

25th Anniversary Project

Posted by Hannibal Rex - 27 Apr 2023 20:38

Greetings, Warlords

Darklords Rising turns 25 this year. At the height of its popularity, the Warlords series has been considered a peer of Heroes of Might and Magic. Sadly, while the latter has an enduring fan community even for the older games, Warlords 3 has mostly sunk into obscurity.

I've been tinkering with the available modding tools for a while, and I've decided that for its 25th anniversary in August, I'm going to release an overhaul mod, to maybe give the old game a little shot in the arm, and give long-time fans an excuse to delve into it again.

My goals:

- Rebalance all the units in the game. For many, that means only recalibrating their gold cost and some light touches, others will be changed significantly. Outliers that used to dominate competitive multiplayer will be nerfed, many more which were unplayed will be buffed. Abilities that were only introduced in DLR or its 1.01 patch will be a bit more widespread. The intent here isn't to make every unit competitive, but to make all at least playable and not be made obsolete by another, cheaper unit.

- Rework the heroes from the ground up, drawing on lessons from the K4 and X multiplayer mods. This will be major work, and balancing them will be tricky and probably dependent on how much feedback I get. My starting point is to have a common xp chart and AP progression for all heroes, that may get tweaked later on.

- Some light tweaks to the default.rul ruleset. Greater XP rewards for hard quests, and fixed mana crystal rewards from ruins to eliminate the feast-or-famine randomness.

- Comprehensive gold cost standardization across all items, without changing any of their effects. Among other things, the gold cost determines which items are affected by the Shatter and Create Item spells, so this is a necessary step.

- Lastly, it seems possible to modify the 8x8 different default army sets for playing random maps. Once I'm happy with the unit and hero changes, I aim to recreate those 64 army sets to provide for default

sides that are both thematic and balanced, with every unit and hero class being well-represented across the board.

I won't be modifying the existing campaigns and scenarios directly, but the goal is that replaying them with the new units and heroes will give you more interesting options for stack building and hero selection. There's no intention to include new art or create new units outright, and the end result will probably not be very compatible with the Stormheim mod, as far as balance and unit costs are concerned.

I will be posting updates and my thoughts on game balance as I go along, both here and at a few other places, to hopefully get some feedback. I've never been a part of the multiplayer community back in the day, but I'd be especially interested to hear from those who were. I don't expect anyone is still playing Warlords 3 multiplayer competitively these days, but I'd be delighted to be proven wrong. Multiplayer isn't the main concern of my mod, but I want it to be a better experience than vanilla DLR for anyone who wants to try it.

Farewell, Warlords. Until we meet again.

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Re: 25th Anniversary Project

Posted by Hannibal Rex - 05 Jul 2023 18:56

[quote="KGB" post=3878]**Hannibal Rex wrote:**

I would suggest having no more than 15 units across all your heroes. The Summoner and Necromancer use up a lot of slots (like 11 total) so you only get 4 more for the rest of your heroes. Or you have to cut down what the Summoner can summon (there is no way to change Necromancy)

The Summoner has 4 units, Necromancer 5, and the Alchemist and Priest 1 each. My main thought was to give the Necromancer summons that don't overlap (as much) with Necromancy, but I'll have to limit or shelve that. I understand now why his summons and necromancy units are the same. I also wanted to add Nightmares to the Summoner, to cover all non-Elemental demon units.

But it's not a bad thing that you can't go overboard with custom summoning spells.

For the Blue Dragon, I like that it allows you to experiment with a Disease & Life Steal army set, that can (at least hypothetically) reduce a lot of units to one hp and instant-kill them with lightning. I'll leave it at 1750 gold for now, but might reduce that further to 1650. It's still a powerful ability, but its drawbacks should be reflected in the cost.

For the Silver Dragon, for now I'll file it under 'balanced, but non-competitive'.

I like some of your more radical ideas, but I'll be more willing to be experimental, such as implementing abilities that only heroes have in vanilla on units, once I get to tweaking the Stormheim units.

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Re: 25th Anniversary Project

Posted by Hannibal Rex - 06 Jul 2023 00:49

Here's a thought: How would your assessment change if Silver Dragons gave +2 Fortify instead of +3 Morale? There'd be some unique synergy with heroes that can cheaply upgrade Morale themselves, and/or have a Fortify spell.

I'm not so comfortable with more radical changes, but this keeps it as a stack bonus unit, but now its ability is unique instead of being matched by cheaper units.

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Re: 25th Anniversary Project

Posted by Anomander Rake - 06 Jul 2023 08:39

There is Frost Dragon (+2 fortify). I'm not sure an it's maybe Stormheim unit.

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Re: 25th Anniversary Project

Posted by Hannibal Rex - 06 Jul 2023 11:17

Anomander Rake wrote:

There is Frost Dragon (+2 fortify). I'm not sure an it's maybe Stormheim unit.

Yes, the Frost Dragon has the same ability and would need to be changed. It's also very expensive,

2000, for some reason. So I suppose the question is, are there balance concerns that warrant this high price?

The obvious is that the value of Fortify depends on how easy or difficult access to high Siege is, similar to our previous discussion about Fear and Chaos.

KGB has pointed out that I haven't included a fast Siege unit, which could make the Thief mandatory for everyone. A good and affordable Fortify unit would exacerbate that. I've sketched out that Alchemists and Wizards will get a Siege spell, and SH has some faster Siege units, so there's that.

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Re: 25th Anniversary Project

Posted by Anomander Rake - 06 Jul 2023 11:32

Frost Dragon is IMHO usable. I don't use it very often but I do use it.

I am in general a supporter of increasing the prices of dragons. So that it often pays off to use cheaper substitutes. Or even it was necessary.

Wizard. I would suggest replacing useless Banishment with a siege trait (2ap) and lower the Leadership to 3ap. I get that he's a spell dude but let him have some utility besides mana.

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Re: 25th Anniversary Project

Posted by KGB - 06 Jul 2023 17:22

The Frost Dragon costs 2000 because he allows your stack to reach +5 Fortify in a L3 city and the only counter to that is a Thief with +5 siege. If the Silver gets +2 Fortify it means you'll have to do something with the Frost Dragon (back to the +1/+2 Group Warding idea again). That cost is reasonable given it stacks with city walls / spells / items.

It also means you definitely make the Thief a 'must have' because with no decent +4 Siege unit (unless your Worms get 4 hits with their 20 move) for a reasonable cost (1000 or less) the Silver at +2 will be incredibly strong in a city with +5 vs +3 Siege or even with heroes that have a Fortify spell it will be possible to be +4 Fortify outside a city.

If you want to give the Wizard a siege spell that's OK, but make sure it doesn't invalidate the Shaman's Jihad spell which is one of the main reasons to take the Shaman because he can get you to +5 siege with a siege unit. So it would have to cost something like 2 AP with cost 4 mana without the group move

so it's inferior. I agree with Anomander that the Wizard Leadership cost can go back to 3 AP.

KGB

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Re: 25th Anniversary Project

Posted by Anomander Rake - 07 Jul 2023 07:24

Wizard Leadership cost can go back to 3 AP

Leadership for 4ap is weird. This is probably because there would be nothing to train a lvl 9-10 wizard. So another Wiz ability to train is necessary.

Shaman's Jihad spell which is one of the main reasons to take the Shaman

Good spell but Shaman has some good spells and abilities, so there are more of these causes.

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Re: 25th Anniversary Project

Posted by Hannibal Rex - 07 Jul 2023 17:02

KGB wrote:

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Then the last hypothetical I want to indulge in in this regard is what the usefulness of +1 Fortify Silver Dragons would be. That ability already exists on the Iceguard, but they don't quite have the stats and movement for a hero stack.

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Re: 25th Anniversary Project

Posted by Anomander Rake - 07 Jul 2023 21:27

usefulness of +1 Fortify Silver Dragons

The effect would be: Frost Dragon sometimes, Silver Dragons never.

Possibly deathslaying would be interesting.

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Re: 25th Anniversary Project

Posted by KGB - 08 Jul 2023 16:51

Anomander Rake wrote:

usefulness of +1 Fortify Silver Dragons

The effect would be: Frost Dragon sometimes, Silver Dragons never.

Possibly deathslaying would be interesting.

Correct. At least in any games that allowed Stormheim units.

+1 Fortify just isn't that great. Not only do Iceguards have it, but the Royal Guard (2 turn Stormheim unit) has it too. You just don't see either unit get used. Probably because +4 Fortify wasn't that big of an advantage (since so many use SE which gave +4 Siege). Your change to the SE to +3 might make +1 Fortify units more valuable depending on your final costs for the +4 Siege units (and your Thief numbers). But honestly, I think +2 Fortify is the number needed to make it really useful on a high end unit like a Dragon.

KGB

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