daen ranger and Ethir fisherman NPCs that invariably creep into your campaign. Religious beliefs, common morals, appearance and typical weaponry are all detailed. Want to set a campaign among the Daen-inhabited highland valleys of the Ered Nimrais? Perhaps along the wild coast of Andrast? SG:TP fully details the customs of the indigenous peoples of the area, discusses the particular local manifestation of the larger government and integrates the local situation into the overall history of the kingdom. If you want insight on how to role play a

haughty Dúnadan noble, or how better to bring to life a rural village in Lebennin, you'll find help in SG:TP.

Another strength of the work is in its treatment of Dúnadan culture and the preservation of Númenórean tradition. There is a lengthy discussion of the laws of Gondor, of the evolution of the peculiar political standoff between the heirs of Elendil and the Pelargirean League, and especially of the history of the rivalry between Gondor and Umbar. SG:TP takes up where *The Kin-strife* left off, detailing the internal political factors that drove each episode in the history of the region. There are sections detailing religion and festival among the Dúnadan, the calendar (King's, Steward's, and New Reckonings), and the ancient role of the Princes of Belfalas within the kingdom. Really, all the information a gamemaster could ever need to set an adventure among the big-wigs of the kingdom can be found in this book.

And now on to what you won't find in the work. You'll not find ready-to-run adventures that lead into lengthy campaigns. The accompanying adventures are isolated episodes located in various regions throughout the realm and taking place during a wide variety of historical periods. While interesting as single-session adventures, they really only serve to introduce the gamemas-

ter to the possibilities of extended campaigning in Southern Gondor.

I see the most campaign-yielding potential of this book in its treatment of Corsair raids and sea-borne warfare. The section entitled "The Sea Eagles" gives a wonderful set of rules for quickly determining the course of larger events in this context. The result is a curious blend of Caribbean-style piracy (less the cannons, of course!) and Gondorian historical themes.

Representing as it does the first ICE publication to be packaged as a two-volume set, *Southern Gondor* represents a new product concept that must be discussed. Though it is purchased as such, SG:TP is not intended as a stand-alone product. The main problem I have with the work is its lack of maps.

A large section of the original material included in this book deals with Harondor and the shifting political atmosphere between Gondor and this southern neighbor. It's hard to read through the historical sections dealing with warfare and politics in the Harondor region and not come away confused. Part of the problem is not a problem at all; politics in Harondor is a confusing subject! On the other hand, reading about the fall of some of these towns, without knowing where the towns are located, doesn't lead to a high degree of

comprehension. So, if you're going to spend the money on SG:TP, put away an extra thirty dollars or so for SG: *The Land*.

Overall I think Mr. Seeman and company have significantly raised the standards to which future ICE publications will be measured. Taken together with its companion volume, *Southern Gondor* sets in order the most complex political atmosphere in Middle-earth. When you purchase SG:TP (and you certainly should!) you won't be getting detailed descriptions of each cavern in the *Paths of the Dead*. You also won't be getting extensive dossiers on each political figure during the *Kin-strife*. That kind of detail has been reserved for works dealing specifically with the episode, citadel or campaign in question. What you will get is an explanation of the society that holds each of these specific locales and time periods together. This book also represents the first release in a series of works in which there was a significant amount of collaboration between the authors. Between the *Southern Gondor* set and the forthcoming *Umbar and Near Harad* modules, this area shows an unprecedented amount of promise for lengthy and richly detailed campaigns.

Reviewer: Luke Potter

