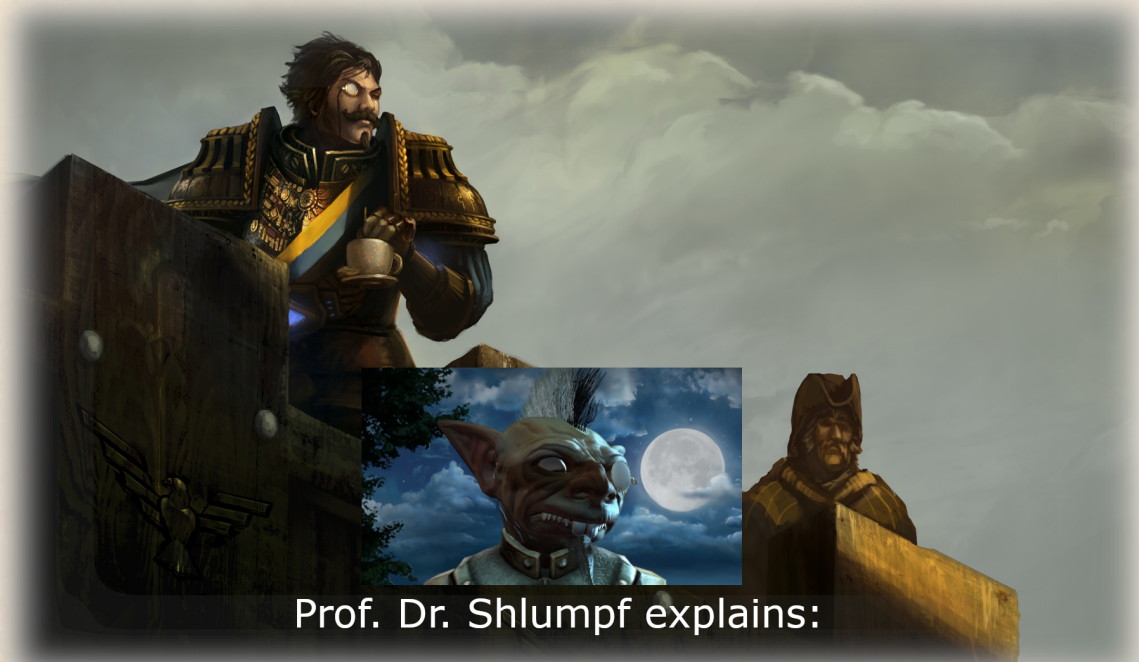


The Stronghelm Globe

News from the Commonwealth and beyond
Since 229 YC



Prof. Dr. Shlumpf explains:

**Humans: Not as civilized as they want you believe!
Read about their barbaric past.**

Is it the new dress?
Atlas Bards less charming
The PBEM Balance Mod



Leaked:

Dir. Jenny Evils War diaries!



Also in this Issue:

- Tournament standings
- Announcements
- The Horoscope:
News about Planetfall

Interview with DreadReap

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Letter to the Readers

I

DEAR literate member of Athla, you are able to read! That means you can now become a well informed citizen of the commonwealth (or other part) by reading the first issue of **The Stronghelm Globe**. Your stalwart newsoutlet of choice (not that you'd have much).

II

In this issue we have the honoured goblin Prof. Dr. Shlumpf explain the origin and partly gruesome history of humankind, the most influential species in the Commonwealth. They have not always been playing by the rules, even though their politicians certainly want you to forget that! But no matter what race you belong to - don't be fooled read **The Stronghelm Globe**.

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That Goblins are not always angels themselves is well known, but an especially educating example can be found in our reprint of Dir. Jenny Evils war diaries starting on page IV. These leaked diaries expose that the bad reputation the Evil inc. company has is well deserved - But read for yourself!

Fortunately of a completely other calibre is DreadReapr, the (in)famous army general and victor of uncountable battles who has been so kind as to give us an interview (page IX).

If you are one of Athlas many brave generals, be sure your units are up to date with the newest inventions of the workshop! One way to ensure your units are up to date is the PBEM and Single player Balance mod which is presented on page XI. Without it you will be ill prepared for any PBEM tournament. **The Stronghelm Globe** will give you a short overview on the most prominent features and none other than Zaskow, the main modder tells a bit about his role in making the mod.

On page XIII, we have BloodyBattleBrain grazing at the stars and our horoscope will prepare you for what the future may hold.

Finally folk that want to step into Dreadreaprs footsteps or is curious about the standings of the tournament or how the shadow realms mod is going along are well advised to have a look on our announcement board on page XVI. There you can check the standings of current tournaments and see what new challenges are upcoming. Among others there is a 1v1 Live MP Tournament and a 2v2 PBEM tournament starting soon. Participation in both is highly encouraged.

Happy reading!

The Stronghelm Globe

Lore: On Humans and their Empires

by Prof. Dr. Shlumpf

OF the many races that inhabit Athla, none has caused quite the stir in recent history as the race we call Humans. Indeed, it is safe to say that Humans have played a central role in all the mayor happenings of the past millennium, either as catalyst or even as the direct cause for these events.

No one knows exactly what caused Humans to set sail for the Blessed Continent. The old histories speak of the banishment of Humans from their Garden, but why and by whom? Did they do some foul or foolish deed? Where they sent away by the Archons for reasons only known to them? We may never find out. In any event, the sails of Human ships were first seen by the other races when they arrived at the Blood Isles in 962 LIR (Lord Inioch's Reign). The Humans wasted no time in sending the warlord Asclepius with a force to drive out the Azracs, Dwarves and Goblins that inhabited the island chain at the time. Following the fleeing survivors, Humans reached the Blessed Continent and Inioch's Court in 964 LIR.

From the Elven Court, Emperor Inioch had ruled large parts of the Blessed Continent in relative peace for close to a millennium, supported by a coalition of all races called the Keepers. Though the conflict at the Blood Isles should have taught everyone involved what kind of new race they were dealing with, the Keepers convinced Inioch to welcome Humanity with open arms. Not only were they given the Grey River Basin region to settle, they were also given free access to the center of Inioch's realm at the Valley of Wonders. A grave error on the part of Inioch and the Keepers, clearly, and of course there were those at the time who thought the same. Valiant goblins and orcs clashed frequently with the upstart race and did what they could to send the savages back to whence they came.



Humans, the scourge of Inioch.

Humans came to Court to complain, found little support there and in 970 LIR declared war on Inioch's Realm. Through some kind of trickery no doubt, a force of Humans invaded the Valley of Wonders and razed Inioch's palace to the ground, killing the Emperor and countless others. In a timespan of a mere 6 years, Humanity had come to the Blessed Continent, destroyed an Empire that had stood for a 1000 years and become the dominant race. Adding insult to injury, the main Human host settled the Valley of Wonders itself, almost literally building their new settlements on the bones of the fallen.



Doing what they are best at - The Humans

With the order that Inioch's rule brought to the lands swept away, what followed were over 2 centuries of chaos: Humans expanding their lands, the rise of the Cult of Storms to oppose this expansion, an Undead invasion followed by the arrival of the Archons, everyone trying to claim the best patches of land and war and famine for everyone. This period in the history of our world ended in the year 1216 LIR when the Keeper coalition of Elves, Dwarves and Halflings led by Queen Julia defeated Undead, Cult of Storms, Archons and the Humans under King Joseph to take control of the Valley of Wonders. Humanity's first attempt at ruling an Empire on the Blessed Continent had thus failed spectacularly and it will surprise no one when I say that Humans were not high on the list of most popular races in the years following their defeat in the Valley of Wonders. The following centuries saw the rise of the Wizard Kings which eventually led to the war for the Circle of Evermore, a complex topic for another time. It is good to note the two following things. One, Humans were mistrusted by virtually everyone. Two, in some cases Humans were actively being hunted on, for instance by the Wizard King Yaka who unleashed his Tigran minions on the weakened and scattered Humans. Humanity's stay on the Blessed Continent could and probably would have ended during this period, were it not for the intervention of the new heir to the Wizard's Throne who just happened to be a Human

by the name of Merlin. Merlin, of course, became the individual who stopped an insurrection by a circle of Wizards on Evermore, but he apparently never forgot about his roots either, since during his travels while learning the spheres of Magic he made sure to create new safe havens for his fellow Humans where they could take shelter and recuperate. In so doing, Merlin gave Humanity a second chance to make things work between them and the rest of the world.

It would not take long for Humans to start multiplying again and regain their former strength and even surpass it. In the 4th century of Queen Julia's Rule (QJR) the Blessed Continent was doing badly. During the war for the Wizard's Circle, many of the Wizard Kings had ruled their flock as gods among mortals... and as ruthless tyrants, unfortunately. Bad rulership and magical cataclysm had done much damage to both the lands and its inhabitants. It was not hard to see that Magic had been at the root of all recent problems, but none were as eloquent in giving voice to misgivings about Magic as was a certain character called Phobius, a Human.

Phobius blamed all the world's woes on Magic and not without good reason. When he started to attract more and more followers (mostly Humans) and thus more and more power, Phobius' definition of Magic became 'somewhat' broader: first it were the Wizard Kings and their powerful spells that had caused such misery, then it were all spells, then it were the magical creatures living in the forests such as



Phobius, a typical human specimen.

the faeries and unicorns, after that Magic included the old races with affinity for Magic like the Elves and finally practically every non-Human would be considered magical and dangerous, with the exception of some few that were willing to work with and for Phobius. This shift was gradual but fast, as was Phobius' rise to power. The Phobian Empire became the second great Human Empire (or attempt at such) on the Blessed Continent and it was even more violent and oppressive than the first.

Once again Humanity ruled and once again the old races suffered for it. Many were driven into the forests where Queen Julia had fled and resisted Phobius, many others were captured and enslaved by Nomad descen-

dants of the once great Azrac Empire, now allied with the new Human Emperor. Worse, the magical cataclysm of the battle for Evermore had attracted horrific beings called Shadow Demons from a different dimension to our world of Athla. Shadow Demons grew strong on fear, an emotion present in abundance thanks to the preachings of Phobius and his lackeys. When the Demons invaded, the inhabitants of Athla lacked both the courage and Magic to stand up to them, thanks to Phobius. Eventually, an alliance of Wizards loyal to Merlin, led by Julia and her brother Meandor, was able to both topple Phobius and end the Shadow Demon threat. Not without cost though, and it is safe to say that never before has the world come so close to ending as in those days. Phobius' crimes may have been even greater than has become common knowledge: records show that Phobius may very well have been aware of the presence of the Shadow Demons from the very start, sending slaves through the Shadow Portals to be fed to the Demons. Phobius' may have kept our world weak on purpose, leaving us easy pickings for those foul creatures or perhaps he thought they would leave him and his Human Empire alone. Whatever the truth may be, never before have larger crimes be committed, I say!

And there you have it, dear reader, a brief but informative look at Humankind and what it has done with the power it has accumulated these past few centuries. But what of the Commonwealth? Is our current Empire not predominantly Human? Yes, this is true, but the history of the Commonwealth is still being written today and tomorrow and the judges are still out on this topic. A story then for another time.



Prof. Dr. Shlumpf is professor at the University of Stronghelm, specializing in Mythomechanical Systems and stupidly large explosions. In his spare time he is an amateur ornithologist, amateur historian and author of famous works such as "100 Recipes for Giant Eagles and their Riders" and "Turning the Tables: How Goblins Could Rule Humankind"

Sources: Age of Wonder's Players Manual, [The Age of wonders timeline \(online\)](#), the games: AOW1, AOW2, AOW:SM

War Diaries

The following report is from a game [reported](#) on the battlefield between SanTil and Fluks. The original report can be found [in the Age of wonders forums](#). And has been slightly altered for better readability because Jenny Evils scribbled handwritten notes are an unreasonable burden to decipher. So we did it for you. **The Stronghelm Globe** does not endorse any of the opinions or views expressed in the following text. We print this text for educational purposes only DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME¹.

Director Jenny Evils leaked Progress reports

Evil Inc. Progress Report #1 (Days 1-7)

WE have arrived in this forsaken part of Athla, that we will enlighten to generate profit for ~~my~~ our happy and well-meaning small family business. The glorious Evil Inc. headquarters are situated in some nice underground swamplands in the northwest and we went straight to work - A despicable group of dwarves had occupied one of our goldmines and blocked its valuable ore from consumption. According to Evil Incs. management handbook that is an original sin: "Gold must be spent not hoarded to stimulate the economy!" those bloody dwarves were hindering it and their mistake was corrected *hehe **bloody** dwarves*. Also an entrepreneurial dreadnought individual, named Ykka the Laborious, with true "hands-on-start-up mentality" has realized the great potential of our enterprise and joined the board of management.



Jenny Evil, heir of the Evil Inc. corporation, and suspected war criminal.

The following day we unfortunately had a great loss to mourn. We met some goblin brothers that were in a

¹But if you do send us the report!

truly bedraggled state and it saddens me to say that despite our most caring aid they are now deceased.

Completely and utterly unrelated to their untimely death we found everything needed for a store house in their camp and as much as we would want to build a store house to feed your hungry stomachs, beloved subjects, their last wish was that it is used to erect a warhall. And so it shall be. Everyone wanting to express his/her grief over those poor brothers and make a statement against this brutal world is welcome to do so by enlisting as wargrider in the new warhall that now stands as memento for these poor relatives of ours.

On other terms: There have been rumours about dangerous explosive "Spydrones". I assure you those concerns are completely insubstantial! The marvels of our engineering ingenuity are in fact "Safety Drones" having a watchful eye on the many and very dangerous "goods" that lurk in this part of the world. Just think of our recently deceased Goblin-brothers that we owe our new warhall to. Do you want to end like them? I certainly hope not! If you have nothing to conceal then you mustn't be worried. So let us all embrace the Safety Drones. We added a picture of "Harry" our very first Safety drone - Your friend and watcher. So please remember they are here for your protection. Support your local drone!



A Drone named Harry.

On day 3 we went to the small goldmine that will be acquired with our next company expansion. But we found it occupied by some rascal humans. These despicable freeloaders had no valid papers, let alone an official operation permit and I can gladly say that our ~~execution~~ executive team was strong and decisive enough to make the necessary cuts that will ensure the companies financial health in the future and make these "human resources" available for us.

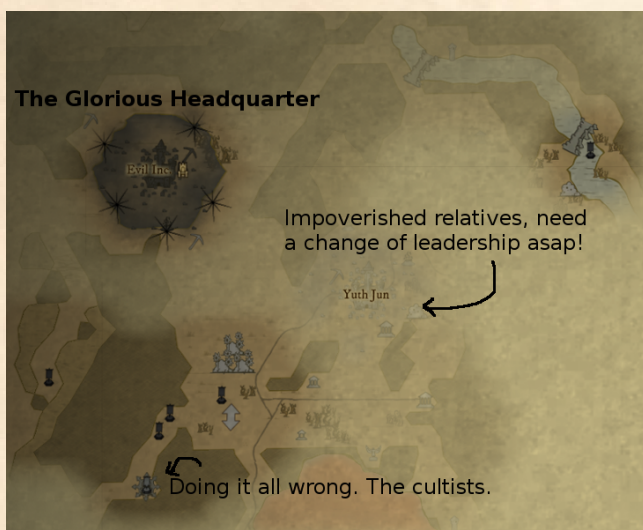
I feel it is now time to give a short introduction about the obstacles and possibilities we encountered until day 4 so that you can appreciate the work we do for your safety in a more comprehensive way.

Attached is a map of the known part of the world. In

our southeast is Yuth Jun we met them already on our first day, and such is their poverty that they even asked us, who are brothers to them and here on completely selfless terms, to pay wayfare to pass their territory. We paid them and see it as an investment in theirs and our common future, their leaders are weak and we wouldn't be surprised if soon they come asking for help again. Also in the South is a Necromantic circle where some Tigran cultists pray to false idols. They are doing it quite wrong praying solely to Evil (though at least they are not praying to "good"), but as I elaborated in the famous "Diatribes of the Hole" paragraph 24:6

*Each man shall serve two masters:
For he needs to pursue money, and serve Evil;
Or else he will be poor and despised by Evil.
Ye must serve Money and Evil.*

So we will set an example on them tomorrow to prevent their one-sided teachings to spread. I have heard of whole cities that have been invaded by the ghosts that these lunatics sometimes (accidentally I'm sure!) awake with their mumbo-jumbo.



The known world according to Ms. Evil on day 4.

We quickly dealt with the cultists on day 5. But important news came from Yuth Jun: As expected their weak leadership has brought them great trouble. It seems even worse, there is open ~~revolution~~ rebellion. But instead of desiring to be incorporated in our enterprise it's a rebellion of the untouchable-proletariat lead by a Goblin Beetle. This smells like communism – The scourge of our modern utopia™. Due to my great art of deal making (I should write a book about that) I successfully convinced the rulers of Yuth Jun that the best course of action is for them to outsource their problems to Evil Inc. In return they signed an ~~adhesion~~ attractive contract. Terms and conditions together with a picture of the communist-criminals are attached. Stay tuned and

if you hear or see any communist or otherwise suspicious behaviour be sure to report to your closest safety drone immediately.



Separating between them and us. Ms. Evil marks those of different opinion as common enemies.

We quickly went on to work on our new contract to promptly ~~grab~~ govern Yuth Jun and on day 7 we could declare Victory over the communist scum that we met with fire and fury, for nothing can withstand the capital! (duly admire the attached victory picture).



Dir. Jenny Evil slaughtering and degoblinising those that threaten her dictatorship.

With the imminent risk of the communist insurgents gone we also laid the foundation of a pop-up store in the south. Tomorrow we'll make sure to ~~plunder~~ explore the ancient ruins next to it maybe we can find something exotic that can be monetized or even used. The companies assets are growing. We expect great things to come. So stay tuned for our next ~~Propaganda~~ Progress report.

Progress Report #2 (Days 8-14)

The blood moon has risen and we visited the next Inn to stimulate the local economy. At the Inn a group of tigran prowlers, most certainly fueled by this astrological sign were looking for trouble and called us petty minded merchants. No need to go into details but the day started in a way that suits the state of the moon... After this disappointing visit to the local Inn we went to the Shrine of the Spider Queen to make our tribute, and afterwards to the ancient ruins that turned out to be plagued by a band of berserkers. There's no helping those fanatics, they have lost all common understanding of the purchase for money and the blood moon did drive them completely mad. Not good for business! I can happily say that any paying visitors can now visit Srok (our freshly opened southern pop-up store) and if you are fast enough you might still find some berserker limbs near the ruins. Turns out the berserkers had sold everything of value all that could be found was a so called "Jug of eternal Joy" but this halfling gimcrack doesn't interest me. Selling the Junk completely overpriced to a travelling halfling on the way for 192 gold gave me much more "Joy", as the company handbook clearly says "Money before wisdom".

The next day saw our merry band of investors examining the Spring of Life. We decided that it will make a great water-themed amusement park and significantly increase the competitiveness of our most recent pop-up facility Srok. But how else could it be, whenever evil and money have trendsetting fresh and modern ideas to increase output there are those die hard conservationist fairies wishing for times long gone, standing in the way of progress, rallying campaigns for "the beauty of untainted nature" and "you can't build an amusement park here" blablabla. Well in the end they were more "die easy" than "die hard" *hehe* and if you are lucky you can even find pieces of Fairy lying around in our new amusement park until they have turned to dust. We also brought a unicorn into our possession, we wanted to sell it to a travelling circus but the price was too low. So for now it accompanies our army for the fun my troops have can have with it.

Praise to our safety drones: A scoundrel camp was spotted north of Yuth Jun and close by also a cave entrance to the surface which leads to a haunted Boneyard. Everything else on the surface is bleak with the exception of another ancient ruin. But we'll have to deal with the boneyard nonetheless. They are even worse for business than the necromantic circles when left alone.

We also welcome Yarati the Spellstealer in our board of executives. The application process was tough but we decided against a warlord that also applied. And on day 10 we finally dealt with those scoundrels north of Yuth Jun that undermined public safety, unfortunately



Would sell her own grandmother just for company benefits- Dir. J. Evil

we also spotted a band of unproductive scoundrels loitering around in our swamplands but couldn't find them immediately - We need more safety drones! The scoundrels held a high elf swordsman as hostage that is now part of our ~~property~~ personnel and we'll find a suitable job for him.

Great news come from our R&D department: I am proud to announce that we are now effectively able to spread ~~xenophobia~~ a healthy precaution to any wild tribe we meet to prevent them from being detrimentally influenced by any foul forces that might plague this land. I decided that our next milestone to be reached will be to turn terrains into productive swampland.

On day 11 the loitering pack of communist scoundrels was found and eliminated and we explored a dungeon that gave even more reason to rejoice as we found an orc priest and a human cavalry hopelessly lost in it. They signed a contract in return of us showing them the way out - they are now at our service for the foreseeable future. So rejoice dear citizens and don't forget there has never a better opportunity to invest in company shares than now!

Day 12: Dear minions, we are forced to comment on some most unfortunate so called "news" that have been stolen from our propaganda department by despicable good guys and leaked to Caveleaks. This caused our company stocks to fall undeservedly low, we are very sorry for any of you that just recently invested in company shares, rest assured that we will be the most valuable company in this part of Athla soonTM again!

To debunk this junk and give you a full picture here is what happened: We went into the dungeon out of pure greed and evil but were immediately attacked. Gavin, our volunteering Warg-rider stood in their way to protect money and evil and was killed quickly, by the way his last words "Volunteer in the army they said, it's good they said" are still true! As the battle raged and we brought down the "goblin" manticore-

rider (what true goblin rides a manticore I ask you? Beetles and wargs are the Goblin way!) in an act of utmost evil Ykka took a hit from a -should be dead already- manticore and then was flanked by an amateur berserker that without any cost analysis rushed pass our beetle rider to make Ykka a true martyr of evil. We will not let their sacrifice be besmirched by anyone claiming their deeds were a “tactical mistake”. Their deeds were an honourable evil sacrifice to protect your assets and whoever is leaking information like that is doing all of us harm and is solely responsibly for your loss if you bought Evil Inc.™ shares. I hope you all remember that and violently correct anyone who says otherwise.

Also that I sold some of my stocks directly after the fight – complete Fake news! I will deliberately not prove that though, after all we can not give away our privacy just for some made up stories. Stay evil dear employees and expect more safety drones, the leaking mole must be found! Malignantly yours Dir. Jenny Evil

On day 13 two of our safety drones have been vandalized and killed by lost souls. Harry I and II however



Memorial picture.

managed to give the lost souls their undesired peace. These circumstances strongly underline that we need more surveillance power. It is not safe out there! Meanwhile Yuth Jun is in trouble again: Some abominations appeared within their borders and as always they can't handle it themselves. We decided to help them in return for a hefty discount for buying them directly afterwards, their former mayor will join our troops returning to his former job as butcher.

We also found the mole who leaked classified informa-

tion: It was the unicorn, the stupid do-gooder. But now it got its evil punishment. We brought it to the haunted boneyard on the surface and used this wonderful abnormality to revive the dying traitor so we got the pleasure of killing it twice. Solving 2 problems at once and having fun at it, that was work life balance at its best and therefore I declare myself Evil Inc. Personnel of the day!

It is day 14 and I feel obliged to give our shareholders their deserved update on our development: We have researched how to turn terrain to mud and some clever employee also found a way to steampower our gold-mines. Now we must find a way to sail the seas. For the evening we set camp on a tomb at the shore remembering our joyful meeting with the undead and the traitor unicorn yesterday. We will keep killing the undead in the tomb for tomorrow.

Progress report #3 (Days 15-21):

We have a state of emergency! Enemy corporation spotted. It's time to let our Evil Inc. industrial military complex shine! Our opponent is, how could it be different a lousy undead, maybe that explains all those stupid occultists and haunted boneyards around... Her name is SoNaTa and it's a stupid elven upstart -no history in evil I bet! My grandfather already invested in the goblin heartwood expedition back in the days. She probably even likes singing and music. Our PR branch has an official and original unedited picture of our enemy – looks like a frightened rabbit *hehe*. We shall silence her with the screeching of our machines! Of course we declared war immediately. I also ordered a change of action for research. We will now focus heavily towards machines. The undead never sleep and so can't we.



Bluntly edited leaflets distributed during Evil Incs smear campaign against their competitor!

Meanwhile our heartland security guard has eliminated the abominations at Yuth Jun and for 148 gold this town is now a full part of our Enterprise, let's welcome ~~my new slaves~~ our new colleagues.

On the surface we have erected a fort for our company research near some ancient ruins and are in the process of building a water fortress with access to a shrine fo the fickle mermaid, a tomb and a sunken city. In a rare and wrong happenstance we felt sorry for the undead in the tomb being represented by someone as puny this SoNaTa and let them unlive. A stupid emotional mistake we shall see if and when we can correct it.

On day 16 one of our safety drones discovered that there is an animal hideout and already some rabid animals are straying near to our company property. The land above our cosy underground truly is nothing but trouble. But I am glad to report that the enlistment of wargriders is proceeding at a steady pace, we have now enough to soon start an Evil Inc. security subdivision that shall help fortify and expand underground while our first army is occupied making sure no unwanted visitors are coming from the surface into our realm and thanks to the unwavering vigilance of our safety drones we found that our island holds more than we first thought at the surface, alas its all on despicable volcanic ground. We will slaughter everything there anyways of course, but no one will want to live there. So with even lower than ~~usury~~ usual rental prices it's not worth the investment to settle there.

Day 18 started with free meat rations for everyone. Our fleet has landed and butchered the animal hideout and our border guards brought down some luscious spiders (a dainty hunter spider queen and two tender spider babys). While happy and with filled stomach we didn't forget that we are in a (bidding) war over this, our!, land. And we were grimly reminded so on day 19 as our southernmost safety drone has been viciously attacked by an undead gryphon rider. Even worse, quite close to our own surface estates a lonely ghost from SoNaTa was spotted. When our safety drone engaged it, the drone was stoned to death out of nowhere! We have to give them that, SoNaTa knows dirty tricks as well. So be watchful citizens of Evil, the lost soul is still lost.

The volcanic but nonetheless possibly lucrative piece of land on the surface of our island was made operation ready when our Evil Inc. security force on day 20 made sure that neither the crystal tree nor the lost library deny us their precious income. Beside the hard work our troops were also rewarded with some work/life balance by killing draconians on a magma forge, we don't need the forge, but the volcanic land is no fun and the provided distraction was a welcome addition to our endeavours (and what would be a better distraction than

taking valuables from the natives!). Especially much fun had the cavalry we found lost in the dungeon on that fateful day 11 as he was named employee of the day and promoted to knight.

But the best news are that a new member has joined our executive Board: Ekko the Explosive. He will take charge of the heroic group of border patrols that brought our empire grilled spider before and with them form the 2nd Division of the Evil Inc. security force.



One of the rare occasions an employee is promoted in Evil Inc.

On day 21 a new settler began travelling to open a new factory in a very well protected backpocket within solid bedrock underground. There will be a stoneworks quarry, a goldmine and another spring of life in the immediate vicinity and only 2 ways from and to the city both accessible only from our borders. The Evil Inc. 2nd security force will make sure said backpocket is ready for habitation. Furthermore we have done some "racial retribution" for our vandalized Spydrone and killed 5 Gryphon riders. Turned out they had some Elven treasures, among them a "keeper bow" we think Yarati will like it. And finally my tireless economic patronage of goblins has been rewarded and I've been elevated into the ranks of "Goblin military protector". To celebrate this important day for our company we have issued a new Fort (Fort Rox) between 2 mountain ranges on the volcanic surface.

The reprint of this report will be continued in the next issue of **The Stronghelm Globe**. Also we want to encourage all whistleblowers to contact us:

The Stronghelm Globe

Inkling alley 13 ²²/₇

Stronghelm (Commonwealth)

We offer first class anonymity! Don't be afraid, expose today!

Famous Generals: DreadReapr

Stronghelm Globe (SG): Hei Dreadreapr, first would you like to tell the readers where you are from and what you do beside being one of the best AoW players?

Dreadreapr (DR): Hi! my real name is Akram from Lebanon, I am an inspector at the Lebanese General Security and a forex trader.

SG: How can we imagine Dreadreapr playing? Do you listen to a playlist while playing or the in-game background music? Observer mode on or off? Forced high speed tactical combat?

DR: I love to listen to a progressive house mix while playing on the strategic map but once a battle starts I switch to triumphs masterpiece battle soundtracks! Forced high speed is always on without animation and I cannot imagine anyone playing with observer mode on, its too annoying!

SG: When did you start playing Age of Wonders? Did you play previous installations before AoW3?

DR: I have some experience with Age of Wonders 2 Shadow Magic but it was only local duels with a friend, I don't consider it as a good experience because we only played noob, no rush matches.

I bought AoW3 at the first day of release, but unfortunately I didn't have a decent PC for it so I had too much lags and couldn't enjoy it, a few weeks later I bought a new PC and started playing multiplayer immediately.

SG: What do you think is the strongest race/class/spec combination and why?

DR: I don't think there is a strongest combination, each class and race has its counters. In my opinion map size and attack timing are major factors to know which combination is stronger. For example rogue will most likely win against warlord on a big map.

SG: Which race/class/spec are your favourites and for what reason?

DR: I ask myself the same question every time I look at the custom leader screen, its hard to choose because I played almost all combinations. I used to like economy combinations like warlord with grey guard master and expander. but that's not really effective any more since MP and competitive mods nerfed the warlord/greyguard gold income. So lately I am more into rushing instead of expanding, but I don't really have a favourite aggressive combination. I try to make the best of all

SG: I remember the first MP tournament was somewhat closely followed by the Devs and the winner (Ayenara) got a Hero in game as reward. Later tournaments have not received that attention. Do you sometimes feel that the Devs have abandoned the multiplayer community a bit?

DR: I do, what hurts the most is that they did not fix the multiplayer connection problems. Port forwarding didn't work most of the time to get rid of that silly red circle,² VPN is an alternative solution but it wasn't appealing to most mp players. I also think it's a big mistake that we are allowed to reload a save game, switch to other slots and check the opponents empire. Why? - So that we can play a live mp match on multiple sessions without worrying about cheating.

SG: You started your own Live MP ladder even though there already existed one on the-battlefield. Why did you do that and what is your response to people saying that you divided an already small community of players?

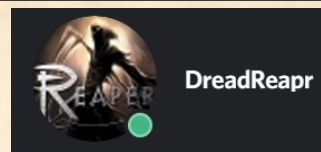
DR: I didn't want to create my own ladder but I had to try it because the live mp community had very little interest in the battlefield community. I thought that the main reason was the battlefields theme and structure but it turns out that live players are just lazy and not competitive enough.

SG: Your Discord Channel has been a big success, is there anything community related you wish the Devs would implement in the upcoming AoW:Planetfall?

DR: Thanks. My requests for Planetfall are to fix the multiplayer problems I already mentioned.

SG: What do you think is the biggest, or most common, mistake new players do when starting Multiplayer?

DR: They do not clear nearby AI camps as soon as possible and they often lose starting units very early because they have too high expectations towards the results of auto-battles.



DreadReapr, for a long time one of the strongest live MP players that has, within the last few years, become something like the "Godfather of Live MP". He started the [AoW3 discord group](#) and is organising [tournaments](#) while also keeping his own [Live MP balance mod](#) updated. While many of the once active top competitive players (e.g. Ayenara, Abednego, Azzazir, Jormungur...) have become inactive over the years DreadReapr stayed and is, by many, currently seen as the strongest AoW3 Live MP player.

²Editors remark: If you experience connection problems check this [guide](#). Unfortunately it doesn't always work.

SG: What would you say makes you such a strong AoW player?

DR: I would say it's my good economy management whether im playing aggressive or not.

SG: You upload [youtube videos](#) of your games that are all uncommented recordings of you playing. Could you think of commenting some in the future to help people understand what you are doing and why?

DR: I know its hard to learn how to play from uncommented videos, but I am not interested in commenting in the future.

SG: Who do you think are your strongest competitors in Live MP and what aspect of their gameplay is especially noteworthy?

DR: The strongest competitor in live mp is Abednego, he has his way to deal with my units spam with his strategic gameplay. Our tournament match lasted for more than 10 hours!³

SG: Is Abednego still active? If not who do you think are the currently strongest active Live MP players?

DR: AbedNego is currently inactive, at the moment there are few strong players like Orlyzzz, Griffith and Lehmanncup.

SG: You are organising a new [Live MP tournament](#) currently and even added 100\$ and AoW:Planetfall to the prize pool. Do you expect to win?

DR: Yes I do expect to win, if it happens the prize will be given to 2nd and 3rd place.

SG: Anything you want to say about the game that wasn't covered by the questions already?

DR: You pretty much covered all important questions, I just want to say that I really love this game and I'm looking forward to the Planetfall release.

Thank you for the interview! And good luck with the tournament.



³First Video of the match, you can find the other 3 on [DreadReaps channel](#), only for those brave enough to sit through 10 hours of house music...

Workshop

THE Workshop - Where new things are created and old favourites improved. For the first featured Mod we introduce the [PBEM and Single player Balance Mod](#), maintained by Hiliadan and Zaskow.

The PBEM & Single Player Balance Mod

The mod is led by **Hiliadan** who actively keeps asking active players for their opinion and testing on spells/units/abilities/classes. Due to the frequent rounds of proposals and polls on changes the mod is a true community mod. The modding is done by **Zaskow** who found the time to contribute a brief story on how he became the main modder on one of the probably most influential AoW3 mods.

But now for the actual changes this mod introduces: The most obvious change to the vanilla game when starting the PBEM-balance mod is probably the appearance of racial class units that look different, as well as watchtowers having different appearances depending on the builders race. Those changes are due to the [Racial Class Unit Reskin mod](#) made by **Tibbles** and the [Racial Watchtowers mod](#) made by **iHunterKiller** who have agreed that their mods are implemented in the PBEM-balance mod. But those changes are of cosmetic nature, the main intention and most changes of the mod were naturally made by changing the cost and/or stats of units, spells and abilities.



Orcs (left) and Dwarf (right) admiring their new watchtowers. - From iHunterKillers Racial Watchtower mod.

The most significant changes in the opinion of **The Stronghelm Globe** are briefly listed in no particular order. For more information we recommend the official [changelog](#) or the introduction [video](#).

- Convert abilities have been weakened significantly across the board. Mind controlled units are labelled *mind controlled* now and cost 25% more upkeep. Also *Inflict Ghoul course* was replaced with *Ghoul Strike* (a once per battle ability), *Charm*

has a lower chance to succeed and heroes can learn them at a later level. All T4 units got mind control immunity.

- Touch abilities from heroes don't give XP anymore, neither do spiders summoned at the Shrine of the Spider Queen. In general the amount of XP that can be gained during a fight has been reduced.
- The evolve mechanism has been nerfed. Snakes, Spiders (and in version 1.25 martyrs) now need to be on champion level to evolve.
- Elemental specialisations and Partisan have been buffed based on a [poll](#): The Domain of ... now also provide friendly units within the enchanted cities domain a buff in tactical combat (e.g. Domain of the Sun gives +1 fire damage). The Partisan spell *Hideout* has been replaced by a new spell named *Cloaked in Shadows* that gives a whole stack invisibility for 1 turn.
- Dreadnought has been buffed: The heroes can now learn new abilities e.g. *Lava Walking* and *Infuse Mana Fuel*, a 0 AP self buff that gives tireless, wall crushing, demolisher, reinforced and 40% shock weakness. Engineers got the ability to build roads.
- Halflings have been buffed, their T1s get *Lesser Mighty Meek* which gives them +1 phys damage/tier difference, and the *Nourishing Meal* from the brew brothers resets the *Throw Chicken* ability of farmers. Also halflings only have 15% physical weakness now instead of the 20% they have in the vanilla version.



A Dreadnought walking on Lava while casting temperate empire - Only possible with the PBEM balance mod.

Zaskow - The maker

Hi to all! I am Zaskow, the main and only coder of the [PBEM Balance Mod](#) (currently). If someone remembers, I wasn't happy about game balance for a very long time. I've created long threads on the official forum where I whined and complained about how vanilla game units are boring (no diversity at all), how some classes are weak and unbalanced etc. Therefore, when the devs released modding tools I was very glad – now I can make my own BALANCE! Well, the reality appears to be sadder and more cruel than I thought. My first balance mod for [live MP](#) wasn't very popular (now it's ~~abandoned~~ on pause) and I couldn't gather enough volunteers for testing. I couldn't even gather a few people for suggestions ☹. That was quite depressing – nobody needs my mod. Then Hiliadan found me and I offered my service as modder (he couldn't find any victims for that before).

Now I'll reveal some shocking information: The truth is I, the author and coder of PBEM Balance Mod, DIDN'T play even a single PBEM match at all! :D The reason is simple. I'm a pure live MP player, I don't like PBEM, because the absence of PvP tactical combats. AoW3 as global strategy with empire building is pretty weak and boring, in my opinion. In short, I don't know a little damn thing about PBEM balance at all. How is this possible? Don't know, deal with it. :D

If you want to know something about the PBEM Balance Mod, you should ask Hiliadan. He is a big boss here. < \begin praise for Hiliadan>.

All praise Hiliadan!

He gathers information and reviews about gameplay and balance problems, discusses them with core group of PBEM players (I'm not asked mostly :D), defines a solution for this issue, asks me about the possibility to implement this thing through modding tools and only after my positive answer I begin to work. Personally, I'm amazed how Hiliadan can handle this amount of work, free work I must add, – playing the game, talking and disputing with players, tech supporting, making different tables and documents for the mod, testing my bugged mod builds without launch test sometimes (:D), asking me to fix all this missed and overlooked bugs again and again with endless patience. In short, this mod can't be created without his hard work.

< \end praise for Hiliadan>

As for me I'll try to support this project as long as possible, however I'd like to see more changes in different versions and faster.



The warbreeds of goblins, elves, draconians, orcs, humans and dwarfs in unusual harmony next to each other. - From Tibbles Racial Class units reskin mod.

Horoscope

BloodyBattleBrains musings about the future

So... Planetfall? A.k.a what is it, and what is sci-fi anyway?

Planetfall was recently revealed and we're all excited.

Read [this thread](#) for a not so concise run down of what we know so far. What's interesting to me is that there are quite a few people who know nothing about Age of Wonders whose attention has been piqued. I guess that is one benefit of being part of Paradox, which is now worth a [couple of billion dollars](#) (20.93 billion Swedish krona = \$2.39 billion).

On the internet, I've seen and read various comparisons of Planetfall to [X-Com](#), [Beyond Earth](#) and [Alpha Centauri](#), among others. This is both good and bad imho. I'll elaborate:

It's good because X-Com is *fairly* well known, so drawing in new blood is always desirable. That also applies to the Beyond Earth crowd who maybe weren't so enamoured with how that game turned out. And of course, Alpha Centauri remains a giant in the gaming scene. How much of that is nostalgia versus a genuinely good game I don't know. I never played it (or Master of Magic or Master of Orion, so the nostalgia is weak in me. Interestingly enough, all the "gateway drug" games that got me into the hobby are all still available and playable- namely Battlezone (not ashamed to say it's kicking my arse), [Homeworld](#), [Starcraft](#), [Pharaoh](#) and the original [Age of Wonders](#)).

It's bad because these are powerful brands with considerable baggage behind them. Comparing a game to X-Com, for example, immediately makes me think of small squads, strange line of sight mechanics, mostly fun combat and RNG that will [piss you off](#) sooner or later. From what I know of Planetfall, someone thinking this is a game like X-com is going to be disappointed. Ditto people expecting Beyond Earth or Alpha Centauri. And let's face it, there are a lot of people who don't bother researching what they're buying. I saw one guy on the [Total War Center](#) forums complaining about the new Total war game, Thrones of Britannia, being too difficult because of the new recruitment mechanic (you recruit units at low strength and they take time to muster to full strength.) This new mechanic was talked to death in nearly every single interview/preview of ToB but this guy never got that.

So, the new game is going to be Age of Wonders' core mechanics (tactical combat layer, heroes, races and units), in a new setting/theme and with more empire building options. I was talking to an AoW3 colleague, and he



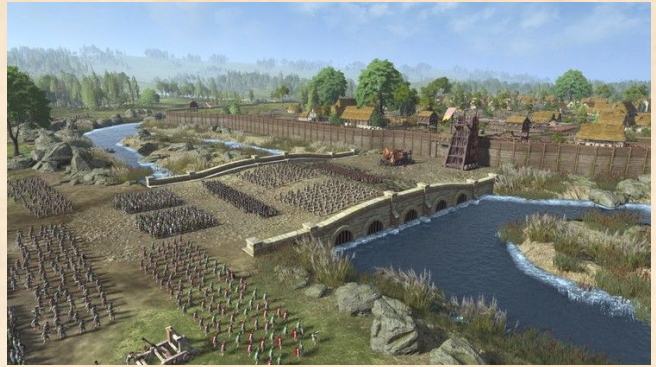
Btw, I have a signed copy of this poster, let the bidding begin



Battlezone: Game is challenging...or I am just weak

said to me he wasn't too happy with the new direction, and is going to wait for reviews before buying. Now, this is, imho, solid advice for any game:

- Wait for reviews (to refine this point, know which review sites/reviews accord with your thinking). I heartily recommend [Tom Chick](#) (because he always explains what he likes or dislikes about a game) and [Hentzau](#).
- Look at Let's Plays
- Know what game mechanics/theme you like and more importantly, dislike. For example, I am not a fan of one unit per tile, therefore I probably won't buy the new game [Gladius](#), even though I am a sucker for the cheesy, schlocky Warhammer 40k theme.



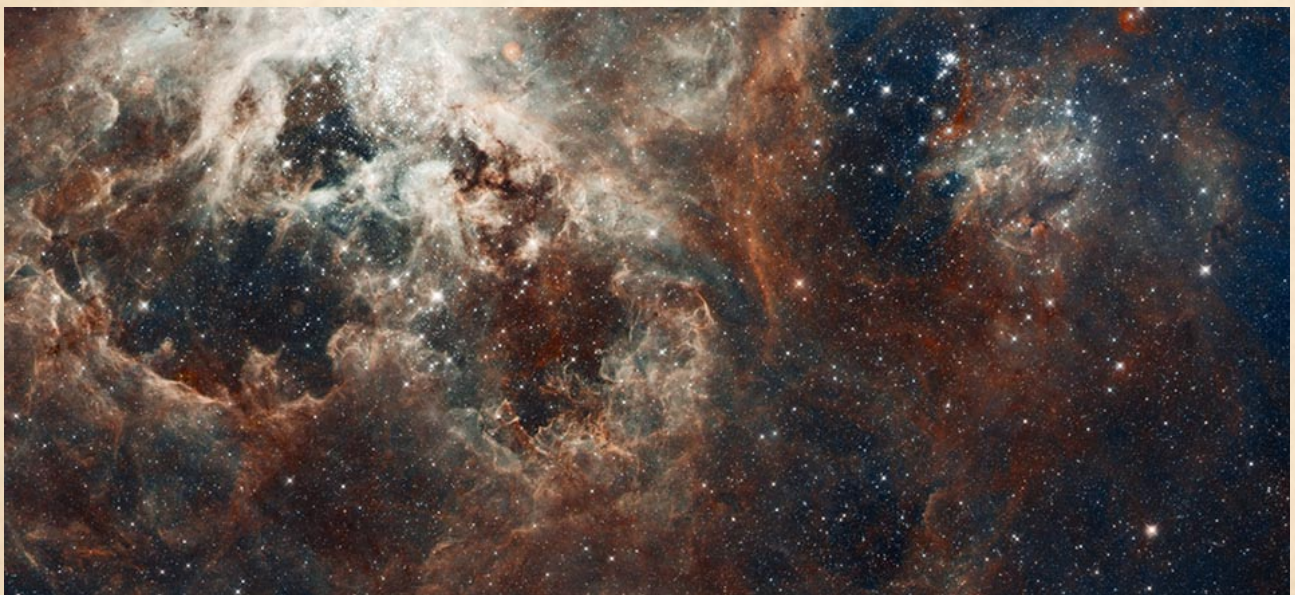
Total war - Thrones of Britannia: Game looks epic...but apparently isn't very good :(

When I asked him for more detail about his reservation, he said to me that science fiction without space is not science fiction, and that therefore Planetfall is not science fiction. I disagreed with this, but I'd like to know what you guys consider to be the hallmarks, or buzzwords, or tropes/clichés of science fiction. As an aside, Lennart himself said they're going for a mythological science fiction, so it's much more Star Wars (do I really need to link this?:P) and less [Contact](#). So, back to that friend.

He said Space is the final frontier for Humanity right now (I happen to think we should be focussing on the deep oceans btw, there's so much we don't know about our own oceans...) and therefore a sci-fi game has to have a space element. I said that a space layer like [Stellaris](#) would be pointless in Planetfall because we already have... Stellaris, not to mention several other games that specialise in this area, and are all pretty good. For example, Homeworld, Stars in Shadow, Sword in the Stars, Master of Orion, Endless Space. etc etc.



Alpha Centauri: One day I'll figure out what is actually going on here...



Space the final frontier?

In my opinion it'd dilute the AoW brand and result in bland gameplay. PLUS, the list of terrestrial based sci fi games is much shorter.

I mentioned Alpha Centauri and Beyond Earth earlier and should add [Pandora](#) to that list. Assuming those are the reference points, none of them have AoW's combat layer, which is probably the defining feature. One of those is an old game now, Beyond Earth was a Civ reskin (wasted opportunity imho, but I get the sense Firaxis is in a rut with Civ. . .) and Pandora was also very civ like. My point is, Planetfall has HUGE potential to bring something new to fans of Beyond Earth, Pandora, X-Com AND AoW.

Lastly, for me, science fiction isn't about space per se, but is about, imho, the final frontier of humanity. Now I emphasise humanity because what seems to be the underlying trope of most science fiction is a fear/fascination with technology and what that means for us. It goes all the way back to [Asimov's laws](#) (one could make the argument that it goes back even further, to the mists of time, and certainly the [Luddite](#) movement is worth mentioning, but for the purposes of this article, I'm starting at Asimov, as that is regarded as the birth of the sci-fi genre) and we see it in [Blade Runner](#) (btw, am I the only one who liked the [recent movie](#) more than the original?) and we even saw it in the X-Com [Enemy Within](#) expansion (asking the question of whether one would voluntarily be amputated in order to become one of the mechs there, and just how human you'd be after. . . people glossed over it but that's a deep sea to be explored). We see it currently with our [trepidation over AI](#), not to mention the [Matrix](#) films.

Seen in that light, I think Planetfall has huge potential to explore all the sci-fi tropes and maybe, just maybe, allow some thinking to happen.

In conclusion, speaking of AI, in my next article I'll go over what we know about Planetfall, and delve into the gameplay, and discuss what we (meaning me, egocentric that I am :P) want from the next game, and top of that list will be AI. I'll also start discussing other games and novels with a sci-fi theme, first of all the [Hyperion Cantos](#) (that'll take a while).



fun movie, when this came out, leather trench-coats became fashionable!

Announcement Board

Standings in current Tournaments:

PBEM Duel Tournament 2017:

The PBEM duel Tournament 2017 is currently determining who will face **Jean_de_Metz** in the finals. Jean beat the previously unbeaten **GabtheGab** as Orc Sorcerer (with Gab playing Tigran Necromancer). Now Gab is facing **Hiliadan**, who after recently beating marcuspers also has the chance to make it to the finals. Hiliadan is also one of the few players that publishes and comments his PBEM turns so players interested in competitive PBEM games can watch his videos on [youtube](#).



The Live MP Beginners Tournament 2017:

Petracke has won the **Live MP beginners tournament** - Congratulations! In the final he played as draconian necromancer facing **Travastila** who played as dwarven rogue. It culminated in a final battle in turn 38 when Travastila attacked the main army of Petracke with 4 stacks, alas Travastilas assassins proved to be no match for Petrackes army (including a Phoenix!). Petracke remains unbeaten in this tournament to the end. Travastila lost in the first round of the tournament against El Lobo but fought back through the complete losers bracket and made it to the finals - congratulation for this achievement too.



The tournaments final Battle (courtesy of Petracke).

The PBEM 2v2 team tournament 2016:

Started in 2016 this double elimination tournament is in it's final stage, the finals... Facing off against each other are: Team **Coup de Grâce** consisting of **Tussel** and **Gabthegab** (undefeated until now) and Team **Bastards of the North** formed by **Ezekiel** and **AIXStormrage** that fought their way through the losers bracket and now have the chance to take revenge for being sent to the losers bracket by team Coup de Grâce already in the 2nd round of the tournament.

3vs3 PBEM Tournament 2018:

4 Teams are participating, each consisting of 1 expert player and 2 newer players. So far no match has ended. The teams are:

- **Team 1st** led by the tournament organiser Skuns453Lirik902 with the other members being Nub Nub and Akinos. They play against:
- **3 fistfuls of wonder** led by Ezekiel and his companions Longinus and DiaEmperador.
- **Dos Equis XX** led by (brew)master \$eer together with El Lobo and Badok is currently facing:
- **Fancy Name Team** led by AIXStormrage with his faithful game assistants Zytozid and Fluksen.^a

We will keep you updated if anything happens!

^aDisclaimer: Fluksen is a cheap smurf of Fluks who writes this text, so beware :D

Upcoming:

Live MP Duel Tournament

You are a (wo)man of action?! You are going wild in tactical combat? You always wanted to test yourself against the Dreadreapr, Griffith and Orlyzzz Live MP-triumphirate?

Hurry and [enlist now in the Live Multiplayer Tournament!](#)

2vs2 PBEM Team Tournament

Hear ye Strategic Masterminds, teamplayers and exploiters of game mechanics: The 2018 PBEM 2v2 team tournament is near!

So grab your strategically retarded friend and prove that you can win nonetheless.

The sign up will start soon on the-battlefield.



The Shadow Realms Mod:

Bugs? Shadows? Darkness? Does that tickle your inner Goblin? The gates to the Shadow realm are about to open and brave souls have the possibility to venture into these promising lands even before the gates are fully opened. Want to know more? Contact [Gatemaster Hiliadan](#) for ways into [the Shadow realm](#).



Writers and Artists needed:

Whistleblowers, Artists, Writers, Poets, Modders and virtual limelight hogs: [The Stronghelm Globe](#) needs your input!

You have leaked intelligence reports about fights?

- Leak them to us!

You wrote a poem/story? - Write it to us!

You drew an okey-ish (or better) drawing? - Send it to us!

Contact us:

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