

Bring Life to The Land

By Graham Spearing

Premise

These are the scenario notes that I used for a 4 hour convention game set in Tolkien's Middle Earth. I particularly wanted to provide players with a demonstration of the core game concepts found in the Burning Wheel roleplaying game. As such, you will find below opportunities to play out 'Duels of Wit' and the scripted 'Fight!' mechanics, plus all the usual interplay using the player characters' Beliefs, Instincts, and Traits.

To ensure players have time to get to grips with some of the detail of the Burning Wheel system, the scenario has been kept simple and straightforward, with two immediately predicted paths. Both paths may need to be taken before success is achieved. The players may of course take you down alternative avenues, more power to them.

Introduction

The dragon was slain, and the armies of Orc and Warg were defeated and scattered at the Battle of The Five Armies.

“Songs have said that three parts of the goblin warriors of the North perished on that day, and the mountains had peace for many a year.”

The northern kingdom of Dale has been re-established, and the dwarves once again have a king under the mountain. However, much work yet needs to be done. This land is now spoken of with many names, none of which are particularly complementary. 'Desolation of the dragon', 'desolation of Smaug', or simply 'the Waste'. For the land, especially to the north of Erebor, the lonely mountain, has been devastated by Smaug's extravagant respiration and general unsociability.

It is the crisp month of Narbeleth, in the year 2951 of the Third Age, by the Stewards of Gondor reckoning. The cold northern winter is already in evidence on the ruined, and still dangerous landscape, pure white on the ashen shroud of the land.

Bard's Hall

The players begin in the hall of the King of Dale. This section provides an opportunity to serve up the quest to the players, and gives room to proclaim their characters to the group

- Meet and Greet – sharing of Beliefs and Instincts
- Mission Briefing
- It is a test of Bain's and Thorin's respective future leadership, and for the prosperity of the land
- Heroes of the realm have been assembled to guide and aid them

Tasks

Determining the plan – allow the players to come up with whatever outline they wish. Point them to their Beliefs as a guide to action.



Checking Resources and Circles – if they need any particular help

Two anticipated approaches have been outlined in these notes. If the players elect an alternative approach, let them go with it, and see how much of the ideas below you can use. The two approached are:

- Option 1 - Seek aid from Thranduil
- Option 2 – Seek aid from Radagast

Players may choose to weigh up the pros and cons of both options – beliefs may shape some of these. There will be tension from the dwarves if they are being to asked to go cap in hand to the elves, despite the warmer relations after the battle ten years ago. You may want to put in a Duel of Wits here to resolve which path to take.

Option 1- Elven Realm

Journey to the Elves

South to Esgaroth and then West into Mirkwood to find the Elven Kings Palace. Test character skills to guide them accurately to the Elven kings hall. If they mess things up, feel free to 'Let it Ride' and have them hopelessly lost in the depths of Mirkwood...

A Rescue

Once into Mirkwood the players are ambushed by a couple of Orcs who then lead the players to the place of a kidnap. The 9 Orcs of the Misty Mountains and their Spider friend have accosted Finrial the elf maiden and her horse – which they have just eaten.

Fight!

The setting is a small clearing. Finrial is tied to a tree by her partly eaten horse's entrails. Use the Orc sheet and perhaps one spider. Keep the combats 'one on one' for each player character where possible.

Finrial can guide the players to the Elven King's hall.

Merry Elves

However the players find their way to the hall they will be escorted within by an impressive guard of silvan elves.

As you travel into the elven hall you are struck by its natural beauty. The twisting, crossing, echoing paths leave you unsure if you are in a crafted tunnel under ground or somehow under the boughs of many trees that arch perfectly to form a leaf covered roof. The passages are lit by red torch-light and bright globe lamps that hang from these carved branches on fine chains of gold. They are of an intricate patterned design that suffuse the area with a warm yellow light as if of a late summer evening. Shadows of leaves and woodland creatures flow around giving the passages a sense of life and vibrancy.



As you are escorted you hear the most beautiful singing. Light and fluid and gay, careless of worry, the voice entices a sense of happiness of merriment that eases the burden of your quest, lightens the load of responsibility upon your shoulders.

You enter a wider chamber, or is it a forest glade?, where a beautiful elf maiden watches you as she continues to sing her song.

Song of Merriment ob3 (ChaBur pl05)

Wonderment (ChaBur p 98) – steel test within presence of singer.

Singer B6 - (+IHes for each MoS of the singer)

A Moments Rest and Test

The players will be escorted to a chamber for some rest and bread and water. However on the way to their chamber they will pass another chamber in which there is the glisten of gold, accentuated by the warm light in the passage. This chamber is a test. It lies only a few twists and turns away from the chamber that the players are left in. They are left apparently unguarded, providing an opportunity for some of them to 'stretch their legs'.

To find the Chamber Ob 2 (see The Chamber of Gold below)

If the roll is not made then the players are lost in the palace. Have them turn up in a place where barrels are being pushed into the river...

On simple wooden bowls there are a series of fruits and breads and game birds. There are also a dozen empty wooden cups. To one side of the chamber is a small fountain, depicting 6 carved fish leaping from the water. Cool clear water flows out of their mouths into the fountain. The water and food is restorative and cleansing. There is a magic to it. It operates as if the character is under the treatment of a B6 herbalist (BW 202), however as it is magic it is an open test. Even if a wound has been checked before with a health test, drinking the water of the pool permits a further health test for the player. If the result is better, then it can be applied to the particular wound.

The Chamber of Gold

This chamber hold a variety of pocketable temptations. Greedy dwarves will be tested... If this room is emptied by the players, simply allow them to do so. Perhaps look surprised and then, with a carefree laugh, and a conspiratorial wink, move the play on.

Around the chamber is a low wide shelf. Placed on the shelf at equidistant points are three tempting packages...

Temptation 1

In one area there are several scrolls written in Sindarin. They contain lore about the observing of the heavens.

Temptation 2



A fine wooden box carved with the image of a deer. In the box is a delicate head band of gold, fashioned as intertwining tree roots. It is a thing of great delicate beauty. Ob 2 Steel test for wonderment.

Temptation 3

A finely crafted leaf bladed fighting knife, engraved with fine elven script, and a dark leather bound with fine gold thread.

The Elven King

You are brought into a large chamber where, at the far end, is a low branch of a tree that seems fashioned as a throne. To either side of this are miniature trees of silver that have leaves of fine worked peal.

Upon the throne sits the elven king. He has silver blonde hair, unlike the dark hair of the elves you have met so far, that flows beyond his broad shoulders. He wears a garland of green leaves and red berries – could this simple adornment be his crown? He holds a staff of untreated wood that appears like a branch picked from the forest floor.

The elven king is in fact his son, Legolas.

Note: Thranduil is far to the south. He is inspecting his realm and the increasing pressure of the plague of Spiders. Many orcs, including some that escaped the Battle of the Five Armies ten years ago, are based in the Mirkwood mountains, and travel abroad on elven paths that once formed part of the Greenwood realm. The elven 'king' is his heir Legolas, who is holding court until his father returns. This is a good thing. Thranduil is working for a time of introspection after the Battle and to work towards the defeating of the dark spirits of Dol Guldor. Legolas is more outward looking and is, as yet, untouched by the deeper grief that threatens to overwhelm his father.

Go not to the elves for council, for they shall say yes and no.

Legolas' role in this scenario is to grant access to the ancient power of the elves to heal the land. It also proffers the GM with a brief opportunity to be Orlando Bloom. Legolas will require persuading to help the plight of Dale.

Legolas' Duel of Wits information

Will B5, Persuasion B5, Calm Demeanour (+1d in DoW)

Legolas' Argument: "The elves have enough troubles of their own with the spiders, the orcs of Mirkwood Mountains and the darkness of Dol Guldor. We cannot help you at this time"

This argument is more for the benefit of the other sindarin courtiers who are watching how Thranduil's son fares in the presence of men and dwarves. Will he be strong or weak?

Consequence if Legolas 'wins' the DoW: request: Your request is denied. You are escorted to the border of the elven realm.



The players may notice the courtiers watching Legolas intently and whispering to each other. The players argument would best be served in supporting Legolas' position while humbly asking for help. Where possible Legolas will play along, and even try to subvert his own argument or give the players openings to advance their position.

Factors that will influence the DoW for the players.

1. Crimes and misdemeanour's

If one of the PCs take a fancy to something, including in the camber of gold, simply allow them to take it. No test is required. However, prior to the commencement of the DoW make a resistance roll vs B6. This is the resistance for the elves to have detected the theft. Particularly large items, or inexpertly blundered larceny can either be an automatic failure or a suitable bonus tot he resistance.

If the elves are aware of any of the thefts now will be the time that they reveal their knowledge. Legolas gains 1d to his body of argument due to the players' transgression

2. Saving the maiden

Saving the elf maiden from the cruel orcs will give the players a +1 advantage die in the DoW contest,

If the players win the DoW then they will be granted several gifts:

Three elves will travel to the blighted area to sing the 'lay of the land' a restorative song that draws the goodness out of the land. it is exactly what is needed, but it will take them some time to complete this task and will require protection while they undertake it. We're talking a matter of a couple of months.

Alwis will be granted access to an Earthlife spell, first taught to men by Radagast in response to the disasters that struck Erebor earlier in the 3rd Age. It functions very similarly to the elven lay. Through this enchantment Alwis will be empowered to heal the land that has suffered due to the dragon. This will take him some time, and a lot of walking! Within three months he will have made an incredible difference. He will also gain reputations as a friend of te elves and as a great wizard.

Losing - the hard way

If the players lose the DoW then they will be escorted out of Mirkwood. They will be left with only one alternative (that I can think of, and player ingenuity allowing): to seek out Radagast. If the players can come up with nothing else, have them fail. Describe how the land became known as 'The Desolation' stunting the capacity of Dale to prosper. A further side effect was the expansion of Dale's authority to the South and the East in an attempt to ready for any possible aggression from the Easterlings.

Losing - the soft option

If your players have entertained you well, if you are short of scenario time, if you specifically want the players to come out of this scenario with something, then you could elect this 'soft' option. Legolas wins the Duel of Wits in front of his courtiers, but still wants to help the plight of the men



and dwarves. He arranges the players' escort out of Greenwood to also be the elves that will aid revitalise the land. Legolas will have to find a plausible reason for the elves to be away for several months. Various missions into the East spring readily to mind.

Option 2 - Radagast the Brown

Radagast is one of the legendary Istari, great wizards that arose in the histories of men during the Third Age. Alwis can make a roll on Istari-wise to tell more:

- He has great powers over land and animals
- He lives in the vales of the Anduin, however is often travelling across Middle Earth.
- He has little contact with men or the elder races, preferring to spend time in the wilds of nature. He understands the ways of beasts and plants but has little interest in the affairs of men
- He is known as Radagast the Brown because of his close alignment to nature and the land
- He has the power to heal the devastation of Smaug, or impart lore that could heal the land

How to find him?

Going to knock on his door is about the only option available to the characters. His current whereabouts is unknown, though he can be often found in his home during the winter months. It's a long way to go though. There are two routes. Take the forest road through Mirkwood or travel over the old Northern road.

The Forest Road

Haunted and deadly the paths through Mirkwood remain dangerous to travellers. There are ancient evils that have now found a home in the former elven realm. Trolls orcs and spiders now control large swathes of the forest and will doubtless be encountered, especially if the old forest road is taken.

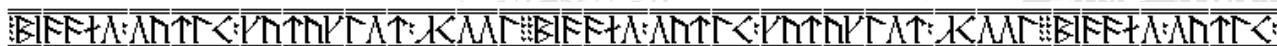
Crossing the forest off the main roads is not a good idea, unless the realm is known to the character (Mirkwood Wise ability). There is a glamour to the forest that leads one astray, and disorients even the best in orienteering (Ob6 Test). The players will almost certainly get lost.

One option is to have them lost and captured by the elves. If they have not yet taken the 'elven option' then they can be introduced to this now. If they have already tried and failed the elven option, they might be taken pity on, and escorted through the forest to the vales of Anduin, close to Radagast's home.

Or you could just kill them all in a huge Fight! scene...

The North Road

This way is well marked and better understood than the Forest road. The North Road is a clear path that was used by Dale to extend influence and by other men. It is also the main thoroughfare used



by orcs from their capital at Mount Gundabad. The slaughter at the Battle of the Five Armies has cleared the Misty Mountains of orcs so the way is, comparatively, safe.

If the players decide to take this route they will have opportunity to encounter some of the unique flora and fauna of this bleak mist shrouded corridor...

The road is wild and dangerous. Mist shrouded and bleak, the old road winds over bog and marsh and on the low hills the occasional sign a hamlet or cottage. these are the homes of the northmen, long time residents of this bleak landscape, occasionally seeking protection from Dale from the rapacious orcs and drakes that inhabit the Ered Mithrin

It is a wearying and morale sapping journey. Ob 3 Health tests. Failure reduces steel temporarily by 1.

On Wild Horses, Snowy White Horses (a colour scene)

Wild horses are known to roam in the narrows. On travelling through the narrows the players see a herd of white horses running free to their north. They make a glorious site. They are running at pace and as the players watch a giant wurm swoops down and strikes one of the horses with it's huge talons, downing the horse.

If the players look to intervene, it will be a fools errand, as this is a full size gray scale dragon that will not take kindly to being interrupted from its meal. However, it may be interested in talking....

The Settlement

A small settlement can be seen to the North. There is a shroud of mist around the base of the hill and a small winding track leads up to a typical wood and earth circular palisade. The gate appears to be open and a figure stands outside, as if guarding the entrance holding a huge pole with a banner on it.

If investigated the players will see that the person guarding is a young girl (about 8 years old). She clutches onto a spear which has a banner fluttering with a serpent emblazoned on it.

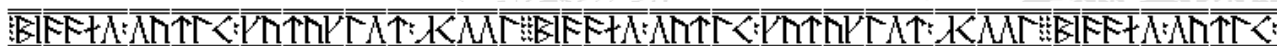
Her name is Inger, and she is a ghost (Steel test +1 Ob for meeting a ghost). She is waiting for Dada to return from the wars. Her small village has been gutted and there is but one living inhabitant left: Garg.

GARG - Small Cold Drake

Perception 4, Will 5, Agility 5, Speed 6 (x4), Forte 7, Power G6
Health 6, Steel 6, Reflexes 5, Mortal Wound 14, Hesitation 5

Scales 3d

Rending Claws +2 Power VA 1



I M S Pow Add WS VA
4 8 12 2 2 S 1

Brutal Piercing Fangs +2 Power VA 1

I M S Pow Add WS VA
4 8 12 2 2 S 1

Physical Tolerances

Superficial B4 ○○○ +1 Ob

Light B8 ○○○ -1d

Medium B11 ○○○ -2d

Severe B12 ○○○ -3d

Traumatic B13 ○○○ -4d

Mortal B14 ○○○ Oying

The encounter serves as a chilling reminder of how dangerous these lands are, and suitable opportunity for the Fight! mechanics to be tested...

Meeting Radagast

Radagast will be at home, though it might be fun to find his home empty, other than with a bear sitting eating a bowl of honey. The bear may even be a beorning.

Radagast will join them at some point! I would play him as relatively uninterested in men and dwarves and their concerns. He is more interested in the plight of the land so will take an interest in what the players have to say.

He has pressing business with the Ents of Fangorn and isn't minded to wander off into the North just at the moment, so will need some persuading to help.

Radagast's Duel of Wits Traits: Will B6, Persuade B4

Radagast isn't especially interested in the argument so will look to use Obfuscate and similar diversionary tactics with the occasional 'Point' thrown in.

If Radagast wins then he will wish the players every success as he departs South.

If the players win, well they get what is agreed at the beginning of the Duel of Wits. Most likely Radagast will be heading North with them to heal the land.

Something Always Happens On The Way Home

The players may or may not have been successful in gaining the lore or assistance that they needed to aid their quest. Some of the group may be carrying wounds, guilt or despair. So, as the players return home, here's an opportunity for Hakon to make a play for power.

Up to 4 mercenaries – Exponent 4 in all necessary traits

Armed with long sword and shield



Plated leather with open helms. 3D

<u>Melee</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>CD</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>Add</u>	<u>VA</u>	<u>WS</u>
BARE LISTED	2	4	6	2	-	F
SWORD	4	7	10	2	1	S

#1 Physical Tolerances

Superficial	<u>B3</u>	○○○	+1	O6
Light	<u>B5</u>	○○○	-1d	
Mid	<u>B7</u>	○○○	-2d	
Severe	<u>B8</u>	○○○	-3d	
Traumatic	<u>B9</u>	○○○	-4d	
Mortal	<u>B10</u>	○○○	Öying	

#2 Physical Tolerances

Superficial	<u>B3</u>	○○○	+1	O6
Light	<u>B5</u>	○○○	-1d	
Mid	<u>B7</u>	○○○	-2d	
Severe	<u>B8</u>	○○○	-3d	
Traumatic	<u>B9</u>	○○○	-4d	
Mortal	<u>B10</u>	○○○	Öying	

#3 Physical Tolerances

Superficial	<u>B3</u>	○○○	+1	O6
Light	<u>B5</u>	○○○	-1d	
Mid	<u>B7</u>	○○○	-2d	
Severe	<u>B8</u>	○○○	-3d	
Traumatic	<u>B9</u>	○○○	-4d	
Mortal	<u>B10</u>	○○○	Öying	

#4 Physical Tolerances

Superficial	<u>B3</u>	○○○	+1	O6
Light	<u>B5</u>	○○○	-1d	
Mid	<u>B7</u>	○○○	-2d	
Severe	<u>B8</u>	○○○	-3d	
Traumatic	<u>B9</u>	○○○	-4d	
Mortal	<u>B10</u>	○○○	Öying	

They are well known and loyal to their former captain, Hakon. Having escorted a Long Lake merchant to a clandestine rendezvous they are returning to the familiar lands of Dale.

It's important to run this encounter, if you have time, at the end of the game session. These four could easily be recruited by Hakon, and we don't want the Fight! Scenes in this scenario to get any more crowded or any easier for the player characters. Have the number of mercenaries + Hakon = remaining player characters.

This encounter could remain innocent. If Hakon is still alive, he may decide not do anything with the opportunity offered to him. His player may not even see the opportunity. The mercenaries may simply escort the players back to Dale. Burning Wheel is about providing players with opportunities to test their Beliefs and flex their Instincts and Traits. So, throw this encounter in at the end of the session and see where it takes you...