

Comments on Play (In Order of Finish)

1. Bobby Bissett, as Hermione the Witch (+58 Victory Points)

The Witch is often derided as a weak character on the Magic Realm web forums, so it was a pleasure to watch Bobby demonstrate that there are no weak characters in Magic Realm – just unimaginative players. Bobby selected what I consider the Witch’s optimum starting spells (“Broomstick”, “Absorb Essence”, and “Remedy”) and had the superb good luck to be able to absorb the most powerful monster on the board, the Tremendous Flying Dragon. The Witch’s alliance with the Captain was good for both characters and allowed Hermione to take out both the Rogues and Company on Day 17 with the Captain’s hired Soldiers managing the risk. This coup netted the Witch 247 Notoriety points and allowed her to pull ahead of the Witch King. Having the Captain to lead her to the Chapel to remove the potentially crippling Wither curse was all-important. It is always a good thing to have friends!

2. Al D’Amico, as Voldemort the Witch King (+56 Victory Points)

Since most players have enough trouble just breaking even, 56 victory points should be more than enough to be the victor of any Magic Realm game. Al was just unlucky that the Witch absorbed a more powerful monster than he was able to find. With an early character choice, Al created a corner of the board suitable for a flying character and grabbed the Witch King. With the Fiery Blast/ World Fades strategy for native removal stymied by “Watchful Natives,” he selected a powerful collection of “Melt into Mist”, “Broomstick”, “Absorb Essence”, and “Dissolve Spell” as his starting spells. His play in absorbing the T Giant to pound minor monsters and Goblins and then changing absorbed monsters when the Tremendous Dragon turned up was perfect, and paid big dividends when the Witch King was able to net 220 Notoriety points by eliminating the Lancers and Rogues. The only problem was that the House, where the Captain started and hired the Soldiers, turned up right next to the Lost Castle in the isolated corner of the board that the Witch King had hoped to fly into. The Captain and his hirelings were too dangerous to attack with the Witch/TFD as a bodyguard, and by the time the Witch King dissolved his “Melt into Mist” and went after the Black Knight, he ran out of time to get the right order of actions in combat to allow him to finish off another victim that would have put him ahead. A virtually flawlessly played game from beginning to end.

3. Mitija Vidmar, as Captain Alatraste (+27 Victory Points)

The optimum strategy for the Captain is usually to trade in armor to hire a native group at the beginning of the game. The problem is handling the natives effectively thereafter since the native combat rules are among the most difficult and confusing parts of the game! Mitja began at the House, sold his shield and helmet, and hired the Soldiers in Day 2. With the SHQ to help him search for treasure, the Captain was in the catbird seat when the Lost Castle turned up in the next tile. His long-term alliance with the Witch was the last piece of a winning strategy. When the Witch absorbed the Tremendous Flying Dragon, it fixed the relatively light-hitting Soldiers’ vulnerability to Tremendous armored monsters. After picking the Hoard and Altar clean, taking out a few monsters with his hired men, and delivering the Food and Ale across the board, the Captain had more than enough Victory Points to have won most Magic Realm games. The only slight miscalculation was not putting more Victory Requirements in gold, but it was as

impossible to foresee amassing the fortune of gold as it was to predict two other players accumulating more than 50 Victory Points.

4. Tony Rowe as Lothar, the Black Knight (-6 Victory Points)

After failing to forge an alliance with the Amazon and other characters that would have allowed Lothar to finish off the Rogues at the Inn, Tony played a thoroughly Black Knightish game and would have finished off with a nice positive score if he had only remembered to leave enough time near the end of the game to get to the Guardhouse to sell the Imperial Tabbard for its conditional Fame and enough gold to cover the starting cost of his armor (always a problem for heavily equipped characters!) When he found and donned the Garb of Speed, the Black Knight became instant death for other characters, as the Berserker and Pilgrim found out. He was most effective when he was working with the Elf, a nice combination of deadly characters. As it turned out, his foray out the High Pass ridge to the Cairns was fruitless and nearly fatal when he was trapped by the Witch King/TD. A better plan for the last week would have been to get to the Guardhouse early enough to sell stuff and then kill the Guard HQ and loot it all back. Still, a barely negative score is a creditable result for a first Magic Realm game. The lesson to take away is always plan the end game carefully to cover your Victory Requirements!

5. Craig Perras/Alan Busby as Ogion, the Wizard (-31 Victory Points)

“Lightning Bolt” looks so good on paper that it’s surprising how often it doesn’t pay off. After wandering around a little aimlessly at the beginning of the game without collecting enough Notoriety to pick up the Escort Party, the Wizard found the Flying Carpet and used it effectively to get to treasure sites in the mountains where “Lightning Bolt” can be used. But a miss on the Octopus at the Pool, two misfires against the Spider, and finally failing even to damage the Black Knight’s warhorse with another bolt took away the Wizard’s chances to cover his Fame requirements, and it was clearly a mistake not to have leaned the second spell at the Altar while he was there. Finally, “Talk to a Wise Bird” is not all that useful a spell since it gives you only about a 1 in 3 chance of glimpsing remote chits at the cost of at least one fatigued Magic chit. Usually in a 10 player game the tiles are revealed by other characters moving into them long before “Talk to a Wise Bird” pays off. The Wizard, although often selected by beginners, is actually a rather vulnerable character and plays much better if he partners with another character instead of being played as a lone wolf as in this game.

6. Mark Mitchell as Blaize, the Amazon (-32 Victory Points)

The Amazon’s problem is that until she can find an M* weapon, she is just too underpowered to pick up much Fame, so selecting 3 Fame as Victory Requirements is taking a big chance. She is actually much more like the Black Knight in her capabilities, and a workable strategy is to team with the Black Knight and the Elf on Day 1 to take out the Rogues. Even with “Watchful Natives” in effect, it is very likely that they could take out the two Axmen and the Archer on Round 1 and then mop up without losing more than one piece of armor. After her unsuccessful tussle with the Ax Goblins (which, by all rights, should have turned out better), she was forced on the defensive. Her best stretch came in the middle of the game when she worked with the White Knight to loot the Pool—coming out with the Magic Wand that the Wizard would have died to have, but not much use to Blaize except as a Great Treasure—and then with the Witch King to slaughter the Patrol. We got a good picture of how the Amazon with a pony can

cross the board in one day as she galloped north to Deep Woods on Day 20 and then changed her mind and galloped south hoping to find monsters she could kill as she made her way through Borderland and Ruins to the Guardhouse to sell her equipment to GHQ, nearly the only unhired leader alive after the Witch and Witch King's depredations.

7. Bill Sculley, as Iftandir/Iftanrel the Elf (-34 Victory Points)

Without the Ambush Optional Rule the Elf could really use an ally to lure while he fires arrows at the denizens, and one of the Elf's problems is that having an evil reputation can make it hard to find other characters you can trust. So it took a while for the Elf to warm up to the Black Knight as a partner. Together they are an extremely strong pair since the Elf's ability to lure and run away solves the Black Knight's problem with Tremendous monsters that are too powerful to kill. In the fight with the Berserker and Druid, however, the Elf paid a high price for an instructive combat lesson: "Stones Fly" is longer than a Light Bow! Since the Elf knew that the Druid had an alerted spell, it would have been a better move to run out of the clearing instead of alerting his Bow. True, he would have left his buddy the Black Knight to be the target of four "Stones Fly" attacks, but Lothar is well protected from mere stones in his metal suit. Bill started over as another Elf and was not making much progress, what with having to go the Chapel to clear the curses he got from Reading Runes. (And not learning both Type VII spells at the Statue was certainly a mistake since spells tend to be hard to come by!) Then a chance to settle the score appeared, and the Elf was able to down the inattentive Druid with an arrow, win back his items, and end up beating out the Druid by two VP's. Revenge is sweet enough to bring you back for more!

8. Chuck Shrader as Naal Han Artal and Imameen Elf-Slayer, Druids (-36 Victory Points)

The Druid's problem in a 10-player game is that his Peace With Nature advantage is almost always going to be messed up by other players tramping around in the same tile. But in BIMR3, interestingly enough, the northern tiles were completely unexplored until the last week of the game and Cairns, the Lair, and the Shrine were virtually undisturbed. The Druid was the ideal character to have benefitted from this oversight, since he could have snooped around in Cavern without drawing the Goblins or Serpents and looted the Cairns without Dragon problems. But the game is more fun traveling with a partner, and the Druid headed south with the Berserker at his side. (An excellent combination, by the way, since the Druid can lure monsters to set up a kill or to run away, and with his Dagger or "Stone's Fly" can protect the big guy from Wolves or Goblins, as seen in the battle on Day 6). After vanquishing the Elf in his half of the four-player combat but losing the Berserker, the Druid took a little too long to find another plan. The Light Bow, always chancy on the Missile Table even with the Elf's Archer advantage, is not really an effective weapon in the Druid's hands. Trying to sneak into the Vault under the Black Knight's nose was just too low a payoff considering that there are only five large treasures there and most of them are probably going to be too heavy for the Druid to carry anyway. (The Druid's major problem as a treasure hunter is his lack of a Medium Move chit!) By the time the Druid headed up toward the treasure sites in the north, the stampede of other characters ruined his chances of exploring unmolested. Then, inexplicably failing to run out of the clearing despite knowing that the Elf had found hidden enemies, the Druid became a victim of the Elf's vengeance. The reincarnated "Elfslayer" Druid really had very little chance of accomplishing his goal, even though the new Elf had forgotten to cast his "Protection From Magic" spell to create a "Get Out

of ‘Stones Fly’ Free” chit. The Elf can simply run out of the clearing if the Druid casts “Stones Fly” and leave the Druid stoning empty space. And if the Druid charges the Elf with a Move L2** to keep him from running, he can’t attack or maneuver faster than speed=4 and the Elf can easily prevail in the ensuing Dagger-fight.

9. Ed Hoden, as Brother Matthew the Basher, a Pilgrim and Snorri Gundarchuksson, a Berserker (-46 Victory Points)

Ed selected a Pilgrim character to play in the open player slot when Michael, frustrated by trying to keep up with the game with his once-a-day e-mail connection, dropped out. The standard strategy for the Pilgrim when by himself is to select the “Small Blessing” spell and cast it until he gets a “Wish for Strength” that transforms the next blow from his Fight M2** Staff into Tremendous damage. Ed took only one day to successfully gain his “Wish for Strength.” Then, armed with the most powerful single-shot weapon on the board, the Pilgrim headed into the north where the three undiscovered treasure sites had to be. Although starting late, the Pilgrim got a huge break when he pulled the Deft Gloves out of the picked-over Statue. By rolling only one die on loot rolls, he could clean out treasure sites that the other characters had abandoned. It is hard to criticize his decision seek out the Cairns, since any other sites had to be in the caves and swarming with monsters from the Lost City. His “Wish for Strength” paid its dividend when the Tremendous Spider showed up, but unfortunately, the barren High Pass didn’t leave the Pilgrim much of a chance to escape when the Black Knight trotted down the ridge. Reincarnating as a Berserker, Ed had barely enough time to swing his Great Ax before the game came to an end.

10. Michael Rodin as Berek and Ur-Berek, the Berserkers (-99 Victory Points, deceased)

Michael and Dan Farrow, who was filling in when Ur-Berek perished, paid a heavy price for overlooking two of the Berserker’s major assets. Although tough on most Tremendous monsters, the Berserker has a dilemma when he faces an attack-speed-4 armored Tremendous monster: he needs to use a T Fight chit to cut through the denizen’s armored hide, but since all his T Fight chits have at least one effort asterisk, he can’t play his Move H4** in the same round. Against the Tremendous Troll, for example, this gives the big guy one chance in three to match directions in Round 1. If he fails, the T Troll hits, flips red-side-up, and will undercut and kill in Round 2 with its speed-2 annihilating attack. An encounter with a T Troll and a wrong guess on Round 1 led to the first Berserker’s untimely demise on Day 5. The answer to this dilemma is to have an allied character or a hired native lure the monster. Then the Berserker, freed from having to play his Move H4** to maneuver, can cover the luring character or hireling’s maneuver with his alerted, speed-4, Great Ax and a Fight T5* chit. This changes the odds, from two in three against, to just about certain victory against any one monster, and the Berserker’s friendship with the Rogues is a major asset in obtaining a decoy for the T monsters he might run into. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the Rogues were protected from massacre by “Watchful Natives,” the Berserker neglected to hire a Rogue helper or two either time he started at the Inn. The bill for this oversight nearly came due when the Berserker ran into the Wolves, and was delivered in full when Berek came up alone against the Tremendous Troll. The Berserker’s other major advantage, of course, is the ability to go berserk, but the second Berserker died in the battle with the Black Knight primarily because he failed to use an Alert phase to go berserk before entering the battle clearing. A berserk Berserker could not have been killed by the Black

Knight's Mace except by the laborious process of wounding to death, one chit per combat round. And the Black Knight would lose his shield as soon as Ur-Berek matched directions once, his armor would go on the second match, and he would die on the third match unless he ran away first.

11. James McCann (with Aaron Brewster filling in) as the nameless White Knight (-99 Victory Points, deceased)

Well, this is one to kick yourself about. The White Knight, despite not being able to avail himself of the usual strategy of improving his equipment by trading with the Order because of "Knight's Adjustment," had actually covered all of his Victory Requirements by Day 26. Twenty-eight days are not all that long in the Realm, and the White Knight shortened his month by failing to submit orders more than once. Nevertheless, he was able to find the Pool in Ledges; kill the Octopus, a Giant or two, and a Troll; scale the Mountain to acquire the Golden Icon; and get back to the Chapel in time to clear his Ashes curse and sell his items and all his equipment to cover his gold requirements. Then, in what has to rank as one of the all-time Magic Realm miscalculations, the White Knight decided to exit the board instead of waiting out the end of the game in the friendly company of the Order. Walking carelessly through the woods carrying the Golden Icon as his Great Treasure and enough Victory Points for a +6 positive score, the White Knight fails to notice the "Bones W" in Pine Woods and attracts two Ogres. Without a weapon or any armor and hindered, like the Black Knight before him, by the T weigh of the Golden Icon, the White Knight is unable to play his Move H4** to run away and is killed by the Ogres in Round 1. In Magic Realm, always expect the unexpected!

All in all, a highly instructive game with a vast spread of Victory Points – and a showcase for magic-users with "Absorb Essence," including the lowly Witch.