



Strategy Guide

For competitive 1v1 on the Ladder of Wesnoth

by Cackfiend

“I think the biggest difference between a good player and a great player is a sense of scale.

A good player understands that 50% defense is better than 40% defense, but a great player knows just how much better in a certain situation, and whether it is worth giving up some other advantage in exchange.

A great player also understands that there are exceptions to every rule. Attacking from water with a land unit isn't normally a good idea.....but in some cases it might be a stroke of brilliance to do such a move when a lesser player wouldn't even consider it.

However, I think there are many paths to greatness: some players focus on mathematical calculation of odds. Some on careful analysis of unit strengths, some on tactical maneuvering, and some on strategic positioning. Some players play cautiously, defensively, trying to build a small advantage and work on it. Other players are more willing to play aggressive gambits.”

~ David, Creator of Wesnoth



ABOVE: Cackfiend vs Pietro in the Tournament of Champions #3 circa 2007

“Wesnoth is a game that seemed so simple to me at first, but once I started playing it I realized just how much depth of strategy it has. I still feel as though every day I get a little better at it - no one has ever truly mastered it. Few games have given me an adrenaline rush when playing competitively like it has.

That is why I love Wesnoth.”

~ Cackfiend, Elo record holder on the Ladder of Wesnoth

Thank you for checking out my Strategy Guide for The Battle for Wesnoth! My intentions are to help new and veteran players get better at competitive play. This guide assumes you know the basics of Wesnoth from playing the Single Player Campaigns, so please learn those first.

If you are interested in playing competitive 1v1 matches of Wesnoth, please join us on the **Ladder of Wesnoth**:

<https://wesnoth.gamingladder.info/>

To discuss this guide's contents, please feel free to join the **Ladder Discord**. <https://discord.gg/8aV2xUKuK8>

If you haven't yet, make sure to check out the official Wesnoth Manual on their Wiki:

<https://www.wesnoth.org/manual/stable/manual.en.html>

***Disclaimer:** This is in no way an official guide for Wesnoth, or endorsed by any of the creators or developers of Wesnoth. It is simply a player-made guide. Everything in this guide is strictly my own opinion.*

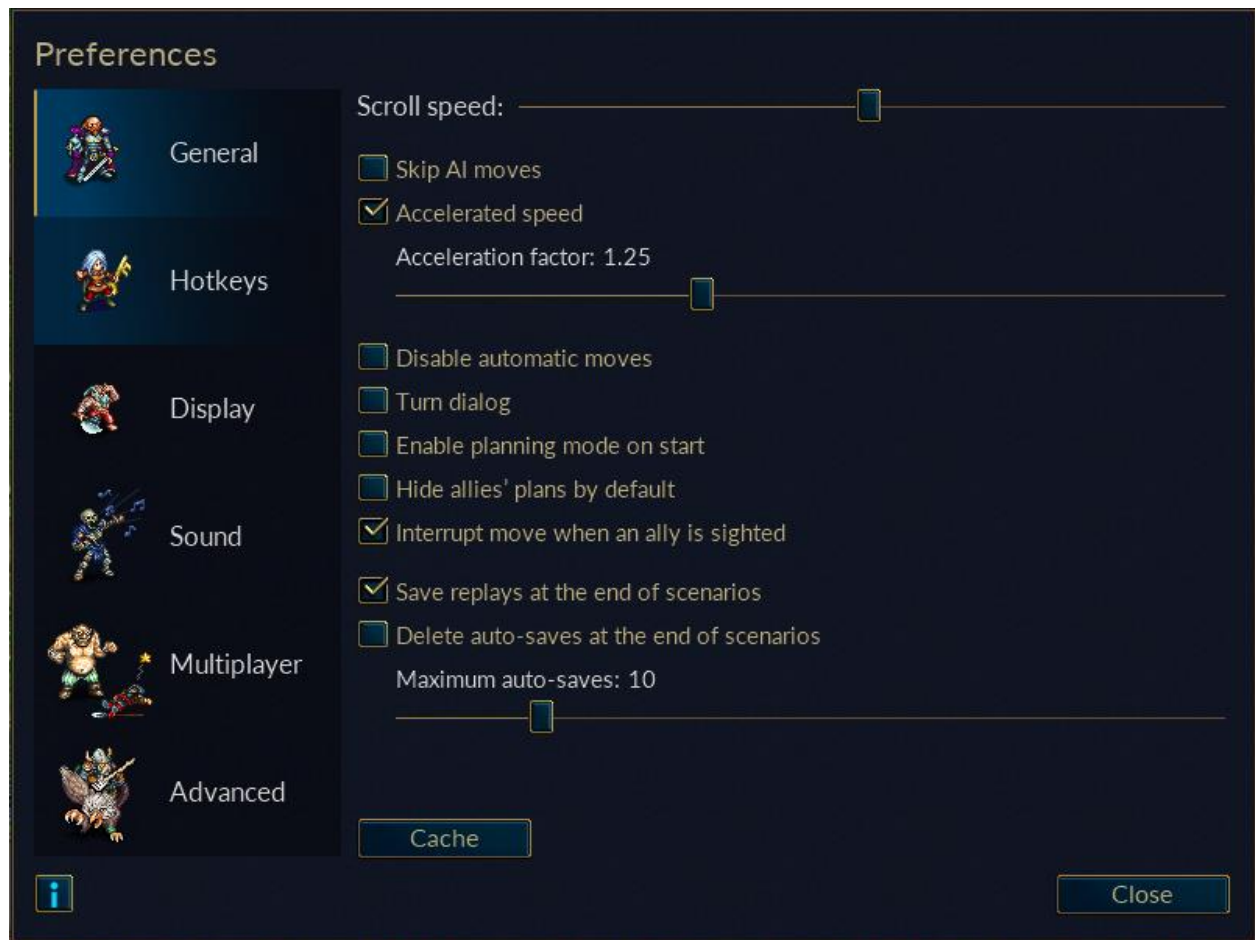
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Preferences, Hotkeys, and Commands:

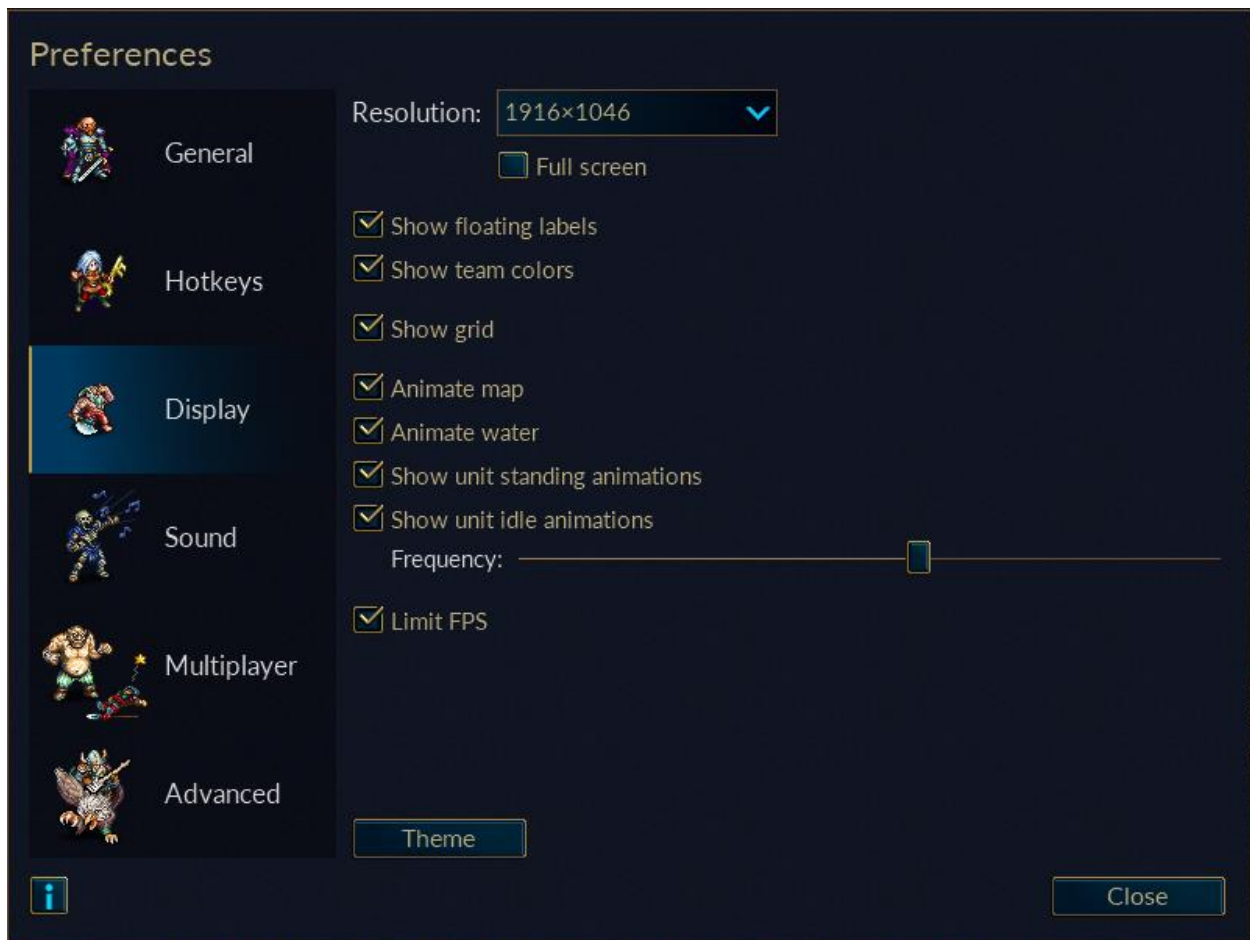
First of all, turn on **Accelerated Speed and Show Grid**.

An **Accelerated Speed** of about 1.25-1.5 is important in case there is a time limit. It also just makes the game go much quicker. You can turn this off while watching replays if you'd like, so you don't miss anything.



ABOVE: Preferences General page with Accelerated speed turned on and set at 1.25

BELOW: Preferences Display page with Show grid turned on



With **Show Grid** turned on you will be able to **Count Hexes** much easier (more on this later.)

The Hotkeys that you will mostly use in competitive 1v1 games are S for Stats, Alt+S for Status, and 'n' to cycle through units. Stats will show how many kills, deaths and advancements you have, as well as a ton of other useful information. Alt+S is handy in case you forget if you're Player 1 or Player 2. The 'n' hotkey will cycle thru your units and should be used every turn to make sure you have moved all of them. You can also hit 'n' on your opponent's turn to see which units they still can move. Regardless of how sure you are that you've moved all of your units, **always hit the "n" key a lot before ending your turn to make sure.** Forgetting a unit occasionally still happens to the best of us.

Don't forget you can use 0, -, and + to zoom in and out of the map as well. This can be handy to give yourself a better picture of the battlefield.

Statistics (Cackfiend)

2p – The Freelands ▼

Recruits	18		244
Recalls	0		0
Advancements	0		—
Losses	2		34
Kills	1		18

Damage	Overall	This Turn		
Inflicted	165 / 209.4	-21%	0 / 0	+0%
Taken	289 / 307.6	-6%	0 / 0	+0%

ABOVE: Example of a Stats window (S key)

BELOW: Example of a Status window (Alt-S)

Current Status

Leader	Team	Gold	Villages	Units	Upkeep	Income
--------	------	------	----------	-------	--------	--------



DrakeKing

Human

Team 1



Cackfiend

Human

Team 2

19

9

17

15

+14

Game Stats

Scenario Settings

Scroll To

Close

Commands to know for multiplayer games are as follows:

:muteall – This command will mute all observers so they don't distract your game.

:mute playername - This command will mute a specific player.

:kick playername - This command will kick a specific player.

:ban playername - This command will ban a specific player.

:control 1 playername – This command will give control of side 1 to a specific player, which is important if your opponent loses connection and rejoins.

:control 2 playername – Same as above. This command will give control of side 2 to a specific player.

Tools: Calculator and Notepad

Having a **Calculator** is essential to play Wesnoth at a competitive level. This will help you determine how much damage your units will deal and receive based on resistances, **Time of Day (ToD)**, and Leadership bonuses. It will also be important to use when anticipating your income in order to maximize your recruits when **Banking** (more on banking later.)



You can also use a calculator to figure out how much money your opponent has spent on their units. This way you can estimate how much money they still have, and if you're playing vs elves, if they might have a hidden Wose somewhere.

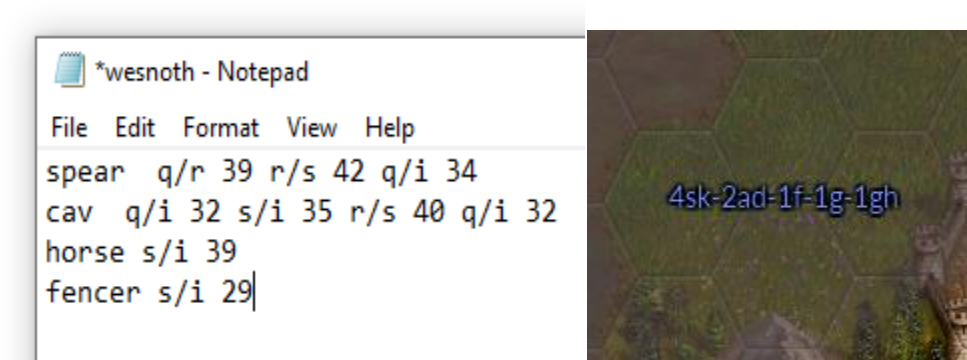
The way damage is **Calculated** in Wesnoth is not by adding or subtracting together Time of Day (**ToD**) bonuses/penalties, resists, and leadership - but rather by multiplying them together.

For example, if you have a strong Grunt (10-2) at night (+25%) attacking a Cavalry unit (30% Blade resist) the damage output would be $10 * 1.25 * .7 = 8.75$ (9) rather than $10 + 25\% - 30\% = 9.5$ (10)

This brings us to the **.5 rule** in Wesnoth. Whenever a number goes up or down by .5 it is not changed. If you normally do 10 damage, but due to **ToD** the 10 becomes a 7.5, then it's really an 8. This works the other way as well. If you normally do 10 damage, but due to **ToD** bonus you're doing 12.5, it's really just a 12. This is why Poachers are not able to take advantage of Drake's -10% pierce resist even at night time since $4 * 1.25 * 1.1 = 5.5$ (5).

Using a calculator is essential to figure out how much damage is needed to kill units. Besides **Counting Hexes** during your opponent's turn to anticipate where units will be in the next 1-3 turns, you should be anticipating what units will be fighting each other and how well their damage outputs match up with their HPs. This will maximize your efficiency in combat, and leave your opponent with dead units rather than 1-2 HP units. For example, if you have two strong grunts you will want to plan for them to try to kill a 36 hp unit at night in just 3 hits.

A **Notepad app** is an essential tool to write down your opponent's units and their **Traits**, hit points, and quantity. You might even want to write down unit names so you don't get them confused with each other. Keeping track of these things can be the difference between winning or losing key fights. It also helps with keeping track of whether or not units that go in and out of your **Fog of War** are the same units as before - or newly recruited ones. Some players use **Map Labels** to keep track of these things, but something like a Notepad is usually much better. **Map Labels** can be useful to note where a Wose is hiding or where a pesky bat flew into deep water, though.



ABOVE: A Notepad and Map Labels to keep track of your opponent's units

These are the types of things you should be focusing on when it isn't your turn; Writing down traits/hps, **Counting Hexes**, and **Calculating** damage to be able to efficiently kill your opponent's units in the least amount of attacks.

Random Number Generator (RNG)/Expected Value (EV):

“I don't think anyone denies that luck has a huge influence on the game. In fact, luck is a fundamental and crucial part of the game. If luck didn't have an influence on the game, we would scrap it.”

~ David, Creator of Wesnoth

The **RNG** and **EV** is a core aspect of Wesnoth. It is what makes the game interesting, and causes many players to shout out in victory or cry out in dismay. It is one of the things that gets the adrenaline pumping and the heart beating in a competitive match of Wesnoth. It is the overall luck of the game, and learning how it works is important to your success or failure. Adapting to good or bad luck is key to victory in a competitive game. **Learning to manage bad luck/EV is one of the main abilities of the most successful players of Wesnoth.**

The way **EV** is **Calculated** is by dividing your maximum damage output by the defense of your opponent. For example, if you have a 60% chance to hit a unit and have three attacks that do 10 damage each, then the game will give you an **EV** of 60% of 30 potential damage, which is 18. This changes when the unit you're attacking has less hps than the damage you can put out - as the game calculates the **EV** in a completely different way. For example, if you kill a unit that only had 7 hit points but your attack was for 12 the game only gives you the 7 for your actual damage output and 5.3 for your **EV** (if the unit was on 50% defense) rather than 12 output and 6 EV. This is one of many ways **EV** is deceptive.

It is important to note that **EV** does not show how often your units are hitting or dodging attacks, but simply just how much damage the game thinks they should be giving or receiving. Because of this, some players complain heavily about **RNG** due to the stats showing a large advantage of **EV** by their opponent, when in reality they might have been hitting about as often as the game says they should be. The problem here lies with units that do very little damage hitting often, and units that do lots of damage missing a lot; or vice versa.

For example, if you attack a unit at Day with two Gliders and hit 6/6 with a 60% **Chance to Hit (CtH)** for 24 damage, but then with a strong Clasher you hit 0/4 with a 60% **CtH** and do 0 damage out of a potential 36 Damage, you still hit 60% of the time. The **EV** of these attacks would be 36 (60% of a potential 60 damage is 36), but since you only did 24 it shows as -33% for the attacks. In reality, you hit as much as you should have hit, but again **EV** can be deceptive.

BELOW: -21% EV of Inflicted damage and -6% EV of Taken damage

Statistics (Cackfiend)				
2p – The Freelands				
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There is a big difference between the overall luck (**EV**) and individual Lucky fights. Players will often complain about the **EV** in their match without fully realizing that many key fights went their way. This is usually in the form of a **Chance to Kill (CtK)** being successful or failing.

For example, a player could be down 20% on **EV** and then get lucky by having their low hit point unit level up by hitting every time vs a unit with a high defense. **EV** would still show that the overall luck of the game is still against them, but they had a very lucky fight go their way that could very well change the entire battle. Conversely, you could be up 25% **EV** and then your unit goes 0/3 on a 1 hp units and fails to level up, and then dies the next turn. **EV** still shows they're way up, but the important fight was devastating. Players will often discredit successful strategies because **EV** favored it, when in reality, even with negative **EV**, it would still be a success.

When getting into a battle, it can be beneficial to expect and plan for bad **RNG**. A pessimistic approach of expecting about -20% on **EV** against you will help a lot to adapt to the situation. If you get actual **EV**, or it is in your favor, you will probably be in a strong position. See how well your units are hitting the opponent's, then see how well they are dodging attacks, and then re-evaluate your moves from there. **This is essential to becoming a great player.**

One of the main ways to minimize **RNG** being a factor in your match is to increase the number of units on the battlefield. The earlier the fighting takes place, the more **RNG** based it will be. On the other hand, if you are going to recruit heavily luck-based units like Horsemen and Thunderers, don't be surprised when luck goes heavily one way or the other. Another way to minimize **RNG** is to use **Zone of Control (ZoC)** for defense. Giving a unit only 1-3 hexes to be attacked from will drastically lower its chance to die from being hit every time - versus being opened to attacks from 4-6 hexes while in good defensive terrain.

The other best way to minimize luck is simply by out-strategizing your opponent. This is usually in the form of superior unit composition or divide and conquer. Many great players set themselves apart by being excellent at controlling the tempo of the game and keeping the initiative with superior positioning. Remember to **Count your Hexes**. Strong foresight and playing ahead of your opponent will give you an advantage that the **RNG** cannot affect.

Remember: 70% and 80% to hit does not mean 100%. 30% or 40% chance to hit does not mean 0%. However, it sometimes definitely feels like it. Taking shots at low **CtKs** will sometimes yield pleasant surprises. Hitting a unit with 60% Defense on a village 4 times in a row does happen 1 out of 38 times (2.6%) as seen in the following pictures:

Attack Enemy



Tathira
Elvish Archer
Lvl 1
neutral
strong, dextrous
HP: 30/30
XP: 8/31

Profile

Syry
Spearman (ladder)
Lvl 1
lawful
quick, resilient
HP: 24/39
XP: 9/29



Profile



sword
6×2
40%

— melee —

spear
5×3 first strike
60%



bow
6×4
40%

— ranged —

javelin
4×1
60%



Damage Calculation

Attack

Cancel

Damage Calculations

Attacker

Base damage 6 (bow)

Total damage 6×4

Chance to hit 40%

Chance of being unscathed 40.0%

Expected Battle Result (HP)



Defender

Base damage 5 (javelin)

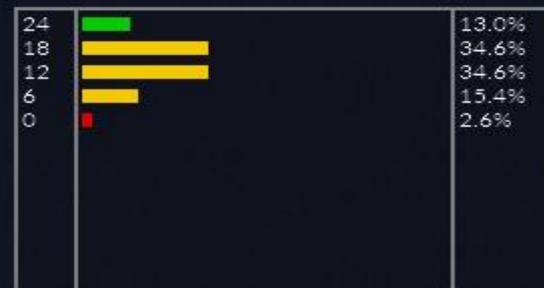
Time of day modifier -25%

Total damage 4×1

Chance to hit 60%

Chance of being unscathed 13.0%

Expected Battle Result (HP)



Close

Often, many key fights will have about a 50% chance to succeed. Losing multiple crucial coin flips in a row can be the end of your battle, but you should still be planning to lose all of them from the beginning. Eventually **RNG** usually goes back in your favor, and you need to be ready to take advantage of that. For example, if your grunts have been hitting 0/2 for most of their fights, you might eventually have a turn where they mostly hit 2/2, which is usually enough to turn the fight around.

High Risk/High Reward fights really should only be done if you're badly losing. Don't get greedy. For example, attacking a low hp adept with an archer could be disastrous if you miss the first two attacks and the adept hits back twice. However, leveling your poisoned 1 hp horseman by attacking a full hp unit could be the difference between winning or losing the match. Going for some low **CtKs** and achieving them can get you right back into a losing game.

The bottom line is Wesnoth is a chance-based game - much like Poker or Magic the Gathering. You cannot change the **RNG**, but you can adapt to it, minimize it, and learn from it. If we didn't have **RNG** we would just be playing Fantasy Chess. Everyone loses or wins some games due to extreme **RNG** and luck. Try not to let it get you too down, or too high-horsed. If you are getting extreme **EV** in your favor, it can sometimes be polite to apologize, especially if your opponent is clearly frustrated. If you have extreme **RNG** against you, try to keep calm. It usually turns around.

Players tend to ignore their own good luck and only register their bad luck. Similarly, they will be well aware of their opponent's good luck and ignore their opponent's bad luck. Winners and losers need to have **Good Sportsmanship**. Many players have tilted from **RNG** and taken a long break from the game. Ultimately, your mental health is far more important than a video game.

After a game, you can go back and analyze the replay. I guarantee there will always be something you can find where you made a mistake or could have made a better play, rather than completely blame the win or loss on **RNG**.

Eventually you will have to roll some dice. Just remember to make your daily sacrifices to the **RNG** gods.

Overall Strategy:

“Note that the winning strategy is never the same, the ability to formulate this strategy in each game and the confidence to carry it out makes you a great player.” ~ ereksos, Tournament of Champions #3 Winner

When you first start a new match, you will want to plan the best strategy that has the most likely chance for you to win. The Map, Factions, Leaders, and Traits of your Recruits will all heavily influence your **Overall Strategy**.

Consider the following when planning your strategy:

- Is this a good Map for Rushing? Will you be the one Rushing, or will you need to defend against the Rush?
- Are Villages on this Map easily pressured, giving the attacker an advantage? Or is it easier to sit back and defend?
- Are the Leaders powerful for either player? Should you avoid theirs or utilize yours?
- Do you need a complete army to go on the offensive, or is your faction efficient with few troops?
- Would defending and Banking be best to save enough money for a large expensive army?
- Will the combat be heavily Initiative based where whomever attacks with their Favorable **ToD** will win?
- What would be the best defense; **ZoC Line Defense** or a **Fortified Position**?
- What Traits do the units on the battlefield have? How will this affect the match?

This guide will explore these questions and more.

Maps:

“Surely you will agree that players that are much better than you also have a better understanding of terrain formations, p1/p2 pressure dynamics, and factional interactions on a given map.” ~ Doc Patterson, Multiplayer Developer, 1v1 Map Designer, and HODOR Legend

Different maps have various strategies that work or don't work, depending on the matchup.

There are many things to consider about a map:

- What are the dimensions? Is this a big spread-out map or a small one?
- How many villages are there?
- How will you reach your villages efficiently with your **Initial Recruit**?
- How many keeps are there?
- How far away from the keeps are the **Front-Line Villages** for attacking or defending?
- How quickly can reinforcements reach those villages?
- How many **Lanes** are there to attack or defend?
- Are the villages more easily defended or attacked?
- How much water is on this map, and can you take advantage of that?

Most competitive maps have been painstakingly balanced over many years of adjustments. Maps have at least one **Front-Line Village** that is hard to defend and encourages players to attack. It is important to learn how to play certain matchups on a certain map, and this will come with experience by playing the game and watching replays. Some maps do inherently favor one side in a specific matchup, and some matchups can therefore be heavily map dependent.

The map you're playing on could heavily affect your decisions on recruitment and overall defensive and offensive strategy. For example, some maps (like Fallenstar Lake) are nearly impossible to do an effective first-night rush on. This means you will have to adapt your strategy. Northerners, for example, might want to go more troll/assassin heavy if they don't plan on rushing, because a large map doesn't compliment that strategy.

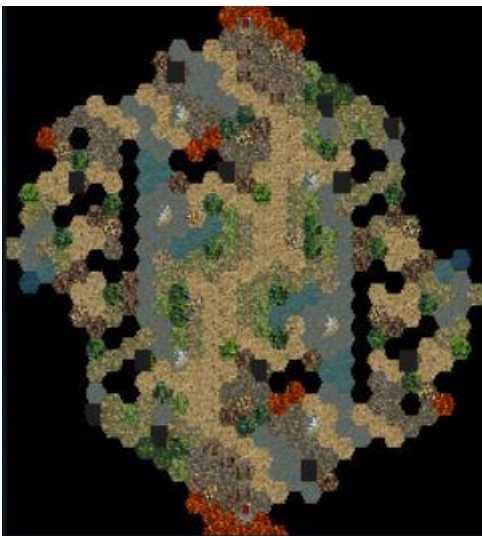
Caves of the Basilisk:

- 41x24 16 Villages - your **Front-Line Village** 7 hexes away
- Opponent's **Front-Line Village** 14 hexes away
- 2 **Lanes** with mostly impassable center
- Symmetrical



Den of Onis (ladder):

- 29x24 12 Villages - your **Front-Line Village** 12 hexes away (in small side lane)
- Opponent's **Front-Line Village** 18 hexes away
- 1 **Lane** with 2 small **Lanes** on the sides
- Symmetrical



Fallenstar Lake:

- 41x22 **20** Villages - your **Front-Line Village** 5 hexes away
- Opponent's **Front-Line Village** 16 hexes away
- 1 wide open north **Lane** with 1 small **Lane** on bottom
- Symmetrical with 3 forward keeps



Hamlets (ladder):

- 25x28 14 Villages - your **Front-Line Village** 7 hexes away
- Opponent's **Front-Line Village** 16 hexes away
- 2 **Lanes** with slim water channel in the center
- Symmetrical



Howling Ghost Badlands:

- 33x36 16 Villages - your **Front-Line Village** 7 hexes away
- Opponent's **Front-Line Village** 13 hexes away
- 2 **Lanes** with impassable center
- Symmetrical with 2 forward keeps



Sablestone Delta:

- 21x28 14 Villages - your **Front-Line Village** 4 hexes away
- Opponent's **Front-Line Village** 10 hexes away
- 1 wide front **Lane** with slim side passages
- Symmetrical with 3 forward keeps



Silverhead Crossing (ladder):

- 29x30 16 Villages - your **Front-Line Village** 2-5 hexes away
- Opponent's **Front-Line Village** 14-15 hexes away
- 3 **Lanes** (mass unit advantage)
- **Asymmetrical** with 3 forward keeps



Sulla's Ruins:

- 35x30 16 Villages - your **Front-Line Village** 6 hexes away
- Opponent's **Front-Line Village** 9-10 hexes away
- 2 **Lanes** with mostly impassable center
- **Asymmetrical** with 2 forward keeps



The Freelands (ladder):

- 37x24 16 Villages - your **Front-Line Village** 7 hexes away
- Opponent's **Front-Line Village** 15 hexes away
- 2 **Lanes** on far left and right with 2 small **Lanes** in middle
- Symmetrical



Weldyn Channel:

- 29x22 14 Villages - your **Front-Line Village** 7 hexes away
- Opponent's **Front-Line Village** 15 hexes away
- 2 **Lanes** with Water/Mostly impassable center
- Symmetrical



Traits:

Pay close attention to your units' **Traits** when you recruit them. Also, pay close attention to your opponent's units' traits, and make note of them in your **Notepad**. **Traits** can alter **Overall Strategies** for both players.

Some traits are more important for different factions and different units. For example, the **Quick** trait is extremely important for Dwarf units since they have a base movement speed of 4, and the **Intelligent** trait is very important for units that only require about 2 kills to level when they get it (poachers, thieves, saurians, orc archers, etc.) **Resilient** is an important trait for any unit you plan on using to defend a village or hold a **Defensive Line**. **Strong** is incredibly important on units with 4 attacks, like the Ulfserker, Drake Clasher, Elvish Fighter, Naga, or Fencer. It can also give a +2 damage bonus (instead of +1) for units like the Cavalry or Drake Clasher, during their favorable **ToD**.

Some units require **Strong** in order to take advantage of their opponent's weakness to certain damage types. For example, non-Strong Elvish Fighters and Archers do 5 damage to Saurian units, but **Strong** ones do 7 damage.

You can plan an entire strategy around your units' traits and your enemy's units' traits. For example, if you're Drakes and playing vs Rebels that have a lot of **Strong** units, and not many **Dextrous**, you can go heavy Drake Fighters as they negate the elves' strong trait, and archers only take advantage of Drakes -10% pierce resist if they're **Dexterous**. On the other hand, if most of the elves are not **Strong** you can go heavy Saurians, since elves only take advantage of their -10% slashing resist if they're **Strong**.

If you recruit an army of mostly **Quick** units then you might want to consider an **Overall Strategy** based on **Initiative** and superior positioning. If your units are mostly **Quick**, you can chase down retreating armies and pull back from opponents' villages effectively when **ToD** no longer favors you.

If you recruit a lot of **Strong/Resilient** units consider going for an all-in attack, or try to hold the line when facing an attack rather than retreating. If your opponent recruits mostly **Strong/Resilient** units be extra cautious when engaging them in battle. Consider trying to out-manuever them instead. For example, you could attack the flank of an army where his non-**Quick** troops might not be able to reach, essentially **Dividing and Conquering**.

Rotating **Quick/Intelligent** units to defend your villages that aren't being attacked is usually a good idea. You don't want your **Strong/Resilient** Elven Fighter guarding a village all game that isn't getting attacked. You want him in your main army where the action is.

Leaders:

Adapt your strategy depending on which leaders are on the battlefield. For Example, if either of you have a powerful leader (Marksman, Steelclad, Deathblade etc.), or one with **Leadership** (Lieutenant, Drake Flare, or Elvish Captain) then you will want to try to utilize yours or avoid theirs to win the game. If either of you have a weaker leader (Longbowman, Arbiter, Elvish Hero etc.) then it may be more beneficial to try a more offensive strategy, since these leaders will not help much in defending. Regardless of the strength of the leaders, they will mostly be used to dissuade attacks to weak **Lanes** or vulnerable villages.

Utilizing a powerful leader, or one with the **Leadership** ability, means mostly staying on the defense in hopes of using it. When it comes time to use your leader in combat you will usually use it to bolster a defense in the **Lane** that is being attacked. Be careful not to move more than 5 hexes from your keep if you have the income to recruit units every turn, as the temporary boost to your army's strength is rarely worth the loss of continued reinforcements.

Alternative to defending, you may want to try playing a longer game so that you can recruit many units and mount a full-on attack with your leader coming along. If a match does go long, and you do a mass recruit with little gold left with an income that won't allow you to recruit at least every other turn, then you can consider bringing your leader along for the upcoming big fight since you won't be able to recruit anymore new units for several turns. This is especially powerful if you have the **Leadership** ability. However, if you are actively taking your opponent's villages then your leader should almost never be out of its keep. **Do not march your leader down to the battle when you have a good income. A stream of reinforcements is more valuable.**

Your opponent's leader will influence your **Overall Strategy**. If they have a powerful leader then you will want to consider going on the defense so that they can't utilize it well. You can usually force them on the offense by **Banking**. If they have a weaker leader then feel free to go on the offense.

When you're on the offensive versus a powerful leader, a good strategy to employ is to attack multiple **Lanes** at the same time. The **Lane** that is bolstered by their leader should then not be engaged while you go in for a full attack on the leaderless ones. Regardless, you will want to try and stay at least 7 hexes away from their keep so that they cannot use their leader by attacking you and then going back to recruit the very next turn.

BELOW: Note how the injured Elvish Fighter is only 5 hexes away from the keep. Now the Drake Arbiter Leader can attack it while still able to move to the keep to recruit the next turn



Regardless of how strong or weak a leader is, always be on the lookout for the leader **CtK**. Be very careful to not put it in a vulnerable position where it might die, and always beware the Knalgan Ulfserker. Sometimes a leader kill will not be apparent until someone realizes they can sacrifice low hp units by attacking a leader and having the unit die, which will free up the hex for more units to attack. As long as those units are doing damage to the leader then a **CtK** opportunity may arise if they did the math right.

If your opponent does use their leader in the battle, you should try to put damage into it early to deter them from continued use, or else they risk a leader **CtK**. If you do eventually have a **CtK** on a leader, you should see how many times your first unit hits and then decide if it's still worth it to attack with more units. Your opponent might be desperate for you to go for a low **CtK** on

their leader with hopes that it will deal enormous **Retaliation Damage** to try to get them back into the fight, but if you're winning it's usually not worth risking a failed leader **CtK**.



ABOVE: A Lieutenant Leader leaves its keep to press forward at day

A common mistake that players make with their leader is leaving their base one turn too early to join a battle. It is important to calculate when exactly the main fight is going to take place and then have your leader out of the base and helping on the most optimal turn. For example, if a **Chaotic** faction pressures your base in the Afternoon you will want to wait until Dusk or First Watch to leave your keep instead of immediately leaving in the Afternoon.

Managing Income and Upkeep:

Understanding how to **Anticipate your income, Delay Recruiting so that you can afford the proper units, and Banking your gold in a passive match** is essential in any highly competitive game of Wesnoth. Learn to manage your income and upkeep to figure out exactly how much money you will have every turn to recruit the best units for your matchup and situation.

Remember, you start with an income of 2 gold and received an additional 3 from each village you control. Upkeep paid is the difference between the number of villages and the upkeep cost. Upkeep is only paid if the total upkeep of your units is greater than the number of villages that you control. Level 0 units don't cost any upkeep, but Level 1 unit costs 1 upkeep while each Level 2 unit costs 2 upkeep.

Anticipate your income. For example, if you have 20gp and a 13 income, you could recruit a 20gp Mage if you think there is a high chance that one of your units will die on your opponent's turn, because then you can still afford a 14gp Spearman next turn (your upkeep will lower by 1, giving you an income of 14). If you know you're going to lose a village, or take one, then check to see what your gold will be the next turn with that factored in. Either recruit or don't recruit a new unit accordingly. Managing your gold efficiently, by anticipating your income, is part of a game winning strategy.

Delay Recruiting so that you have the proper units for the match. It may be tempting to recruit a unit just because you have exactly that amount of gold saved up, but if you just wait one turn, you will be able to afford better units. For example, when you're Drakes and have 15gp, you might be inclined to recruit a Saurian Skirmisher. However, you might be in a situation where you should most likely wait until the next turn, so you can afford something like a Clasher instead.

Banking is an advanced strategy where you no longer recruit units in order to save up lots of money. This is normally done by sitting at your maximum upkeep. It's usually a good idea to bank if your opponent won't go on the offense and doesn't properly pressure your villages. Banking is also sometimes a good idea in a matchup where you need many expensive units to properly launch an offensive - like in Loyalist vs UD where you need Mages.

If they advance on your villages to try and stop you from banking it may be a trick if their units are out of position. For example, only half of their army can reach your defensive line. Instead of recruiting with all of your saved gold, you may just want to recruit a couple units instead to bolster your defenses against a possible attack.

After successfully banking for a while, you will perform a mass recruitment. Anticipate what **ToD** it will be once those units will reach your opponent's **Front-Line Village**. For example, in a

Lawful vs Chaotic matchup, if you recruited 6 new units in one turn you would want it so that those units were at your opponent's **Front-Line Village** by Dawn. **Calculate** exactly how much money you'll have in a number of turns to maximize your recruitment efficiency. For example, if you have an income of 16 and 10 gold in the bank, you will have 74 gold in 4 turns. With this amount, you could recruit 3 Drake Clashers and a Drake Fighter.

You should never be banking while engaging your opponent. There is no good reason to save money in order to recruit multiple units at once while your units are busy fighting. You need reinforcements ASAP and you should be recruiting every turn, or in a rare case skip just one turn if you are **Delay Recruiting**. For Example, if you have 14 gold and could recruit a spearman, it may be worth waiting a turn to recruit a Horseman instead since it will reach the fight quicker and provide a big damage boost. Sometimes it is a valid strategy to start banking when you know your army is going to retreat from your opponent's territory, but that is a rare exception, as you will normally need troops ASAP once the fighting has started.

Banking wars may occur when both you and your opponent refuse to recruit units. Pressuring villages may have failed to force either side to start recruiting. Whichever side has less upkeep is winning a **Banking war**, which forces the other side to act. The best thing to do in this situation is to start to recruit 1-2 units to put pressure on your opponent to recruit as well. This way you aren't recruiting tons of units and getting terrible upkeep all of a sudden. Usually, your opponent will respond by recruiting 1-2 units at a time as well. This might go back and forth for a while until you both do eventually just stop banking altogether. If they aren't scouting your keep, you might be able to do a mass recruit and attack at your favorable ToD while their fresh recruits are still in their keep.

Recruiting:

Your **Initial Recruit** will be based off of how to take your villages efficiently, and whether or not you're rushing. Afterwards you will be **Counter Recruiting** your opponent's faction. **Reinforcements'** movement will need to be **Calculated** as the match progresses, so that they reach the battle effectively.

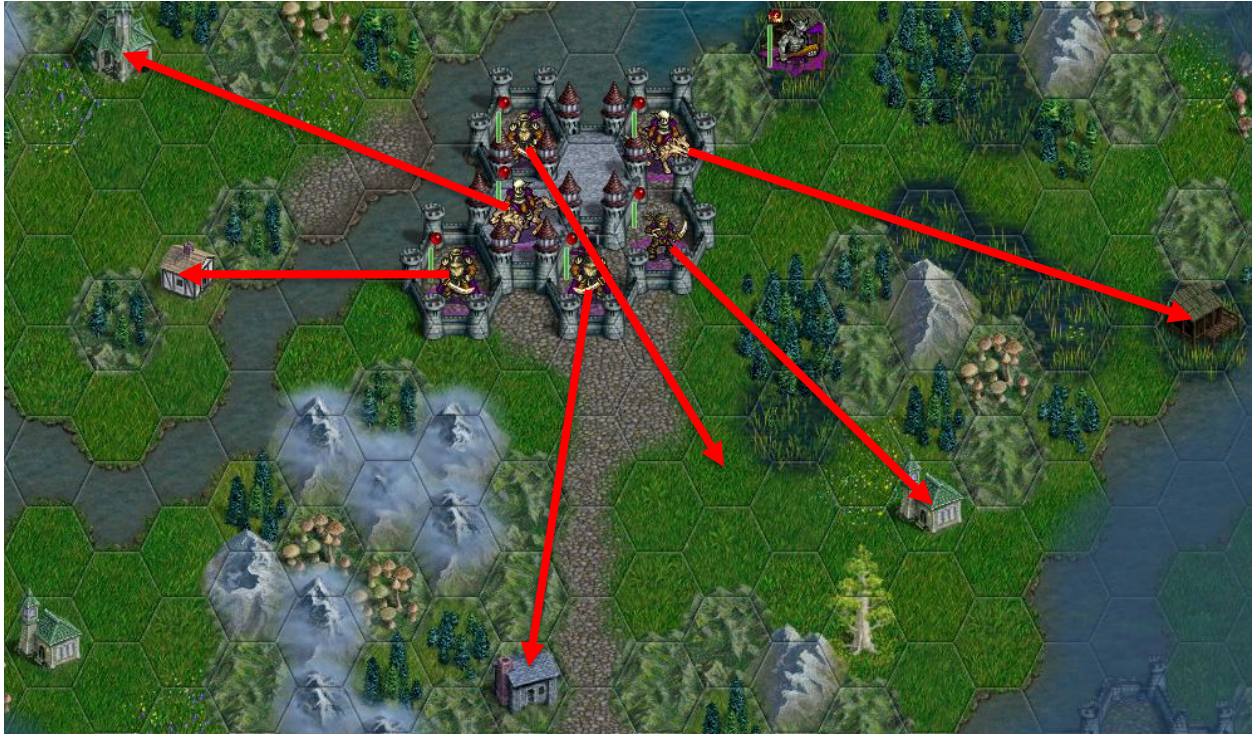
For your **Initial Recruit**, you should recruit units that have enough movement points (MPs) to take as many villages as possible the next turn. You will also want to recruit a powerful village holding unit to occupy your **Front-Line Village** by turn 3 to defend against a rush. You should have all of your villages by turn 2 or 3 with only a few maps taking 4 turns. **If you recruit a unit that can take a village the next turn, you are essentially getting that unit for cheaper than what it costs, compared to recruiting a unit that cannot reach a village in the next turn.**



ABOVE: A common initial recruit for Rebels on Caves of the Basilisk. All villages taken by turn 2

If you are **Chaotic** faction that is planning a rush attack, then your **Initial Recruit** will have extra units that won't be taking villages the next turn. They will need that extra turn in order to attack your opponent as soon as possible. This is an advanced method of recruiting, and you have to figure out where those early recruited units will be by night time (by **Counting Hexes**) in order to justify it.

BELOW: A Northerner recruit on Freelands as P2. Note how one of the grunts won't be able to reach a village next turn, but that's okay since he is rushing to battle















When performing your **Initial Recruit**, consider if you are vulnerable to a rush attack.

Defending against the rush is one of the first things you need to learn in competitive 1v1 matches. If you are Player 2 on small maps like The Freelands, then you should consider how you will defend versus a well-executed rush from **Chaotic** factions. This generally consists of recruiting units like Drake Clashers or Ghouls to hold your **Front-Line Villages**.

After your **Initial Recruit**, you will usually not recruit anything else until you **Scout** your opponent, so that you can **Counter Recruit**. Once you know what your opponent is playing you will want to recruit the best units that counters theirs. **Learning what units are best versus different factions comes with experience as you play the game, but it is important to learn the best counter units early.**

Here are some important **Counter Recruits** to know:

		If you are					
							
		Undead	Loyal	Drake	Knalgan	Northern	Rebel
If Opponent is		Dark Adept	Heavy Infantry, Mage	Drake Burner	Footpad, Ulfserker	Orcish Archer	Wose, Elven Shamans, Mage
	Undead						
		Skeleton Archers		Saurians	Thunderers	Orcish Archer	Wose
	Loyal						
		Dark Adept, Skeleton Archers	Bowman		Thunderers	Orcish Archer	Elven Archers
	Drakes						
		Ghosts	Heavy Infantry, Mage	Drake Burner		Orcish Assassins	
	Knalgan						
			Cavalrymen	Drake Clashers	Poachers		
	Northern						
			Mages (vs Wose)		Ulfserker	Orcish Archer (vs wose)	
	Rebel						

When playing versus a random faction, your **Initial Recruit** needs to take into consideration all the possible factions that you could be facing. Recruiting units that are very good versus some factions but terrible versus others should generally not be in your initial recruit. For example, if you recruit multiple Elven Archers, and then face an Undead opponent, you might be at a serious disadvantage.

As the game advances, consider where **Reinforcements** are needed and what turn they need to be there by. Recruiting slower units at first and then quicker units after so that they arrive to the fight at about the same time can be very effective. For example, in Loyalist vs Northerners you may want to recruit a Spearman followed by Cavalry so they reach a fight that is 15 hexes away on the same turn. Be sure to **Count Hexes** to figure out how long it will take for them to get to the fight. Consider the **ToD** as well. You don't want a Saurian Skirmisher showing up to a fight in the Morning, just like you wouldn't want a Drake Fighter reaching it at First Watch.

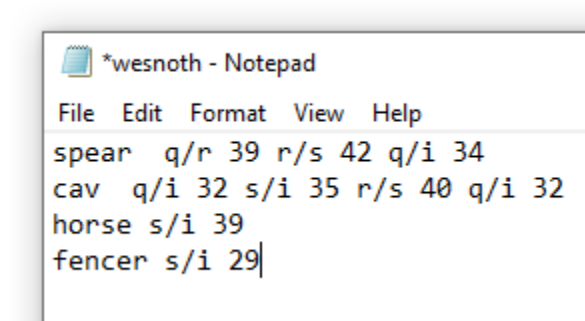
Wait to recruit until after all of your units have moved. Exceptions are if you need to see what traits a recruit gets that might change your plans (like Quick), or in situations where you're moving your leader outside of your keep to attack something before finishing the rest of your moves.

Always consider if leaving your keep with your leader is worth it, as it will cut off **Reinforcements** for every turn you're outside of the keep. A lot of times the bonus of having a Lv 2 unit join a battle in the form of your leader is a big advantage, especially the stronger leaders, but you may regret it if you don't have a fresh supply of **Reinforcements** to bolster your army for several turns.

Scouting:

After your initial recruit, you will begin scouting out your opponent's faction, units, and positioning. Generally, this is done with a high movement unit so that it can see far into your opponent's side of the map, but any amount of scouting is better than none. See what they are recruiting every turn, and check how many turns it will take for them to reach certain hexes like your **Front-Line Village**. This will give you plenty of time to recruit the proper counter units. **If you scout well in your games, nothing will ever surprise you, and you can play 1-3 turns ahead of your opponent effectively.**

As you scout, immediately make note of your opponent's units. Write down their type, their traits, and their hit points on your **Notepad**. You can also **Calculate** how much gold your opponent has spent on their army, and therefore you should know about how much money they currently have. This will also tell you whether a Rebel opponent has hidden Woses, or a Loyalist has a Horseman sitting far back in the **Fog of War** - waiting to ambush you.



ABOVE: A loyalist opponent's units with their traits and hit points written down. Make sure to delete them as they perish

Always scout first before planning your turn or recruiting units. You don't want to put yourself in a position where a unit you couldn't see can now reach you because you didn't scout first. If there is a seemingly obvious choice to make, like attacking an exposed unit or taking an open village, it is usually a trick, and scouting first can expose ambushes.

When you do not have a scouting unit, you should at least move a unit out of your forward village to scout 2-3 spots ahead, and then move back. Some amount of scouting is better than nothing. A good opponent will anticipate your scouting capability and try to hide things in the **Fog of War**.



ABOVE: An Elvish Fighter moves up to scout the Northerner army to see if it is advancing or not

Sometimes you will be able to block your opponent's scouts by moving your army up. This can be helpful to make it so they can't see what your new recruits are in your base, or to hide that you're **Banking**.



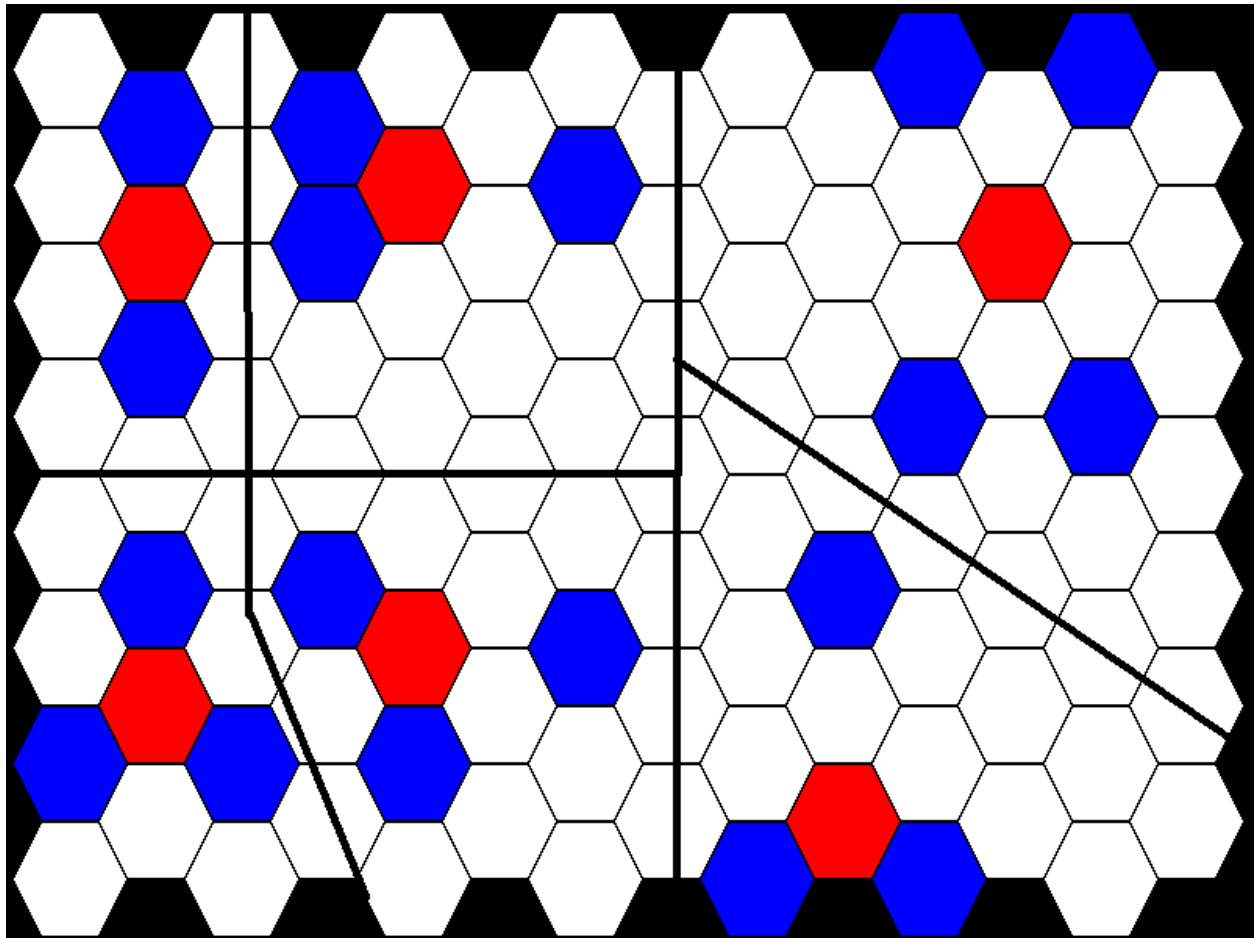
ABOVE: The Quick Wolfrider is unable to scout the Rebel castle

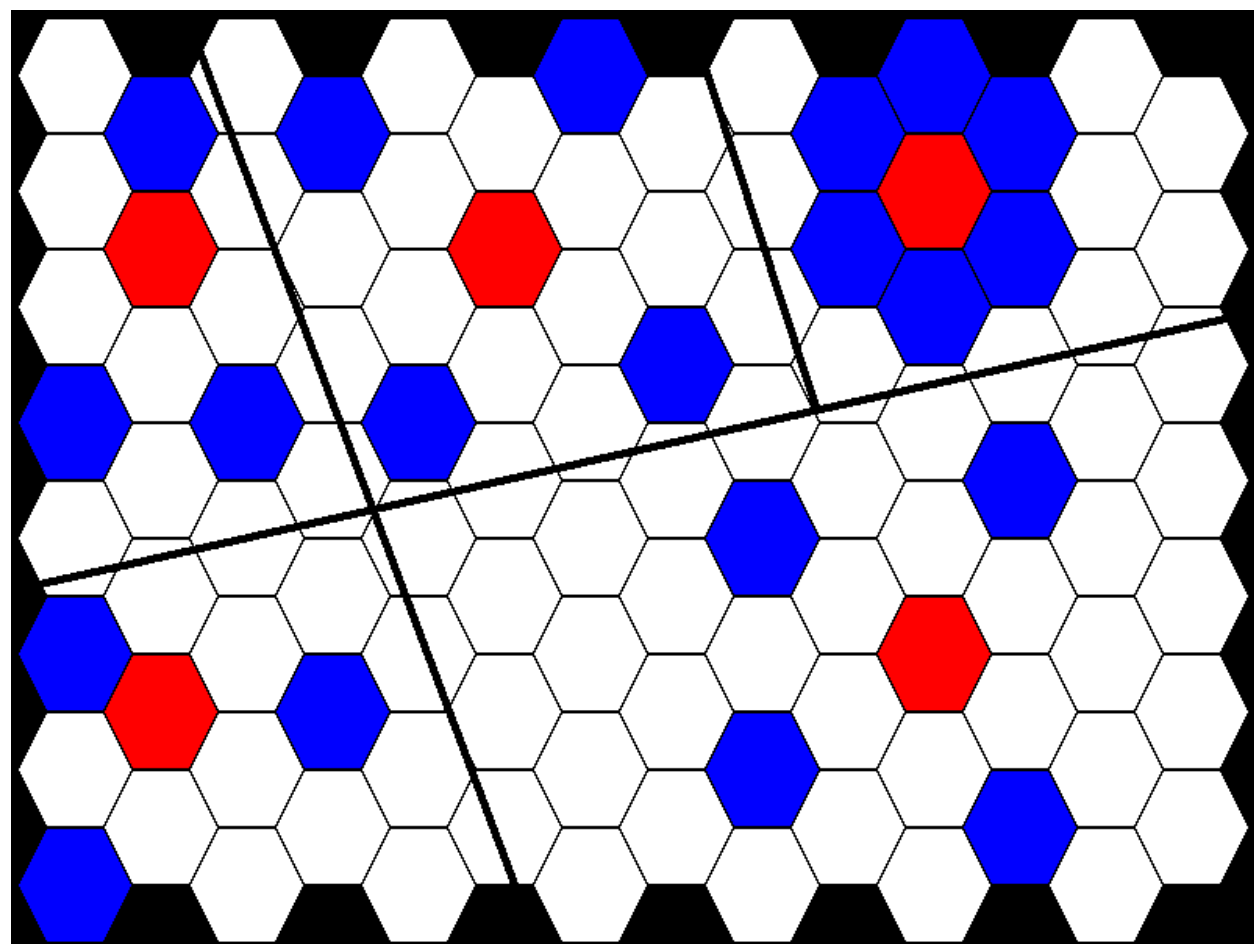
Zone of Control (ZoC)

“ZoC-ing is vital and if you can combine your attack with ZoC-ing to keep opponent on a bad terrain, then your chances for winning are increasing rapidly.” ~ dragonking. Multiplayer Developer and Winner of the Tournament of Champions

Zone of Control (ZoC) is a core part of Wesnoth. Mastering it is fundamental to your success. You will use **ZoC** to form a **Defensive Line**, **Retreat** effectively, **Trap** units (especially a retreating army), **Block** your opponent from taking villages, or **Protect** vulnerable units. Hover your mouse over your opponent's units to see where they can move on their turn, and place your units accordingly. **ZoCing Effectively** is one of the most tactical aspects of the game.

BELOW: Here are some common ways you can prevent an opponent's unit from moving by using ZoC. The Blue hexes would be your troops while the Red hex is your opponent's. While contained by ZoC a unit is only able to move one hex





Consider the following in-game pictures of **ZoC Defensive Lines**:



ABOVE: Rebels form a Defensive Line with ZoC, so that their units can't be attacked from more than 1 or 2 hexes



ABOVE: Drakes form a V-shaped line to retreat and not get ZoC trapped

BELOW: V shaped ZoC Defensive Line is utilized by Rebels. If the Undead player moves all of his glass-cannon Adepts to attack on the front line, they will surely suffer massive damage in the counter attack



BELOW: A ZoC Defensive Line like the one that the Drakes have created is only a good idea if they can counter attack on their next turn. If they are planning on retreating then they are just giving their opponent Free Hits by staying in range of so many units





***ABOVE:** Effectively using ZoC to Block a unit from taking your village*

***BELOW:** Units are placed to Block a spearman from a CtK on a Leader*



When defending a village, it is sometimes a good idea to surround and **ZoC** it with additional units. If your opponent manages to kill the unit holding the village then they still can't take it because it's still **ZoC'd** (unless they have a skirmisher unit).

BELOW: If the assassin is killed, the opponent will still not be able to take the village



While moving your units back and forth in the battle for **Initiative**, you might get an opportunity to **ZoC Trap** one of their units. This may even lead to a large battle as your opponent may try to free it from the **ZoC**.



ABOVE: Two Gliders trap a Bat that got too close

If you think an opponent is likely to try to retreat on their turn then you should probably **ZoC Trap** at least one of their units. They will be forced to continue the fight or lose the trapped unit(s).



ABOVE: A Wolfrider is ZoC Trapped while Northerners try to retreat at Dawn. When ZoC Trapping a retreating army, your opponent will often try to kill the unit that is doing the trapping, so try not to risk injuring it from retaliation damage

ZoC is also necessary to **Protect** your units during a fight. Low HP, High Dmg glass-cannon units (like Mages or Augurs) should be protected the most. Damaged units and units with XP should also be a high priority for **Protecting**.

BELOW: An injured Dwarf Fighter with high XP is Protected because it can only be attacked from 1 hex



In order to **ZoC Effectively** you may want to consider a **Second Line** of **ZoC**. When advancing an army or defending a **Front-Line Village** some players commonly put weak archer units on Flat, right behind their front line. If they are attacked, and a little RNG is on the attacker's side, it can be devastating as units like Adepts and Mages are then exposed to being attacked.



ABOVE: A Second Line of ZoC protects the low hp Drake units. The Rebels would have to not only kill the Saurian Skirmisher in the castle, but also the Glider

Make sure to use mushroom groves to help **ZoC** Orc units and flying units. Most of the time maps have had mushroom groves strategically placed in order to do exactly this.



ABOVE: None of the Northerner units can move into the Mushroom Groves since it takes 3 mps for Orc units. Killing the Ghoul is high unlikely since they can only attack from 2 hexes.

Initiative:

“At high levels of play Wesnoth is often a very defensive, subtle game of position - where unit placement and time of day play pivotal roles in deciding which attacks succeed and which fail.”- Wintermute, Multiplayer Developer and Tournament of Champions 4 Winner

Controlling the game, or having the **Initiative**, starts with the back-and-forth battle for positioning between you and your opponent. Whomever is forcing their opponent to react has the **Initiative**, and it will often switch between the two of you, due to **ToD** rotations. If neither of you are rushing towards the other's **Front-Line Village** for a first night attack, then you will enter into this phase of the game before the main fighting starts. **Games can be won or lost during this phase, so mastering it is key to winning competitive matches. It is often what separates the good players from the great.**

Much like chess, **Planning Ahead** multiple turns and having strong foresight is pinnacle to success in Wesnoth. Before you move your units, be sure to hover your mouse over your opponent's units to see where they can move on their turn, and then place your units accordingly. During your opponent's turn you should be **Counting Hexes** to anticipate where you want your army to be in the next 1-3 turns, and also to anticipate where your opponent's army will be in the next 1-3 turns. Some players like to use **ctrl-V** (Show Enemy Moves) as well.

Pressuring Villages during your **ToD** advantage is incredibly important for the **Initiative** of the upcoming battles. If you fail to pressure your opponents then they are free to sit back and bank their gold or move forward with their army into a position where they can attack your **Front-Line Villages** at their most optimal **ToD**. Controlling the **Initiative** of the game is vital to any attacker's success.

Being the first to attack can be critical to Victory, especially in certain matchups. Primarily ones where even **ZoC Defensive Lines** will yield many units dying, or becoming badly injured. The prime example is Drakes vs Undead. In these types of matches, it is vital to make sure you are not attacked first. That means abandoning your **Front-Line Villages** from an oncoming force, instead of trying to defend it. If your opponent has glass-cannon type units, like Mages and Adepts, you will have little chance to hold your village. It is a much better idea to abandon the village, and possibly launch a counter attack when they take it, giving you the initiative in the battle.

Eventually, one of you will have to pick where and when you want the fight to take place. This usually means one of two things:

- Attacking with **Favorable ToD**
- Defending with a **Fortified Position**

Attacking with **Favorable ToD** will mean your army will be in position to attack your opponent's **Front-Line Village(s)** at the best time. It is better to be P1 in an opposite alignment matchup. You can advance during the second half of your opponent's **Favorable ToD** (Afternoon/Second Watch) in order to position yourself to attack at either Dusk or Dawn (whichever is right before your **Favorable ToD**.) You will also be able to effectively retreat once a **ToD** shift happens - while still doing damage during your **Favorable ToD**.

For example, if you are P1 Loyalist versus a P2 Undead, you will be able to advance at Second Watch with little risk of P2 Undead attacking - since your **Counter Attack** would be at Dawn. If you are engaged in a battle during the day where you have a +25% bonus to your attacks while your opponent has a -25% - you can then safely retreat at Dusk or continue the fight one more turn before retreating at First Watch. In this example, P2 Undead will find it difficult to attack at Second Watch because P1 Loyalist will then be able to counter attack at Dawn which will quickly turn into Morning.

P2 is usually better in same-alignment matchups. The goal here is to avoid being attacked during First Watch/Morning in order to **Initiate** a battle on those turns instead.

For example, if you are P2 Northerners versus a P1 Undead, you will want to retreat from an advancing Undead army at Dusk so that they do not have **Initiative** at First Watch. You will then want to attack during First Watch, giving you two full turns of +25% while your opponent only gets one at Second Watch. Attacking at Second Watch is also a good option since you get a turn of +25%, and then when your opponent takes their turn at Dawn there is no longer a **ToD** bonus.

These are generally the best times to attack, depending on alignment and **Time of Day**, to maximize your damage while minimizing your opponent's:

- **You are P1 Lawful Vs P2 Chaotic or Lawful:** Attack at Dawn **or** Morning
- **You are P1 Chaotic Vs P2 Lawful or Chaotic:** Attack at Dusk **or** First Watch
- **You are P2 Lawful Vs P1 Chaotic:** Attack at Second Watch **or** Dawn
- **You are P2 Lawful Vs P1 Lawful:** Attack in the Morning **or** Afternoon
- **You are P2 Chaotic Vs P1 Lawful:** Attack in the Afternoon **or** Dusk
- **You are P2 Chaotic Vs P1 Chaotic:** Attack at First Watch **or** Second Watch

(Always keep in mind if you're P1 or P2. If you forget, you can always double check in the **Status** window with **alt+S**)

If your army is out of position, and is not getting to those **Front-Line Villages** by that time, then you are losing the **Initiative** battle. **Generally speaking, matches are usually very close if the defending player falls back from their Front-Line Village during their opponent's most favorable Time of Day attack.** This leaves the attacker with 1 less round of good **ToD** to attack with. If they press the attack anyway, the defender has a good chance of successfully defending, and it makes it harder for the attacker to retreat. **If the attacker gets to initiate the attack at their most favorable ToD, then the defender's chances of successfully defending drop dramatically.**



ABOVE: Rebels wisely falling back from their Front-Line Village Northerners advance at First Watch

When marching into your opponent's territory it is usually best to pressure them on multiple **Lanes**. Feigning an attack on a certain side to get your enemy to gather troops there will help divert units from the **Lane** that you are planning to actually attack. This is one of the many ways to employ **Divide and Conquer** tactics in Wesnoth.

The biggest advantage of being the attacker in Wesnoth is threatening villages. This means having a unit in range of moving into those villages if your opponent leaves them. Often you will be able to keep two of your opponent's units locked down in villages just by having a single scout unit threatening them. On some maps, like The Freelands, threatening multiple villages is easy to do, and often gives a large advantage to the attacking side. **The best attacks will threaten/pressure multiple villages**, forcing your opponent to keep units in them.



ABOVE: A single wolf rider with 8mp threatens two villages, forcing the Rebels to use 2 units to hold them

Any well-positioned attacking army will be threatening at least two villages at their favorable **ToD**. A common mistake is threatening just one village, which makes it very easy for the defender to abandon it and position themselves to have the **Initiative** for a strong counter attack - if the attacker takes it.



ABOVE: Undead are positioned to attack both villages instead of just one

If your opponent has the **Initiative** then you will most likely be defending with a **Fortified Position** and/or a **ZoC Defensive Line**. This means having resilient units in villages, high defense terrain being utilized by the appropriate units, and **ZoC** limiting how many units can attack yours. You might have to retreat from your **Front-Line Village** in order to not give your opponent ideal **ToD** to attack with, or if you feel confident you may be able to hold onto your villages with a solid defense and a little help from RNG. While defending, your **Reinforcements** will reach the fight sooner, and you might be able to use your **Leader** as well.

When defending with primarily a **ZoC Defensive Line** (meaning only allowing your units to be attacked from two hexes) it is best to have units that can do both melee and ranged in the hexes holding the line. This way your opponent is receiving retaliation damage - which will give you a higher chance to kill them in the counter attack. Elvish Fighters are particularly good at this. This only works effectively if you have the troops for a proper counter attack the next turn to swap out with the injured frontline units. In games where you split your forces to attack or defend two **Lanes** at once it is much harder to pull off a successful **ZoC Defensive Line**. In these situations, you may want to place your units in high defense terrain instead of holding a line.

Be careful not to wound your units too much before your best **ToD**, especially if you're attacking a unit that is just going to retreat to heal in a village the next turn.



ABOVE: A Rebel Fortified Position against Northerners

If an army that advances towards your **Fortified Position** won't attack, and instead sets up defensively in front of it, consider positioning your army for chasing theirs. There is a good chance they are going to retreat on their next turn if they don't attack on their optimal **ToD**. This means you can un-fortify your army and move up to chasing distance. Having quick units in front for the chase is especially important. For example, if they have 5 mp units, you can place your 6mp units one hex away from them, and then you can chase effectively as they will still be in range of your units the next turn.

Never put most of your army on the far edges of a map, as your opponent will easily out-manuever you. Keeping the bulk of your army in the middle and then adjusting from there will give you the best chances to not get out-manuevered. **A common tactic during the positioning phase of the game is to move quick armies parallel to the opponent's in hopes that they will make a positioning mistake.**

If your opponent gets careless, you can initiate a fight by preventing a unit from retreating. This is not always obvious, but if you keep good track of positioning you can force these fights. Having high movement point units on your flanks will give the best chance for this to occur.



ABOVE: This Skeleton can no longer retreat to the north because of ZoC, forcing a fight

Many times, the unit you are using to force a fight will die, but the reward outweighs the cost, as you will then usually have a **ToD** advantage or army size advantage in the ensuing battle.

Another way to initiate a battle is by creating what seems to be a favorable situation to **Bait** your opponent to attack. Usually this is accomplished by a slightly misplaced unit, which will hopefully survive from at least 2-3 attacks and be able to retreat to a village the next turn. Preferably this unit will have both a melee and ranged attack, so that it can do some retaliation damage and soften up the attackers' hit points.



ABOVE: A Glider is placed so that the Loyalists will attack

BELOW: The result of the Loyalists attacking the Glider. Note the retaliation damage against the Spearman, Merman, and Archers



BELOW: The follow up attack from Drakes. The spearman is dead, and now the main battle begins



BELOW: In this picture we see Rebels defending against Undead. The two Elvish Fighters can be attacked from 5 hexes and stand little to no chance of survival



BELOW: Here is the aftermath. Both fighters are dead and did little retaliation damage



BELOW: Later in the same game, the Rebels have learned their lesson and retreat from their villages. This gives them the initiative on the counter attack if Undead takes the villages



Remember, playing 1-3 turns ahead of your opponent and having strong foresight on a decision is pinnacle to success in Wesnoth. **Count Hexes!** Where will your opponent be moving their units on their next turn? Where is the best place to have your units in order to counter that? You need to consider cutting off retreats, the best placement for chasing, and protecting your vulnerable units, all while maximizing your damage.

Battle Tactics:

“Players take so much time and effort planning, moving, positioning, and just trying to get an edge...but once combat starts all that work seems to go out the window.” – jb, Multiplayer Developer

Large battles are one of the main things that separate the good players from the great, and is usually where most of the mistakes in a game are made. Mastering **Battle Tactics** is one your main goals. Mistakes happen, and it is your goal to minimize yours while capitalizing on your opponent's.

Consider your first instinct for your moves, and then consider something else. If you spend a little extra time studying the coming battle you will often find better moves beyond your initial thoughts.

Answer these questions when deciding what each unit will do in a battle:

- Can this unit only **Reach Specific Hexes** to attack from?
- Do I want this unit to hold the line with high HP?
- Do I want this unit to get exp?
- Does the math work out with my other units to kill this unit I'm attacking efficiently?
- Will moving to this hex put my unit in range of one of theirs that I could possibly stay out of range of instead? (**Divide and Conquer**)
- How much **Retaliation Damage** is possible to receive if I attack?
- If I kill a unit will it open up better positions to move to?
- Are they likely to survive a counter attack if placed there?
- Where will they be able to reach the next turn?
- Will they be able to retreat effectively if needed?
- Will they be able to chase retreating units?
- If I attack and miss every hit, while taking full retaliation damage, what will I do next?

When it finally comes time to engage in a battle, the first things you should check to see is if you have units that can only **Reach Specific Hexes**. These will usually be the units that are the farthest away, and should be considered first before deciding your attacks. Make sure not to block them on accident. You can do this by hovering your mouse over your units and then seeing everywhere they can go.

If you ever forget what Defense % a certain hex gives to either your or your opponent's units, you can click on it and hover a hex to see. If you click on any unit and then hover your mouse cursor over terrain, the game will tell you how many movement points are needed for that unit to move over that type of terrain, and also how much defense the unit will get from it.



ABOVE: A Heavy Infantryman trying to move to hex 22,7 where he will receive 40% defense and takes 3 movement points to move there

If you have units that can only reach one enemy unit then you will most likely want to see how those fights go first before proceeding with the rest of your attacks. For example, your reinforcements will usually be very limited on what they can reach, and should be considered first before moving other units.



ABOVE: The Quick Adept at the top can only reach one unit, so start your attack by seeing how that fight goes first

Any well-executed attack will involve a decent amount of **Calculation**. You want to avoid leaving your opponent with units that have 1-2 HPs because you didn't **Calculate** your attacks correctly. For example, if a 36 HP unit can be attacked from two hexes, make sure to attack it with your **Strong** Grunts or Dark Adepts at night that do 12 damage a hit - and therefore only need three hits to kill it. With few exceptions, you will want to prioritize **CtKs** on units, rather than spreading out your damage.

Some good Unit matchups to know are:

- **Strong Grunts kill Ghouls in 3 hits at night (11 dmg a hit, 33 hps)**
- **Adepts kill Strong/Resilient Drake Fighters in 3 hits at dusk/dawn (15 dmg a hit, 45 hps)**
- **Thunderers kill Strong/Resilient Horsemen in 2 hits (22 dmg a hit, 44 hps)**
- **Strong Elf Fighters/Archers kill Strong/Resilient Saurian Augurs in 4 hits (7 dmg a hit, 28 hps)**

When initiating a battle, always see how many times your first attacker hits before you proceed with the rest of your plan. Adjust accordingly if your unit misses or hits more than you had anticipated. For example, when attacking a high defense % unit, if all of your attacks miss from your first unit, consider abandoning the attack and focus on something else with a lower defense %.

Normally you will start your attack against units that can be reached from 3 hexes. If any of those hexes only has that unit as the target then it is best to start with attacking from there. See how you hit with the first unit before committing to the attack from the other two hexes. If that first unit completely misses, you may want to use those remaining two hexes for other attacks instead.

Once units start taking damage and dying, you will want to consider what moves could open up to you if you get kill hits. For example, you may have a goal in mind for your turn, like killing 2 injured units to get to a ranged unit, or moving to a Hex that allows your Thief to use its Backstab ability.

If you get a unit down to 1-3 hps, consider if it is worth killing or ignoring it. You may want to maximize your damage output instead. For example, if a Grunt has 2 hps you might not want to attack it with a unit that has a 21-damage potential. If you're worried about it retreating and healing up then go ahead with the kill, but in big fights it will sometimes be worth ignoring the near-death units to maximize your damage output on something else.

BELOW: The Elf Fighter with high exp points can be attacked from 3 hexes, and only 1 of those hexes has no other target (circled in red). The correct play is to attack that unit from that hex first, and see how many hits you land before making further decisions:





ABOVE: The results are the grunt went 0/2 vs the fighter, so I opted to poison the Archer and Fighter with the other two hexes instead of continuing with trying to kill the Fighter with high exp. The Elvish Scout dies to the three units it got in range of, and Northerners form a defensive ZoC line with the rest of its units to minimize damage on them from the counter attack, while the poison starts to work

When your enemy has a **ZoC** line of troops, where you can only attack any particular unit with 2 of yours, always try to maximize damage on one unit by attacking the most vulnerable unit first. If you hit a lot, then go ahead and attack the same unit with the other remaining open hex. If your first attack does not hit, then use the next hex to have attack the next unit down the **ZoC** line. The goal here is to hit a unit from 2 hexes instead of just 1 to maximize your damage.

When attacking, it is important to keep your opponent's counter-attack in mind. In the example below we see Drakes having the initiative on an attack versus the Knalgan Alliance. A dwarvish Guardsman holds a village, while a Ulfserker is in range of a Saurian Skirmisher. If Drakes attack here, they will surely take losses in the counter attack. Let's see how it plays out **(You may want to view this document two pages at a time to make it easier to compare):**





Here is the result. A poacher is near-death, a Footpad is at half-health, and the Ulfserker is dead. Unfortunately, Drakes were unable to score any other kills. Because the Guardsman in the village survived, the northern-most Burner can be attack from 3 hexes and will surely perish in the counter-attack.



The counter-attack is devastating. Drakes lose both Burners and the Saurian Skirmisher. They now have to make a decision to continue the attack or retreat. (They retreated)

Later in the same game, the Drakes attack again, but this time with a counter-attack in mind:





The Dwarven Fighter dies, and the Poacher takes some damage. The Knalgan Alliance are now forced to move onto Flat grassland if they want to launch a counter-attack. In addition, several of their units cannot reach the fight for the counter-attack because Drakes did not attack the second village. (**Divide and Conquer**)



In the counter-attack a Burner dies, but the Knaight Alliance do little else other than put themselves in a vulnerable position.



The aftermath is a Thief, 3 Thunderers, and a Poacher all die in the following turn while a Drake Fighter levels up, surely sealing a victory for Drakes.

Advanced Tactics:

“Wesnoth is all about taking calculated risks. You should play safe against weaker opponents but you can't win without taking risks against stronger foes.”

~ Dauntless, Ladder Legend and winner of multiple tournaments

In this section of the guide, I will cover the following:

- Utilizing Low HP Units
- Suiciding Units
- Covering Units
- Surprise Attacks
- Mitigating Retaliation Damage
- Protect your units that have XP
- Sacrificing a Unit
- Dividing and Conquering

Utilizing Low HP Units:

Consider carefully if a low hp unit is better off staying in the fight or retreating to a village to heal. If the game is going to be decided in the next few turns it is most likely a better idea to keep the troop in the battle, but if it's going to be a long game then healing up your units can be the best move. Try to prioritize attacks where they cannot die, or where they have a low chance to die, from **Retaliation Damage**.

BELOW: In this example we have a low HP clasher that cannot die from a Bowman's Retaliation Damage, so it can safely attack rather than retreat to a village



Suiciding Units:

In the middle of a battle, **Suiciding** units to get a kill might be a valid tactic. **This is especially valuable for leader kills and killing lv 2 units.** If you have low hit point units that you could reliably depend on dying from retaliation damage (while hoping they hit a good amount beforehand) it will let you then have a chance of finishing off an opponent's unit with extra attacks from the newly freed hex. You can get many surprise leader-kills this way, so always be on the lookout for it.

Covering Units:

Placing a unit on flat where it can be attacked from multiple hexes is usually a bad idea, but if the unit is **Covered** by reinforcements it can be justified. This simply means that another one of your units can reach the same hex, much like chess. This is a good way to get your opponent to move units into range of your reinforcements, and could even be considered a trap if they attack a seemingly vulnerable unit on flat that is covered by a unit they couldn't see.

Surprise Attacks:

These are hard to pull off in Wesnoth due to scouting, but sometimes it can be game winning if successful. Take advantage of when your opponent isn't using a scout, or you have killed their scouts and they haven't recruited new ones. For example, putting a Horseman unit at max range while it is still able to **Cover** your unit. This way, if your opponent attacks, you can charge it in the counter attack. Hidden units are another excellent way to **Surprise attack** an opponent. Woses and Skeletons in Deep Water can be an early plant that pays off in a long fight, if your opponent isn't anticipating it.



ABOVE: Undead advances, not knowing there is a Wose in the forest Hex. Now it can attack the Skeleton Archer

Mitigating Retaliation Damage:

When placing your units in a battle you will want to try to protect your ranged units as much as possible, so they don't die to the counter attack. This means having them only be attackable from one hex, or possibly two if they have the resilient trait. You'll want to have your low HP units in the back and high HP units in the front holding the **ZoC** line.

The best way to **Mitigate Retaliation Damage** is to first soften up a unit by attacking Melee units with Ranged units, or attacking Ranged units with Melee units. For Example, if a resilient Elvish Fighter has 38 hit points and cannot die to 3 hits from Orc Grunts, you may want to try

and minimize the retaliation damage by attacking it with an Orcish Archer or Orcish Assassin first. Afterwards, the first Grunt that attacks the fighter will risk taking heavy retaliation damage, but the second one might not take any if it's first hit deals a killing blow. This is a good way to keep your units with experience points healthy. If there is a hex to attack from that provides better than 40% defense then you will have to decide if you want the first or second grunt to attack from it. In this example, I would suggest to attack from the high % defense hex with the first grunt in order to **Mitigate Retaliation Damage**.

Protect your units that have XP:

You may want to prioritize keeping your units with **Exp** alive so that they eventually level. For example, if you can attack a unit from 3 hexes, you'll want the killing attack to come from a hex that is the most defensible. This could mean high defensive % terrain or **ZoC** so that it can only be attacked from 1-2 hexes the next turn. This will often mean that the first units attacking will have suffered some amount of **Retaliation Damage**, and will have a harder time holding the ZoC line. The benefit is having your unit with **Exp** being almost impossible to kill in the counter attack.

Sacrificing a Unit: This is an effective way to throw off your opponent's **Initiative**. Leaving a unit in an enemy's village is a good way to do this, and it might even survive an attack from 6 units, while dealing **Retaliation** damage.



ABOVE: An Elven Fighter is left in a Front-Line Village, and survives from 6 attacks, while dealing massive retaliation damage

Divide and Conquer is the art of keeping all of your units in a battle while staying out of range



half remaining in the north

of some of theirs. Your opponent's leader, new recruits, or reinforcements are usually the easiest to stay away from. **As long as they're at least 1 Hex out of reach then you are effectively Dividing their army.**

You can also **Divide and Conquer** by feigning an attack on a certain **Lane** to get your enemy to gather troops on that side, while your real attack will be on the side with less defenders.

Another subtle way to **Divide and Conquer** is having one of your units threatening multiple villages, which will force your opponent to use two units to defend them. Bats are exceptionally good at this. Slipping a unit behind enemy lines to harass villages works well too, especially on large maps like Sulla's Ruins, Fallenstar Lake, and Howling Ghost Badlands. This is usually easiest when a big fight is underway and your opponent is less concerned with blocking a unit from running past, and more concerned with killing your units.

LEFT: Divide and Conquer. Half of the Rebel army is cut off to the south, letting the Orcs overwhelm the other

Village Fighting:

I covered this earlier in the **Initiative** section, but here is some more advice about Attacking and Defending villages.

When you take or lose a village, it is immediately a +3 gold advantage for the village taker. For every turn after that, it is a +6 gold advantage (-3 and +3, assuming the players are past upkeep). As a general rule, when someone has three of their villages taken by their opponent and they don't immediately get at least one of them back the game is usually over. This is why it is so important to protect your villages while pressuring your opponent's.

Attacking Villages:

1. Remember to keep pressuring villages while attacking your opponent's base. If you have a scout unit that can run past your opponent's units try and time it with your main attack. Force your opponent to make tough decisions with their village defense.
2. Taking a village right before a big fight starts, even if you have little to no chance to hold it, could be the difference between your opponent recruiting one more reinforcement. It could also force them to use multiple units to not only kill that unit, but to take back the village – which is a form of **Divide and Conquer** if the village isn't near where the main fight is about to take place.
3. When attacking a unit in a village, see how well the first unit hits before fully committing. It might not be worth attacking with more units if you no longer have a **CtK**. Also consider it's going to regen 8 hps, so further attacks have a greater chance to be wasted.
4. While attacking a village make sure you're going to have a unit in range to actually take the village if you succeed in defeating the occupying unit. One of the worst things I see players do is kill a unit in a village and then for their opponent to just put a full HP unit back into that village the next turn.
5. Sometimes a village will need to be completely ignored because of the highly unlikely chance that you will be able to kill the unit in it. In these situations, you might just want to walk right past it or carefully fight around it.



ABOVE: Undead advances at dusk and steals a village with a Bat. The loss of 3 gold prevented Loyalists from recruiting a new unit on a crucial turn

BELOW: Two Trolls walk around a village being held by a Heavy Infantryman because they don't have much of a chance of killing it



Defending Villages:

1. When Defending a village, it is sometimes a good idea to put a unit right next to it. This way if your unit currently occupying it dies (but your opponent doesn't have a unit to take it) you can still occupy it. This works regardless of if they **ZoCed** it. This only really works if your opponent has very few units to slay the village occupier and you think there is a high chance they won't be able to move into it afterwards.

BELOW: The Spearman can still move into the Village even though it is surrounded by Dwarves:



2. When a village has a likely chance that it is going to be taken, but you want to try to defend it anyway, don't put another unit right next to the village. This will just give your opponent a target to attack with their village taker. Instead, use **ZoC** to lower attacks on the village to 2 or 3 hexes, but stay away by 1 hex on each side and form a line or a V.

BELOW: There is a high chance that the Rebels will kill the spearman in the village, but at least the village taker won't have a target



3. Be careful when giving up a village if you are not confident that you can take it back right away. Leaving a village to finish off a low hp unit may not be worth it if your opponent immediately takes and holds it.

4. When an opponent threatens multiple villages, and you don't have enough units to cover all of them, consider which one would be better for them to take. Usually this will be the village that is closest to your keep and reinforcements. Protect your farthest villages first and foremost as they will be the hardest to take back.

4. Throwing off your opponent's **Initiative** by having a village pillager might be worth it, but consider if you're likely to only get a 3 or 9 gold advantage while they're going to get 8 experience from killing the pillager. Many times, I have seen players make the mistake of taking a village they have little chance of holding, and instead the unit dies immediately without successfully throwing off their opponent's **Initiative**.

Managing Experience:

1. In order to efficiently manage your experience, you will need to answer the following question: Which hex do I want to put my unit in that is going to score the kill and get the experience. Protecting your units with experience should always be a high priority. You should be putting them in high defense hexes and using **ZoC** so that they can only be attacked from 1 or 2 hexes in the counter attack. Once you have leveled a unit, be careful that it is not in a position where it can be immediately killed if it is focused. Your opponent will most likely level one of their own units off of it if they do.
2. When you start scoring kills, you should be trying to put the experience on your units that need the least amount of EXP to level up. This usually means **Intelligent** units since some can level in just two kills. Often times this can turn around a losing battle or further solidify your lead. Once you start putting experience on units, try to make sure those units continue to get experience on the subsequent turns. Avoid spreading out exp among multiple units as much as possible.
3. You will often have to choose if you want to **Mitigate Damage** on your units or put experience on a preferred unit. For example, if you are attacking an elvish fighter with two Orcish Grunts and an Orcish Archer that is **Intelligent** - you might want to attack with the grunts first to try and score a few hits so that your Archer can then get the kill hit and experience. On the other hand, you might want to attack with the archer first in order to **Mitigate Damage** to your grunts when they finish it off instead.
4. When one of your units only needs 1 exp to level up, and it has enough hit points to survive against any attack, you can use it liberally to **ZoC** your opponent. They will rarely attack it to make it level, since the attack will be wasted. If an opponent has a unit that only needs 1 exp to level and can't die to just one unit attacking it, you might be able to get it in kill range by attacking with a Lv 0 unit like a Walking Corpse, Goblin, or Bat.
5. If you ever find yourself with a low hit point unit that is surely going to die, for example because you retreated your army and this low hp unit was **ZoC'd**, you will want to consider suiciding it. Attack their leader, a lv 2 unit, a zero exp unit, or non-intelligent unit so that it dies from retaliation damage. This will prevent your opponent from stacking exp on a unit that already has some.
6. Be careful when attacking a unit that needs 9 xp or less to level as it could be a completely wasted attack if your opponent manages to level that unit the next turn. If it needs 16 xp or less be very careful not to attack it with a unit that could

die to retaliation damage. You don't want your opponent to level a low hp unit because you sacrificed a unit into it and then it scores another kill the next turn.

7. Attacking a unit that needs 1 xp to level with lv 0 units can give you a CtK that you wouldn't normally have. For example, an Elvish Fighter with 25 HPs that needs 1 xp to level could be attacked by a goblin spearman first, and a grunt second in order to have a chance at killing it before it levels.
8. One way to deal with a Lv 2 unit is to suicide some low hp units into it so that you maximize your chances of killing it. This will often lead to a Lv 2 unit of your own.
9. Try to avoid putting XP on your leader or other level 2 units as they will rarely get to level 3. Instead, use them to soften up high hp units and maximize their damage output.
10. In the early part of the game, you may have an opportunity to attack a unit, with your scout, to get 1 xp, without any chance of it getting trapped or dying. It might be a good idea, especially on Intelligent scouting units like the Elvish Scout, since they need 17xp to level.



ABOVE: An Intelligent Elvish Scout has no chance of dying or being trapped by ZoC, so it gains 1 XP from safely attacking the Cavalry unit; putting it at 1/17XP

11. Prioritize getting battle experience on non-intelligent units or units that need an extra XP or two to level after getting kills. Remember, units get 1 xp for fighting level 1 units and 2 xp for fighting level 2 units.

BELOW: Since there was no CtK, the non-intelligent augur attacks the fencer to go to 1/20 XP. The next turn the Intelligent Augur kills the fencer, going to 8/15 XP. In this game both augurs leveled, notably the non-intelligent leveled from being at 18/20 XP and attacking a level 2 unit. Well managed experience can be the difference between winning and losing



Retreating and What to do When You're Losing:

“Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth (*by RNG.*)”

— Mike Tyson

When an attack goes poorly, or there is a **ToD** shift, you may want to retreat. If you have many **Quick** units you may be able to just move their max distance and stay relatively safe, but usually you will use a **V-shaped ZoC** to retreat effectively. The goal here is to have no units trapped by **ZoC** while retreating.



ABOVE: Drakes retreat while forming a V-shaped ZoC so that their units can't be trapped

If you do have a trapped unit, try not to let them die in vain. There is usually something useful you can do with a trapped unit. You will have to decide if you want it to try to stay alive as long as possible to throw off **Initiative**, do as much damage as possible before dying, **Suiciding** it if it has low health, or **Rescue** it.

It may be best to put max damage into your opponent's units rather than do a hopeless retreat. This way, they have to either heal their units or advance with injured ones. If the goal is to stay alive as long as possible, try to stick that unit in a village or whatever is their best defensive hex that is in range. Either way it will slow their advancement down while they deal with the unit. This is usually enough to disrupt your opponent's **Initiative**.

If you have units that are certainly going to be trapped and die, don't move them towards your base. This just gives your opponent a perfect efficient move to make by advancing towards you while also attacking. Throwing off their **Initiative** so that they aren't attacking your **Front-Line Villages** at their optimal **ToD** is paramount to having a chance to get back into the game. If you do not want your opponent's army coming towards your base you could move deeper into their territory. This could throw off their **Initiative** or effectively **Divide and Conquer** for the upcoming fights



ABOVE: In this situation the two Woses will not be able to retreat effectively because of their slow movement. Instead of retreating they should try to do as much damage as they can before they die. Instead, the Rebel player decided to retreat them. This let the Undead player not only march towards the Rebel's side of the map, but also let them kill both woses in the following 2 turns - while taking no retaliation damage. You never want your units in a position where they are in full retreat - with no reinforcements coming in to back them up, while they take full damage from the chasing army

Another choice is **Suiciding** a unit. This way we control what unit of your opponents' gets XP. It is the best move to do on their leader, a non-intelligent unit, or a unit with no XP.

Rescuing a trapped unit consists of moving it 1 hex out of the **ZoC** and re-establishing **ZoC** with your army. This may include killing a unit that is **ZoCing** yours. Be careful when doing this however, it will often lead to even more of your units dying in a full-on battle.



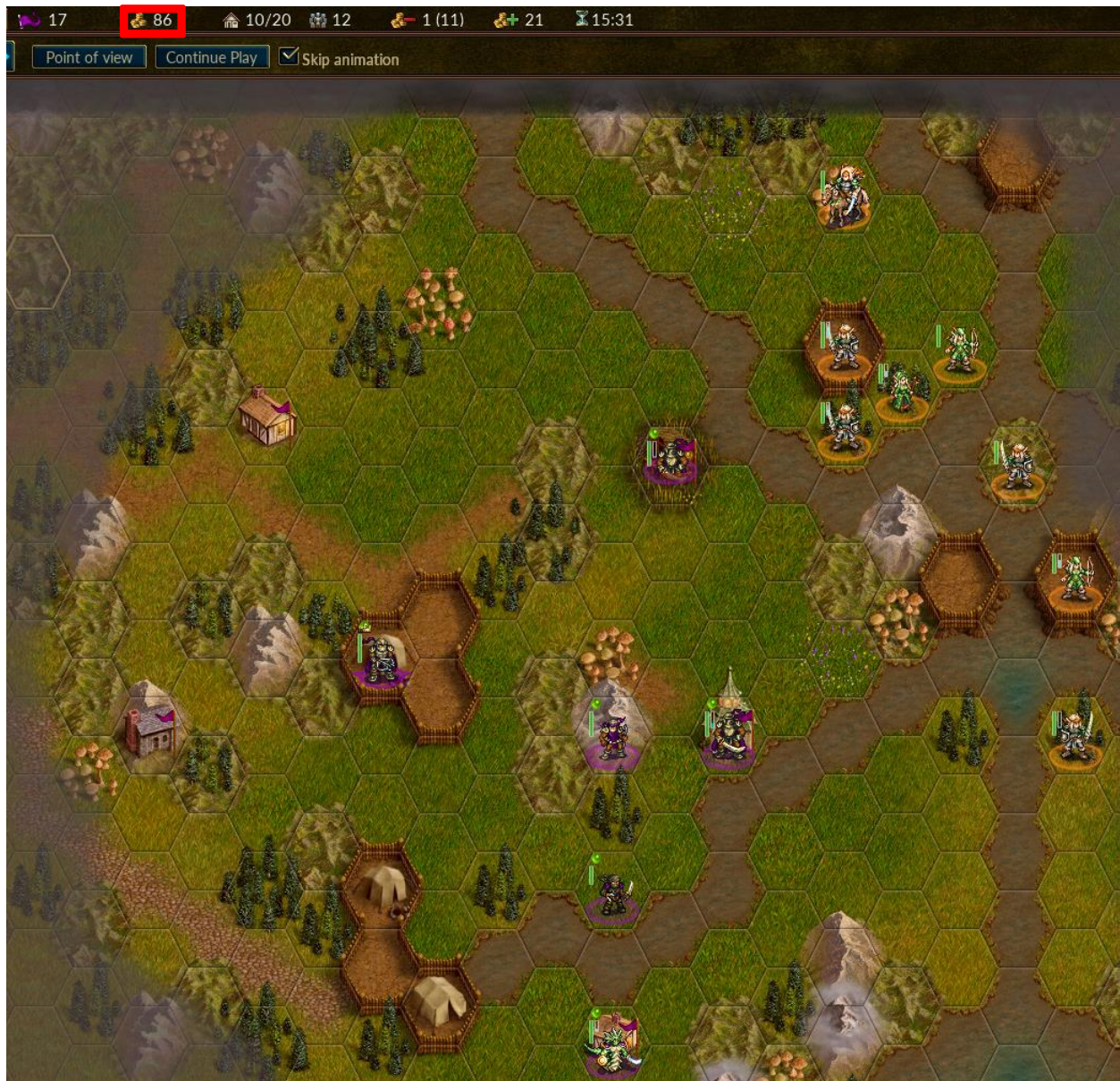
ABOVE: A skeleton is trapped, but Undead is able to move it one hex back and re-establish their ZoC – giving it a good chance it will survive and retreat

While retreating, you will probably have reinforcements streaming in to bolster your army. Retreating for a turn or two before turning around and heading back with reinforcements is a common occurrence in Wesnoth. Remember to **Cover** your units with your reinforcements, even if it's a vulnerable spot like a grass hex. This way if your opponent attacks your retreating unit you will have a full HP one to replace it the next turn.

If an attack fails and you are losing a match, it is often a good idea to start **Banking** while you retreat with what is left of your army. Usually, your opponent will still have a lot of upkeep, which will help equal out your losses as each turn goes by. This forces them to go on the offensive, and in some matchups, this can be a winning tactic. For example, in **Northerners vs Rebels** when your Orc rush fails to break thru the Elven defense, you will want to retreat and wait for the Rebels to attack. If this is a delayed attack, usually because they are busy healing up their units, then you should have a sizable amount of gold saved up by the time they do attack your **Front-Line Villages**.

When your opponent is in full **Retreat**, and they can't possibly turn around and attack you (usually during a big **ToD** shift like in Loyalist vs Undead), you can try and maximize your damage output with little worry of a counter attack. Still, always be careful of too much **Retaliation Damage**. If you attack a retreating Burner with an Elvish Fighter then expect the Burner to hit at least once in retaliation. How will your Fighter fair in a possible counter attack if this happens? Plan for the worst possible outcome.

BELOW: Northerners retreat from Rebels after repeated failed attacks while banking. 86 gold can now be used to do a mass recruit



Another tactic to employ if you're losing a match is running a scout behind enemy lines. Often they will block their villages or position their units to attack a village pillager, so you will mostly stick to staying just out of range of their units in non-village hexes. Take a village if it makes sense, but the main goal here is to disrupt their **Initiative**. It is a frustrating experience to have an opponent's unit behind your front lines. This type of harassment can be very effective and hard to defend, often delaying your opponent from attacking you for many turns. At the very least, it should act as a **Divide and Conquer** method as they will have to employ multiple units to deal with your pillager.

When a game starts to really look bleak, you can start taking some risks to try to get back into it. For Example, low **CtKs** with a high chance of retaliation damage start to look like a decent move. Placing a unit in a village that can be attacked from 4-5 hexes is normally suicide, but when you're losing it could get you right back in the game if it dodges a lot. High exp units with 1 HP can completely change the course of a battle if you manage a 35% **CtK** to level it.

It is **Good Sportsmanship** to say gg when a game is obviously lost, instead of dragging it on and wasting everyone's time. Remember, there is always the next game.

Practice Makes Perfect:

There are many ways to get better at Wesnoth, but the best way is to just play the game more. The more you play, the better you will get. **Top players have put thousands of hours into competitive matches of Wesnoth.** Analyzing your replays, talking to your opponent after a game to discuss the strategy and mistakes that were made, and learning from the best by analyzing their replays - all excellent ways to get better.

One thing that is helpful is just as a large battle is about to happen - make note of that turn. After the match, go back and replay those turns by using the "Continue Game" function inside the Replay to see how you could have played it differently. It will help improve your decision making in future games. **Learn from your mistakes. No one plays a perfect game of Wesnoth.** The most common mistakes players make are bad positioning, attacking inefficiently, and poor XP management – all things that I hope this guide will help players with.

Keep notes about matchups that you have played. Use a **Notepad**. This way when you get that matchup again, or find yourself on the other end of it, you will be able to reference those notes to give you some insight on what works and what doesn't work.

All replays are kept on the replay server: <https://replays.wesnoth.org/>

You can find replays of the best competitive players here:
<https://wesnoth.gamingladder.info/gamehistory.php>

Discuss your replays or 1v1 strategy on our Discord: <https://discord.gg/8aV2xUKuK8>

Finals Thoughts:

The ability to adapt is key to being great at Wesnoth. 'It depends' is the answer for a lot of strategical advice. There are exceptions to almost anything.

The greatest players to ever play Wesnoth have been well-rounded with each faction while minimizing their mistakes. They try to mitigate RNG factor as much as possible while staying calm in extreme RNG situations. They have good sportsmanship whether they win or lose, and always say GG when a game is over.

I hope this guide helps you become a great player. Please let me know what you think about it as I love hearing from the players. 😊

You can always find me, Cackfiend, on Discord <https://discord.gg/8aV2xUKuK8>

Thank you to Chekhovs_Cannon for helping me edit this document! Make sure to check out his stream as he plays Wesnoth on Twitch! <https://www.twitch.tv/chekhovscannon>