

# The Stronghelm Globe

News from the Commonwealth and beyond  
Since 229 YC



## **The Shadow Wars** The lost tales of Ambir



**The Shadow realm mod:**  
Explore the fabled gates of the past



**The grand finale:**  
Sverina the Golden  
VS  
Krinla Peas



**Interview:**  
Hiliadan -  
President of PBEM

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## Letter to the Readers

I ELOVED wise and knowledgable citizen of  
II Stronghelm, the commonwealth or other-  
wise. We present you the 5th and, with  
V heavy heart, final issue of **The Stronghelm  
Globe**. Unfortunately our ranks of reporters never  
were overcrowded. Now, that more and more of our  
VIII reporters start staring at the stars trying to catch  
glimpses of the future instead of searching for new sto-  
ries in Athla we are not able to provide adequate cov-  
XII erage anymore and that at times when great things are  
happening! Not only are the stars coming closer, even  
XIV here on Athla things are unfolding at speed, the shadow  
realm that only the most lucky and daring adventurers  
have glimpsed so far has opened, in fact shadow gates  
are popping up all over and a good deal of this issue is  
dealing with this new phenomenon.

The overture of this issue of **The Stronghelm Globe** is made by a piece about the Shadow Wars as described in "The History Of the Shadow wars: The Draconian perspective" by the legendary Ambir - draconian brood mother on page II. We hope this information will help those that dare venture ot this mystical realm, but also help the educated public to tell fact from fiction in these times where you can barely escape the completely fictitious tales from the shadow realm told by drunkards as soon as you enter a tavern in Stronghelm. Next we have the current standings in tournaments held in Athla if you want to find new challenges and in the announcement section oddities such as Tibbles waxworks wait for your visit!

Thereafter we printed the last communications we got from Sverina the Golden and Krinla Peas, their rivalry stays violent and leads to the grand finale of the two mighty leaders clashing (page VIII).

Another great general, not only on the battlefields, but also one of the leading figures in the (re)discovery of the shadow gates is Hiliadan. We talk with him on page XII about the past and coming battles as well as about the Shadow realm.

This issues workshop section is written by the honourable expedition forces that relentlessly paved the way to the shadow gates so that they are now slowly becoming accessible to the public and we highly recommend any traveler to read what they have to tell about this new world (see page XIV).

There is no horoscope section in this issue, anyone interested in news from the skies - we highly recommend checking the Star Unions official [message board](#).

Enjoy the last issue and say hello when you meet us in Athla!

Sincerely yours,

**The Stronghelm Globe**

(Fluks/en, Draxynnic, BloodyBattleBrain and Rhaeg)

## Lore: An Abridged History of the Shadow Wars

*Along with all other works by Draconian authors, Ambir's "The History Of The Shadow Wars: The Draconian Perspective" was suppressed by Voraditius Pontifex Maximus. With his replacement by Nomlik Trismegistus, this restriction has been lifted. While the complete works contained detailed, if not necessarily unbiased, accounts of the battles in which draconians took part, her introduction serves as an overall summary to the events of the Shadow Wars.*



*Ambir was the Draconian Wizard and brood mother, originally learning the arts of wizardry under Tempest before his downfall. She fought both for and against Phobius during the Shadow Wars, and while she did not fight in the final battle herself, she dispatched a contingent of Draconians to aid in the fighting. Many historians, however, consider her to have been primarily motivated by self-interest. Her current fate and whereabouts are unknown.*

**T**HE restoration of the Wizard's Throne was supposed to restore peace to Athla. However, the hope of peace was short-lived. The return, however temporary, of Inioch and the energies unleashed in the final battle had weakened the barriers between Athla and realms beyond, and attracted the notice of inhabitants of that realm. The Shadow Demons and their Syron slave-soldiers struck first at Evermore, capturing and imprisoning Merlin and Inioch's followers alike. This was only the initial strike - before long, nodes across Athla were collapsing to form Shadow Portals, and insectile demons were swarming out. With Tempest gone, it fell to me to rally the Draconians and drive the demons from our territories - but other parts of the Blessed Continent were not so lucky, and this was only the beginning of the Shadow Demon War.

The people, naturally, blamed the Wizards, and the soon-to-be Emperor Phobius was quick to take advantage. Having somehow unlocked the secrets of Wizard magic for himself, Phobius proclaimed that the unrestrained use of magic was at fault, and that he alone could bring magic under control. All magical beings were therefore to submit to him, or be destroyed.



*Emperor Phobius proclaimed the abolition of all magic, except for that of his allies.*

Against the prospect of the Shadow Demons consuming the world, the Phobian Empire seemed the lesser evil. I had heard rumours that Queen Julia was seeking to rally the elves, dwarves, and halflings against both, and had won battles against Phobius in the Norwood and the Sanctuary Woods, but I was sceptical of what she could do - she had, after all, failed to restrain the Humans from hunting dragons, the Wizards from bringing chaos and disaster to the world, or even to prevent herself from being kidnapped and being made a vessel for the spirit of Inioch. My early victories against the Shadow Demons had impressed the people of the Phobian Empire, and thus I was able to establish myself as an ally of the empire... at least for the time being.

Through some quirk of our draconic ancestry, my people were the only natives of Athla which could naturally walk the Shadow World without suffering the

disorienting effects that most other races felt within that realm. As a result, any hope of taking the war back to the Shadow Demon hives in their own realm seemed to fall on us. I was not to lead these battles myself, however - instead, I was assigned to escort a Syron prisoner to the Drakar Oasis in the deserts of Kesh.

It was there that I first clashed with one of Julia's allies. The natives of Kesh were a nomadic people, survivors of the Azrac Empire which had blended with human stock. The wizard Ke'nan had just come out on top of a power struggle among his own people, and he used his newfound strength to strike at my forces as they camped at the oasis, driving them from the field and rescuing the prisoner.



*Ambir's defeat at the Drakar Oasis allowed Julia's coalition to find new allies against the Shadow Demons.*

I did not know it at the time, but my defeat then was a turning point of the war. The prisoner was not a slave-soldier of the Shadow Demons, but the Syron wizard O'neron, who had escaped from their yoke. With the information he provided, Julia's allies were able to take the war to the Shadow World, destroying multiple Shadow Demon hives and freeing enough of those Syrons whose minds had not yet been broken to spark a rebellion.

Meanwhile, Phobius grew ever more paranoid. Fearing that his general Vorsar plotted to overthrow him, Phobius sent Vorsar on a suicide mission that led to his capture by the Shadow Demons - an experience that his sanity did not survive. I knew that if Phobius' paranoia had grown to the point where he struck against his oldest ally, that it would only be a matter of time until he turned on me as well. When Julia's brother Meandor began to advance on Stronghelm, I saw my opportunity, aligning myself with Meandor against the Phobian Empire.

Weeks later, that empire was no more. Meandor's Dark Elves, augmented by undead warriors animated by Meandor's necromantic arts and Shadow Demons that Meandor had raised from larvae captured in previous battles against the hives and bent to his will, systematically wore down Stronghelm's defences until Phobius was slain and Meandor claimed the capital.



*Meandor's liberation of Stronghelm marked the end of Phobius' reign, allowing the remaining Wizards to focus their efforts against the Shadow Demons.*

Further east, however, the Shadow Demons were launching another invasion, converting much of the land in the region into the stuff of the Shadow World. My former prisoner, O'neron, rallied the survivors of the region, holding out against waves of demons until the rebelling Syrons arrived to relieve them, driving the Shadow Demons back. He would then push east, into lands increasingly corrupted by the demons.

His objective was the Sunbirth Mountains. Somehow, Julia and her allies had been directed by Merlin, despite his captivity by the Shadow Demons, and now he guided O'neron to the site of his prison. The rebellious wizards that Merlin had brought to heel - Yaka, Mab, Serena, Nekron, Nimue, and my former master, Tempest - had been enslaved by the Shadow Demons to serve as guardians to the prison. O'neron defeated them one by one, and released the bindings of Merlin's prison.

With Merlin freed, the stage was set for the final battle of the Shadow Demon War. Merlin had identified a location from which the central hive of the Shadow Demons could be reached, and where the All-Devourer, the overmind of the Shadow Demons, was vulnerable. Each of the wizards that had previously been guided by Merlin gathered at the location, but the All-Devourer struck back fiercely with the most powerful forces at its disposal, destroying the armies of several of Merlin's allies and taking the wizards prisoner. Despite these setbacks, Merlin rallied his forces in underground fortresses and found a means to punch through to the Shadow World, destroying the Shadow Demon hives, rescuing prisoners of all races that were being kept by the demons, and ultimately destroying the All-Devourer.

The end of the Shadow Wars came with one important concession to the magical races of the world. While the Archons had previously demanded that the Elves and other magical races depart the world to make room for humans to dominate, they had seen how human xenophobia had almost destroyed Athla's ability to fight back, and how it had been the efforts of the magical



*The central node of the hive mind of the Shadow Demons, the destruction of the All-Devourer would send the Shadow Demons into disarray.*

races that had prevented Athla from being overrun. In recognition of this, they formally relinquished their demand, giving Athla over to the elves and their allies as long as they promised that the humans that resided on Athla would be maintain their dignity and freedom. Shortly afterwards, the Archons would join with the Syrons in departing Athla, seeking to reclaim the Shadow World in its entirety.

But from the perspective of the people of Athla, the Shadow Wars were ended, and peace had finally come.

Sources: The games: AOW2, AOW:SM

# Announcement Board

## Standings in current Tournaments:

### The 2018 PBEM 2v2 team tournament

Is in full swing the team Pandocalypse (formed by Jean\_de\_Metz and Hellbrick) as well as the Team Mab's Sons (consisting of Hiliadan and Gladis) have so far been confirming their status as favourites and reached Round 3 without losses and are currently faced by team Reckless Mortals (Retromancer and Mahimka) and Xlnt & Henry respectively who also made it to Round 3 without losses. But also the losers bracket is filled with strong teams that shouldn't be disregarded just yet. Among others Marcus & dreadreapr, Ezekil & AixStormrage, \$eer & Lck all are very strong teams that can easily put up a fight to the teams still in the winner brackets.



### The PBEM 2v2 team tournament 2016:

Congratulations to Team **Coup de Grâce** consisting of **Tussel** and **Gabthegab** who won the finals against Team **Bastards of the North** formed by **Ezekiel** and **AIXStromrage** the latter fought their way through the losers bracket but were again beaten by team Coup de Grâce. This win is yet another victory on the impressive crown of GabtheGab after also winning the 2017 PBEM Duel tournament!

### PBEM Duel Autocombat Tournament 2019

This new tournament format organised by Dreadreapr is a PBEM tournament with all fights on autocombat to circumvent players abusing the AI for XP farming and converting units. It is a single elimination best of 1 tournament that is soon entering the semifinals. The first semifinal will be SleepingDog vs Mahimka. Satonirs opponent still is to be decided but it will be the winner of Marcus vs Henrysix.

### 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.<sup>a</sup>

We will keep you updated if anything happens!

<sup>a</sup>Disclaimer: Fluksen is a cheap smurf of Fluks who writes this text, so beware :D

**Mixed:  
Tactical Challenge - episode 01**

You want to improve your skills in tactical battles? Or you think you're already the best and you want some challenging opponents? Come try yourself vs Imanuit, a Frostling Sorcerer AI with an impressive army! So far, six players have beaten the level 1 of the Challenge and only two players completed its level 2! Follow the [instructions here](#) to set up the challenge, design and build carefully your army with the limited resources, fight Imanuit, and share the results with the rest of the community! Maybe the [video of the victory of Blackwill](#) can inspire you?





You always wanted to see a:  
**Dragon?**

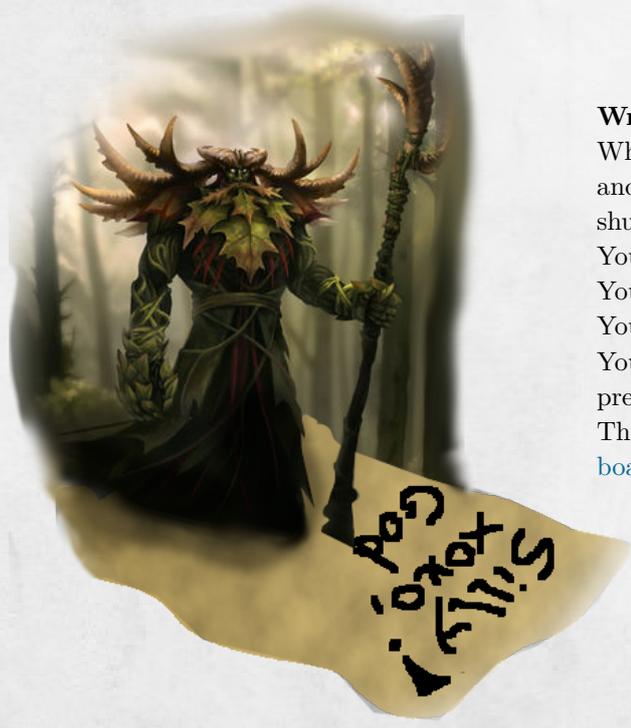
But don't like to get burned? - Here's your chance! Visit the new exhibition of waxworks in Stronghelm. Everything you've ever heard of and more - right here:

Tibbles Waxworks  
 Sculpture Alley 5  
 Stronghelm (Commonwealth)

Veterans and Tigran kittens get a discount at the entrance.

**The Shadow Realms Mod:**

Bugs? Shadows? Darkness? Does that tickle your inner Goblin? The gates to the Shadow realm are open and brave souls have the possibility to venture into these promising lands follow [this path](#) but make sure you read the information in the our newspaperwell to be prepared and don't say we didn't warn you, the **The Stronghelm Globe** can not be made responsible for the horrors you might encounter there.



**Writers and Artists needed:**

Whistleblowers, Artists, Writers, Poets, Modders and virtual limelight hogs: **The Stronghelm Globe** is shutting down.  
 You have leaked intelligence reports about fights?  
 You wrote a poem/story?  
 You drew an okey-ish (or better) drawing?  
 You've been busy in the workshop and want to present the results?  
 Then we suggest the official town halls [notice board](#).

## War Diaries

These are the last and reports from the battle between Sverina and Krinla that reach the Stronghelm Globe. The first batch is printed in *issue 3* and the 2nd part in *issue 4* of *The Stronghelm Globe*. As always: The opinions presented are not those of *The Stronghelm Globe*.

**W**HAT happened so far: Sverina the Golden, a vivid reader of our paper, is on an expeditionary trip to examine the fabled seals of power. While setting up her foothold in the region she meets the wanted human necromancer Malchar the Unholy, a draconian Theocrat named Fai Dural Dzirikon and Krinla Peas - a radical environmental activist and Halfling Archdruid strongly opposing any magic tampering in what she calls "the natural order of things".

Sverina quickly deals with Malchar cleansing and taking command of his base. But Fai and Krinla are becoming serious threats to her. In the very south of the map near Sverinas newly "acquired" frostling town of Fisskala, Krinlas army jumps on her sending Sverina to the void. But Sverina is not easily cowed and plots revenge, unfortunately though while in the void our contact with Sverina broke and for this last part we only have the propaganda from Krinla Peas.

The game is between BloodyBattleBrain (BBB) and Fluks on a medium size continents map with seals (40 charges to win). Apart from BBB and Fluks there are 2 random AIs on emperor difficulty. There are no teams at the beginning, but team victory is on. The underground has been disabled, cosmic events and empire quests enabled. Heroes match players race. The game is played without mods. Gentlemens agreements are: Manual fights only between main players, no split stacking and no attacks in the beginning of a turn.

### The Story of Krinla Peas

#### The 8th week

It is already day 51 as we return to Fisskala and spot another one of Sverinas henchmen - a Priest, unfortunately he is just out of our reach and we expect he will be joined by the rest of Sverinas coming army soon. As we approach we are hit by a thunderstorm out of the blue sky and the Sky above Fisskala becomes a crimson read, a dread omen. At least Pimton is near by now and he can even take a look at the fabled Seal of Veve Falonxar. On day 52 Sverinas army comes unexpectedly from the eastern mountains towards Fisskala and we decide to attack before the last of her reinforcements have caught up with this sizeable force. The battle turns into a disaster.

Our troops are already downtrodden by the Dread Omen on the sky and the cold snow under their feet, but Kipper is also plagued by doubt and can barely move. He tries to encourage himself but it does not help and while he contemplates about his life in misery several of Sverinlas magically corrupted adepts manage to stun him with their fairy fire and the knights come in and finish our poor Kipper.

In response I charge forward, thankfully protected by a Spell of Hastra and bathe Sverinas army in fire, a trick I learned from Pimtons report about the battle against the Fire Rogue. But with Kipper fallen and the Shamans and Cockatrice repeatedly missing their chance to entangle/petrify we find no way to deal with the knights who even seem happy slaying all the endangered species that we took into our care. And so our army ends up being slaughtered by Sverinas Knights and Fisskala will have to bear the yoke of Sverinas Rule again.

The rest of the week is quickly told. My memory is hazy, but while I way fighting my way back from the Void Pimton retreats further south to secure our southern flank against Sverina, which turns out to be very necessary as Sverina is relentlessly trying to ditch our peasful lands into chaos by sending hit and run troops from Fisskala. Pimton and his army manage to intercept an eagle



*Even the strongest heroes can have a bad day*

rider, a gryphon, a civic guard and a watcher + apprentice, but ultimately it comes down to an extraordinary lucky and brave adventurer who valiantly defends our town of Edensprings against an eagle rider that slipped past Pimton.

As if Sverina alone would not be trouble enough the Theocrat Fais greed grows daily and we sent Lardo the builder, who was protecting our realm until now towards Fais realm to keep an eye on him. A wise move as is proven on day 54. Fai takes the Seal of Apotrepein. We urge him to stop this madness! But he only pretends to listen leaving the Seal of Apotrepein just to take the Seal of Lemegeton the next day. This is enough and the day we return we decide he will not get peas from us again and declare war on him. This maniac has to be stopped before he destroys our designated nature reserve!

### The 9th week

As expected Fais greed has led him back to the seal of Apotrepein and we are afraid to say that he is making good progress in his unholy deed to open them up and let whatever is calling him from behind spill over in this untainted natural paradise (well, tainted by the presence of Fai and Sverina, but they shall be cleansed soon enough).

Fais plans are crossed quickly and decisively when Lardo the builder and former protector of our realm arrives with his army on the Seal of Yinxus, located on the border between Fai and our realm, and offers his life to drive Fai away into the Void. RIP Lardo you are now resting among the other great Halfling Heroes Kipper the Tireless and Rikky the Kidnapper, we must find a way to bring you back or Pimton and me will have to finish this alone. And while Sverina is moving suspiciously close to the Seal of Falonxar in the south, the remains of Lardos army in the north keep his memento alive and fight off an approaching shrine of smiting on day 58. Truly the world is burning but nature tries to protect itself and a strong group of elementals appear at the seal of Falonxar and even Sverina starts to see that Fai must be stopped and even though we have not forgotten Sverinas ruthless, but fortunately unsuccessful attacks, we settle for an uneasy "no attack" agreement in the south.

Meanwhile Fais army of zealots is not accepting the loss of Yinxus and only with great effort and bravery Lardos former border patrol manages to keep the Seal of Yinxus secured. We make notes to erect a memorial sign with the names of the fallen at this place in the future nature reserve.



*The border patrols heroic last stand.*

We arrive on day 61 to finally release the brave remains of the border patrol and liberate Fais city of Vhushell without meeting resistance. We are now bound to bring justice to Fai for his many transgressions.

In the meanwhile Sverina takes the seals of Apotrepein and Lemegeton and is now sitting on 2 seals letting me do all the work, typically. We are a bit afraid that our work to save this region from Fai might lead to Sverina opening the seals nonetheless, the ruthless witch has already cold bloodedly burned down the native frostling town of Fisskala in the south. Nothing good can be expected from her once Fai is gone.

### The 10th Week

It can't be helped Fai must be brought to justice and on day 63 we finally arrive in front of Fais throne, Fai the wimp ran away, but it is of no use, flying on our self hatched frost wyvern we spot him on his boat in the very north and for once we don't feel like mercy and finally on day 65 we make sure that he'll be gone from this lands for a long long time.

Of course as soon as Sverina gets wind of Fais demise her whole army suddenly turns and Pimton, who is close



*With the help of Horned Gods we make sure that this land is finally freed from Fai Dural.*

by in the middle of the map has to flee south. Fortunately he escapes for now, and as we still travel back from the north towards Fais former capital to plan our next moves my shamans and an eagle rider bring grim tidings. It seems all cities in the south that were under the yoke of Sverina have been razed and plundered and burned to the ground. What a shame we really would have liked to train the inhabitants of those settlements to become park rangers for our planned nature reserve, so that they can stand up to poachers like Sverina in the future. But it seems too late now. Thanks to Sverina frostlings and their mammoths are extinct in this part of Athla now. My trustworthy frostwyvern is the only living remnant of arctic life that once settled and lived here. But back to pressing matters Sverina controls the Seal of Apotrepein and on day 65 an army under her banner appears on the doors of Lax Mihin, a draconian city that has become my vassal since we freed them of the plague of the Fire rogue long ago. On day 66 Sverinas army overwhelms the draconian defenses and starts plundering the city. Is she planning to extinguish even the draconian population after her genocide on the frostlings? Furiously we come from the north to help our allies, killing Fai Dural and his troops was a necessary culling to help the draconian society to free themselves of his bad influence but what Sverina is doing now preying on the draconians is something utterly different. We manage to retake Lax Mihin and extinguish the flames, in the process we also catch a good chunk of the plundering army, but unfortunately the theocrat that was leading charge escapes with some troops heading towards the next draconian vassal *Vhushell* in the east.



*Parts of Sverinas army are caught looting the outskirts of Lax Mihin.*

Now we'll need to install a new government in Lax Mihin, the old one has been slaughtered by Sverinas troops. And while Lax Mihin is preparing the elections for a new government we find ourself in hot pursuit of the army that takes Vhushell on day 67, we can see it burning but again couldn't prevent the calamities, we are one step behind. Meanwhile terrible news come from Lax Mihin: Sverina herself has brought a big army and took the unprepared devastated city easily while we were trying to prevent the massacre in Vhushell without avail. But we wonder how long she can keep this unhonourable hit and run tactic going our scouts report nothing but burned earth wherever they go. In the meanwhile Pimton has grouped up with a fresh stack of pony riders and leads this army now from the south, he is far away from any of Sverinas stacks, but at least he can make sure the mid and south will not fall into her hands.

On day 68 we free Vhushell apologizing for our late arrival as Sverinas plundering stack again has moved eastwards heading now for the Seal of Yinxus, we decide to stop our pursuit here because we are worried about Fais former throne Urnez, the biggest amount of draconians around under my protection and Sverina can move her army there from Lax Mihin. So we rally our troops and not in vain as it seems. Sverina has left her army and charged forward like the mad witch she is. It seems she wants to settle this right now in a duel and is

standing before the gates of Urnez barking her challenge. I notice that I am not the only one who is riding a frost wyvern, it seems Sverina has abducted one during her plundering sprees in the south and is now riding it into battle. So on day 69 the two last beasts of the arctic and their riders meet on the volcanic fields of Urnez to decide the fate of this part of Athla. The fight is one sided, I can summon some ancestral spirits from these battlegrounds that remember Sverinas crimes and help me in battle. The magic tricks Sverina uses on her weapons are not sufficient to stand the wrath of the spirits and my bow. Sverina falls and this part of Athla finally finds peas.



*The final clash.*

## Famous Generals: Hiliadan

**Stronghelm Globe (SG):** Hi Hiliadan. First would you like to tell where you are from and what you do beside playing AoW3?

**Hiliadan (HD)** Hi! I'm French and I'm based in Paris, where I came back recently after 3 years in China. I'm working in environmental protection.

**SG:** How do you play? Do you listen to a playlist while playing or the in-game background music? Observer mode on or off? Forced high speed tactical combat? Animated movement on the map?

**HD::** When I don't play, I listen music all the time, but when I play, I just go with the AoW3 music. I think it's not the strength of the game, unlike other games which have very good music (for instance tracks from EVE Online are in my playlist of favourite songs) but it's good enough.

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

**HD::** I'd like to refer readers of the Stronghelm Globe to an [interview](#) for 3rd place of the 2017 PBEM Duel Tournament where I detailed that. :P

**SG:** You are managing the PBEM and Single player balance mod, the Shadow realms expansion mod, play "academy games" to introduce newcomers, comment and upload your PBEM tournament games turn by turn, organise PBEM tournaments and, together with markymark, run [the-battlefield.com/aow3](http://the-battlefield.com/aow3) page - Which of these deeds to the community do you find most interesting and why?

**HD::** Mmh, it's a hard question, I find all of them interesting otherwise I would not do it! The Shadow Realm Community Expansion is a really nice project, which goes a bit beyond the rest, because it's a big team project where my contribution is nothing without all the work of the rest of the team. It's really nice to see unpaid volunteers like us managed to build something so big and comprehensive together. Each of us is good at one particular bit (3D models, icons, modding, map making, lore, etc.) but put together, it creates a comprehensive experience for players, which I hope many will enjoy!

- Which one is the most important one you think?

**HD::** The PBEM & Single Player balance mod has probably been the most important so far. I would not be playing AoW3 any more without it because the game is just so broken without it. It would also not be possible to organise tournaments without it as games would be totally unfair, unbalanced and trashed in less than 10 turns like it used to be.

- Which one do you like the least?

**HD::** None of the things you listed but I do dislike some debates which happened about the fact that the balance mod was not moving fast enough or that some changes should have been made regardless of the opinion of the community. I learnt many things on a personal perspective through all these experiences in AoW3, things that are useful in real life. One of them was that there are many advantages to consulting many people with different opinions to take decisions (i.e. doing it as in a democracy and not an autocracy), even if it is slower and messier: the decisions taken are better overall (sometimes you see that only in hindsight) and they have a strong legitimacy.

**SG:** The first AoW3 tournament (I believe organised by BBB) got support from Triumph, since then there have been plenty more tournaments, but to my knowledge, they weren't endorsed or officially supported by Triumph. Do you feel that Triumph could or should do more in that regard?

**HD::** Definitely! I was actually in touch with Triumph to try to get some support but unfortunately, they did not have a budget or a person to help with that. I do hope to get a small prize related to Planetfall for the last AoW3 tournament I'm going to organise in June.

**SG:** If you had a free wish for the AoW community, what would it be?



Hiliadan, a player who influenced the AoW3 PBEM community more than anyone else. He is everywhere. Hiliadan is one of the main admins on [the-battlefield](#), the organizer of the [PBEM-balance mod](#) as well as the [Shadow realm mega-mod/community expansion](#). Additionally he hosts academy games to help newcomers get a foothold in PBEM and is the most active organizer of AoW3 tournaments. With all that it's sometimes easy to forget that he is also one of the most active and strongest PBEM players (currently rank 3 on the PBEM ladder). He is also the person with probably the highest number of competitive AoW3 [youtube videos](#). If you are interested at all in competitive PBEM - these videos are the most instructive ones you can possibly find.

**HD::** Let everyone who ever played AoW3 know that there is a community expansion (once it's ready and released, which will be soon I hope) and interest them all to come back and play again, so that we have a surge of active players and it brings new life into the multiplayer (live and PBEM) community. I think AoW3 has enormous replayability and could still be played for years.

**SG:** What was your favourite AoW3 match and why?

**HD::** Two matches come to my mind: a 2vs2 game with rickyroo in the 2016 2vs2 Team Tournament ([link](#)) where I had an epic run with a Dwarf Rogue hero which I enjoyed a lot, even if it ended very badly. In that game, we crushed several waves of attacks from rrrrookie, it was really nice to be able to defend and play in team like that. The second match was the Top 8 game where most of the best PBEM players were gathered for a totally epic 8 players FFA. I had a really tough time playing Dwarf Dreadnought and making many mistakes but it was a grand game with a lot of twists and really nice moves, and very clever play from Jean. It was really a pleasure to play against very high level opponents as I really had to think about each move and play as best as I could. That's one reason why I enjoy multiplayer: play vs clever humans and not predictable AI. In both cases, I have videos of the matches on my [YouTube channel](#) I had many great matches in truth, that's why I kept playing. :D For instance I also liked very much a match I played with Blight & Ice team and Jean de Metz, where we had a great time battling the Italians (the Sinners team) with Jean. :)

**SG:** What do you think was the most annoying mistake/blunder you made in a game so far?

**HD::** Many to choose from!!! In that 2vs2 vs Jonny Thunder and rrrrookie, I totally screwed up by attacking a Vault of Knowledge with my Dwarf Rogue, who was otherwise pretty unkillable. Without that, the game might have ended differently as I think she could have attacked them on her own (+ reinforcements collected along the way).

**SG:** Is there any aspect of the game that you are particularly strong at (tactical combat, economy, strategic movement, clearing sites etc.)?

**HD::** I think one of my strengths compared to others is to pay a lot of attention and dedicate a lot of resources to scouting. I am better than average at tactical combat but not as good as cbowser was for instance (AoW3 legend for the old players ;)).

**SG:** What do you think is your biggest weakness?

**HD::** I'm not that good at empire building (unlike Jean for instance) but my biggest weakness is probably that I usually take too much risk and hamper myself by taking big losses which could be avoided.

**SG:** What is the biggest mistake new players tend to make in your opinion?

**HD::** Clearly not expand and not be aggressive enough! AoW3 is all about expanding and clearing all the time. You can't have iddle units or iddle cities. You need to be always pushing the limits of your empire.

**SG:** What are your thoughts on Planetfall?

**HD::** It looks interesting but I'm not very excited by it as I still feel I have so much to explore in AoW3 (in particular many mods I haven't had the chance to play yet). I plan to switch to Planetfall only after one or two semester, when it's more stabilised and I have had time to play more AoW3.

**SG:** Do you have plans for a the-battlefield planetfall page?

**HD::** I think it would be useful unless Triumph does it themselves (but it looks like they won't). I think it needs some people very dedicated to run such a Battlefield community and it won't be me!

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

**HD::** As I said in the other interview: watch [my videos](#) (and those of [Marcus](#)), check out the [Wikia](#), and come play PBEM with us! :)

Thank you for the interview!

## Workshop

The Workshop - This time we have 3(!) members of the honourable circle of shadowrealm, the most knowledgeable sages regarding this mythic realm giving you valuable insights. The mod can be obtained here: [Shadow Realm Community Expansion – Content](#)

[Shadow Realm Community Expansion – RMG Integration](#)

and relies on the [Decodence - Map editor content](#) and the [Decodence RMG integration](#).

# SHADOW REALM

Greetings, Athlans and those from the worlds beyond! With the announcement of Age of Wonders III, there was one big question on many fans' minds: Will we see the return of the Shadow Realm and its denizen, even though it was supposedly sealed by Merlin? After much anticipation, the answer was "No", even with the Golden Realms and Eternal Lords expansions. However, the canon events of those campaigns culminate with the breaking of a seal and the likely reopening of a Shadow Gate!

Many of us sorely missed the Shadow Realm, but when Triumph finally released the mod tools for AoW3, there was now the possibility of bringing that realm back. Thanks to Charlatan's work on the Decodence content, the Shadow Realm was once again a playable layer on custom made maps. However, the brainstorming began to get that layer incorporated into AoW3's random map generator as well as populating it with new structures, races, and dwellings. In those discussions, much speculation regarding the lore came up: What happened since the living Archons and legions of Dark Elves marched off through the last Shadow Gate before it was sealed? Did any of them survive? Are the Shadow Demons still a threat? What became of the wizards who flocked through in search of power?



*And so it begins*



*Available in beta*

Finally, a few months ago this all culminated in a beta workshop release of the Shadow Realm Community Expansion!

The mod contains a living Archon dwelling, the Shadow Elves as a playable race, many new units including some Shadow Demons, new structures, new Mystical City Upgrades, and a campaign, which is still a work in progress. All of this content is also incorporated into the random map generator, so that the Shadow Realm is included on any randomly generated maps.

With the opening of the Shadow Gates, the races of Athla now have access to the Shadow Realm, but not all of them are immune to its detrimental effects. Every player now has an upgrade, Shadow Sickness, which causes most units to become Vulnerable to Shadow Sickness, making them weaker once they enter the Shadow Realm. However, not all units are vulnerable as many of the Shadow Realm's inhabitants have adapted to its constant presence.

In addition to its residents, there are remnants left behind by those that passed through the Shadow Realm before its reopening. These include some forgotten towers of the Wizard Kings that have left their mark, even in this strange land. With enchantments that powerful, one should not underestimate the remaining defenders.



*Small but not to be trifled with*

There are few adventurers willing to brave the abandoned sites, leaving plenty of loot for those brash and foolish enough to enter. Who knows what powerful creatures the arcane knowledge in those towers will provide access to?



*Do not try to summon one at home.*

Hopefully, dear reader, this has piqued your interest in what lies beyond the opened Shadow Gates. On behalf of the SR Expansion team, we hope you enjoy the mods! All feedback and bug reports are appreciated!

– Dr\_K

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## The Campaign

The campaign has progressed for two years almost. Most development progress happens to revolve around the story lore parts and the vast amount of scripts needed. There are some cool effects coming around unique for this campaign that utilizes some new tricks not seen in the original campaigns from Triumph Studios. However, the amount of cool factor lies in the whole mod itself while the campaign further investigates the lore and take advantage of the content.

Making a campaign is something that should stand out. Using tricks to alter terrain is something necessary to make the maps unique and to keep players willing to explore.

Most of the problems regarding the campaign creations have been around planning and the amount of bugs occurring from the mod. It has halted the production where scenarios had to be recreated several times in order to correspond to recent changes. The level editor is quite sensitive and needs to be handled with care in order to perform some of the things that should be featured.

From my perspective working from lore is quite doable, but without planning it became much harder to progress when it was necessary to have a beginning, middle and goal set before making the campaign. Initially, it had to be figured out along the way and yet we still do not have a clear sense where the campaign is headed. It has

been interchangeable progress along the way to visualize all the things like quests, story progression, characters and goals. From a map creator perspective, I like to have the exact amount of planning with scenes and content what should be inside each scenario already set before the map is being created. Then only small changes here and there to correct things along the road. Unlike now where the method has been randomized, but somewhat successful in terms of creations.

Campaign features some cool effects like boiling water and the use of environments creating custom lightning that take advantage of fog to create a new effect on a scenario.



*Boiling water*

The last three scenarios will feature a little of everything from the previous Age of Wonders installments like the sea of fire and the united cities. However, I hope to be done with all the scenarios and then move on to the next campaign project.

Sincerely, Refineus

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### **The random madness generator**

Hi Everyone! HousePet here. For some reason Fluksen has asked me to write something. I don't know how to write. Is English even a compiled language? Anyway I've written some stuff to give you some idea what working on a Mod like this is like. Warning: Dense Rambles ahead. Bring a machete.

I loved playing AoW:SM, and one of the best additions in that game was the Shadow Realm. It could have been a typical hellscape filled with Lava, Blood, Bones and Demons.

It wasn't.

It could have been a washed-out colourless landscape full of darkness, shadows and parodies of Athlan residents.

It wasn't.

Instead it was plains of grey soil floating in a shadowy void, glowing blue rocks and mountains, colourful green, blue and purple plants, glowing Syrons and semi cliché ravenous insectoids that eat souls. It was (almost) a completely original setting to me, so I loved it. (I'm also a sucker for a good soundtrack. :P ) What made the Shadow Realm great surprisingly, was all the light in it. Instead of looking bland, it looked surreal.

So as a modder, when I saw that a Shadow Realm project was getting put together, I jumped right in.

Making game mods, and I suspect this also applies to games, seems to involve 4 stages:

Stage 1: Design it.

Stage 2: Write it.

Stage 3: Bug test it.

Stage 4: Release it.

Stages 1 and 4 are great, fun and full of joy. Stages 2 and 3 are filled with gloom and despair.

In Stage 1, you can go crazy with your imagination and make up anything. It doesn't have to be possible at this point, that is future you's problem. I threw a load of designs for different things in for this mod. Totally overdoing it of course. Some of the Site designs seem to have snuck in though. Generally, Stage 2 is where all

the tedious work happens. Where you try to convert that design into actual content. Its usually not hard, but its tiring. I missed most of the Stage 2 work. I can't remember what happened (I suspect I was having "Real Life" problems and too many other projects), but it just seemed like everything appeared suddenly. I'm not used to working with a team of people who can actually get stuff done. Its great, but suddenly all the work gets done without you if you aren't available.

Stage 3 is where reality starts ripping your design to shreds. It turns out you can't just do anything. And you missed lots of little things in Stage 2 because you were tired. This is when I got to work trying to sort out the RMG mod. Stage 4 is happiness again, as you get to let other people enjoy you work. You can also enjoy you work, if you can stand to look at it after all the bug testing... You'll probably be thinking about what to enjoy/suffer trying to make next though.

So... sorting out the RMG mod. I didn't really know how this worked to start with, and not much has changed since. Gloweye did most of the hard work here, by writing most of the generation passes for the layer. I've just been filling in the small missing bits and trying to remove as many (non-shadow demon) bugs as I can. So basically, I jumped into the most sanity destroying part of making a Mod without any idea what I was doing. I really need to stop doing that sort of thing... Now then, what fun things did the RMG throw at me to fix? Well let's start with this goldmine on the right:

There shouldn't be a Gold Mine and there is no way that it should be on Temperate climate. I fixed the Gold Mines, a couple of passes were incorrectly linked (this is not surprising, as there are loads of generation passes and steps) , but I still have no idea how that Temperate Hex got there.

Another problem was clustering: While the RMG seems to have something hidden internally to stop sites touching each other, it likes to cluster them unless you explicitly forbid it. For each generation pass and site. . .



*This leads to horrid circles being drawn on screenshots. Sometimes with text. The Horror!*

The most challenging issue (that I've managed to solve so far) was the Roads problem. They started off fine but then wandered off into the Void a lot. This was greatly puzzling, as telling it not to put Roads in the Void didn't stop it from trying. This turned out to be linked with something the game calls Paths, which is what creates that gap through the forest to a Treasure Site and what tries to make sure all the Shadow Realm islands are connected to a Shadow Gate. This is what makes all those squiggly paths through the Void.

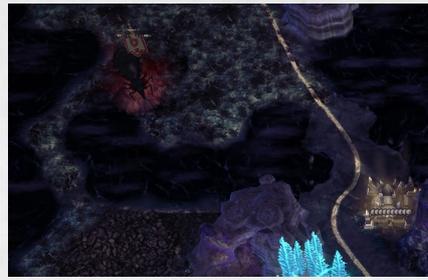
One accident with testing allowed the Paths to invade Athla through the Shadow Gates and fill in Rivers with land. Luckily, I spotted that one before sending the Mod to anyone else. . . It didn't seem to matter what I did though, it kept thinking it would just bridge that 1 hex wide Void, despite not being allowed to put a Bridge on a Void tile and told not to path through Void tiles without putting some land down first. The solution? Duplicate the Path and Road passes and make Shadow Realm specific ones that can never build bridges. Sounds obvious in hindsight.

Fun was had with the number of Dwellings created. Hiliadan wanted the number of Dwellings in the Shadow Realm to be at least 1 on Small, to match the numbers of other layers. The problem with that: I rarely get 1 Dwelling on Small or Medium maps. What is going on here and how do I tune numbers to make it work???

Now a problem that I haven't solved, that is driving me crazy: Shadow Gates.



(a) Not sure what this Road was trying to achieve. Could be an eldritch rune.



(b) A road finally behaving

In.



The



Water. \*explodes\*

Yep, they are set not to generate in Water. Adding further restrictions doesn't change anything. This is probably due to it being a Layer Connector, not a normal Site. After several days of not making any progress I noticed that there was a generation pass missing. One that should generate some flat land around Shadow Gates on the Surface and Underground layers. This seems to fix a few gates, but not all of them. I currently suspect there is some hidden magic in the code that culls some of the Caves during map generation. No idea how to duplicate this for Shadow Gates. Its probably a Secret Spell.

I didn't just work on fixing RMG issues. I have done some content creation and bug fixing in the main Mod too. One involved the game crashing when you tried to Generate a Random Map without the RMG Mod active. How does that cause a crash when the RMG Mod isn't active? Well, it was the Shadow Elves. Without the

RMG Mod, they didn't have a default starting Layer set. The solution? Give them a dummy pointer to the Shadow Realm Layer even though it doesn't exist. That makes a lot of sense. (Actually, it sort of does. As once it determines that the default layer doesn't exist it just picks a random layer that does.) So I hope you are all enjoying playing our Shadow Realm Mod. Now with 90% less game-breaking bugs. (I'm pretty sure I solved one of the bugs while having a shower.)



*Sigh. Well at least it doesn't crash now...*

HousePet

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**The End**

**Imprint:**

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