

## City States of Arklyrell After-Action Report

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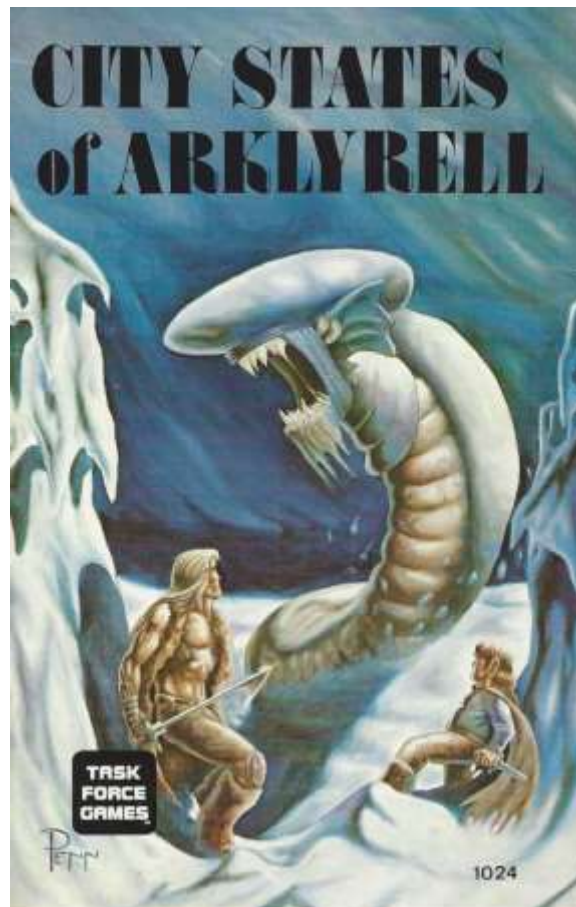
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This is an after-action report of a solitaire play of Task Force Games' *City States of Arklyrell*. I played the four-sided scenario.

### Introduction

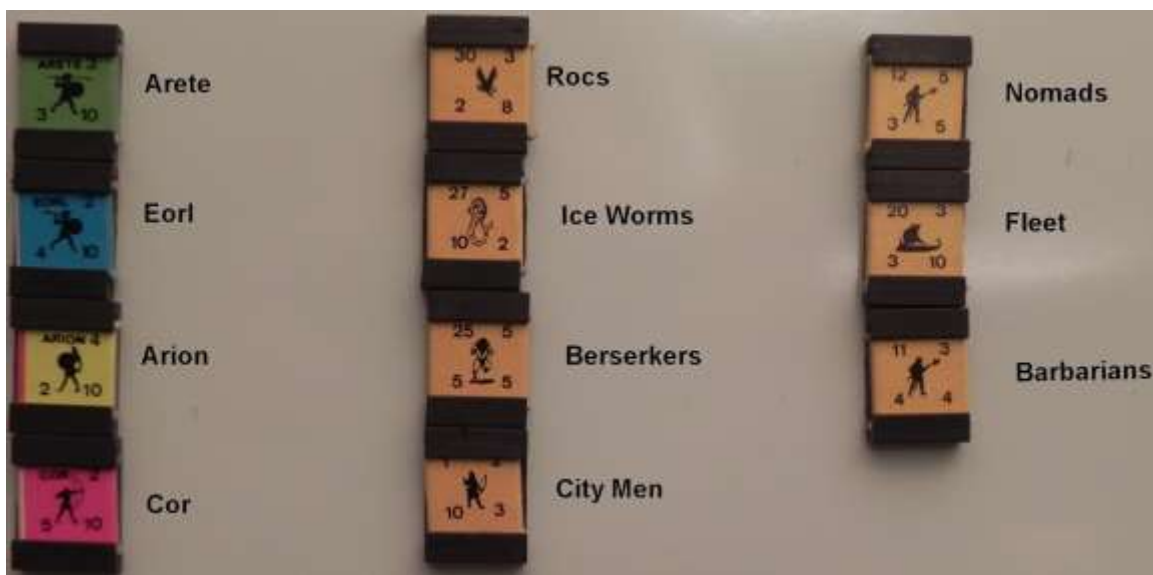
*City States* is a mini-game published in 1983. It has a 21 x 17 inch map, 54 die-cut single-sided counters, and a 16-page 5.5 x 8.5 inch rule booklet, all packaged in a ziplock bag. The setting is a fantasy world in which as many as four leaders vie for control. There are rules for 2, 3, or 4 players. In some ways, it resembles the fantasy computer games such as *Master of Magic*, where one starts out with a small endowment and must strive to expand, eventually coming into conflict with other players doing the same. However, this game is much simpler than its electronic cousins. That's a good thing, if you want a game that can be played to a conclusion in a few hours, especially if you have more than two participants.



# City States of Arklyrell

## Components

The components are about typical for TFG at the time—fairly good, if not up to the standards of the industry leaders. The map is colorful, perhaps a bit garish. It depicts the world of Arklyrell. The northern edge has a continent of ice, and the southern has deserts. In between are five islands. Given that this is an entire planet, the map is considered to wrap around: you can move between the east and west map edges as normal movement. The counters represent the four leaders and the military units available for recruitment. While the leaders are color-coded, the units are not, because they can be recruited by anyone. One must keep track of who owns what by means of the unit's ID numbers (more on this later). Counters have icons of the leaders and troops on them. They aren't very striking, but they do the job. There are a few obvious misprints, but they are easy to spot because all units of the same type (except for fleets) have the same ratings.



Counters. Note that they have been inserted into magnetic clips.

The four leaders all have a movement allowance of 10. They are also rated for morale and combat. Here is a list (morale-combat):

- **Arete** (green) 3-3
- **Eorl** (blue) 2-4
- **Arion** (yellow) 4-2
- **Cor** (hot pink) 2-5

The units are rated for morale, combat, and movement. Here is a list of all the types (morale-combat-movement):

- **Rocs** (3-2-8), giant birds that can fly and carry passengers, but weak in combat.
- **Ice Worms** (5-10-2), fearsome slow creatures who can't leave the northern continent.
- **Berserkers** (5-5-5), good general-purpose infantry.
- **City Men** (2-10-3), best used to garrison citadels, but powerful in combat.

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- Nomads (5-3-5), lesser sort of infantry.
- Barbarians (3-4-4), much the same.
- Fleets (5-2-10, 2-5-10, 3-3-10), fast transports with varying combat capabilities.

In addition to the leaders and units, there are colored markers to indicate citadel ownership and a few representing magical items that the leaders can collect. These include:

- The Mace and the Sword, both of which give the owner a +2 DRM in combat
- The Orb, which lets the owner recruit berserkers automatically
- The Ankh, which has the same effect on ice worms
- Hazer's Dust, a one-use item that can nullify a combat result or allow a do-over after a failed recruitment attempt.
- Poisoned Wells, a booby-prize that causes the discoverer to lose a turn.

## Rules

The basic rules structure is pretty conventional. Units move and then fight. There is no stacking, except for leaders and units being transported by fleets or rocs. There are various terrain effects, but no zones of control. The rules don't actually say that you can't move through or onto unfriendly units, but I took that as given. Combat is voluntary among adjacent units, using a differential CRT. Defending units of different types get bonuses or penalties for terrain, in the form of DRMs.

The major twist is that units all start out neutral and must be recruited by the leaders. There is a recruitment phase in between movement and combat. A leader can attempt to recruit one adjacent neutral unit, by rolling greater than or equal to the unit's morale rating. If the attempt succeeds, he gets control of the unit. If it fails, he may not attempt to recruit that unit again (with some exceptions).

Combat results are eliminations or retreat with disruption. "Disruption" means that the unit must undergo a morale check. If it rolls more than its morale rating, it becomes neutral again. Units stacked with a leader get a favorable DRM equal to the leader's morale rating. Leaders are immortal and not subject to elimination.

The game goes on for 25 turns or until someone reaches the sudden-death victory conditions. For two-player games, this means controlling 5 of the 9 citadel hexes. For three- and four-player games, you need to control only four. At the end of 25 turns, the player with the most citadels wins. Ties are broken by the total combat strength of your units.

## Game Aids

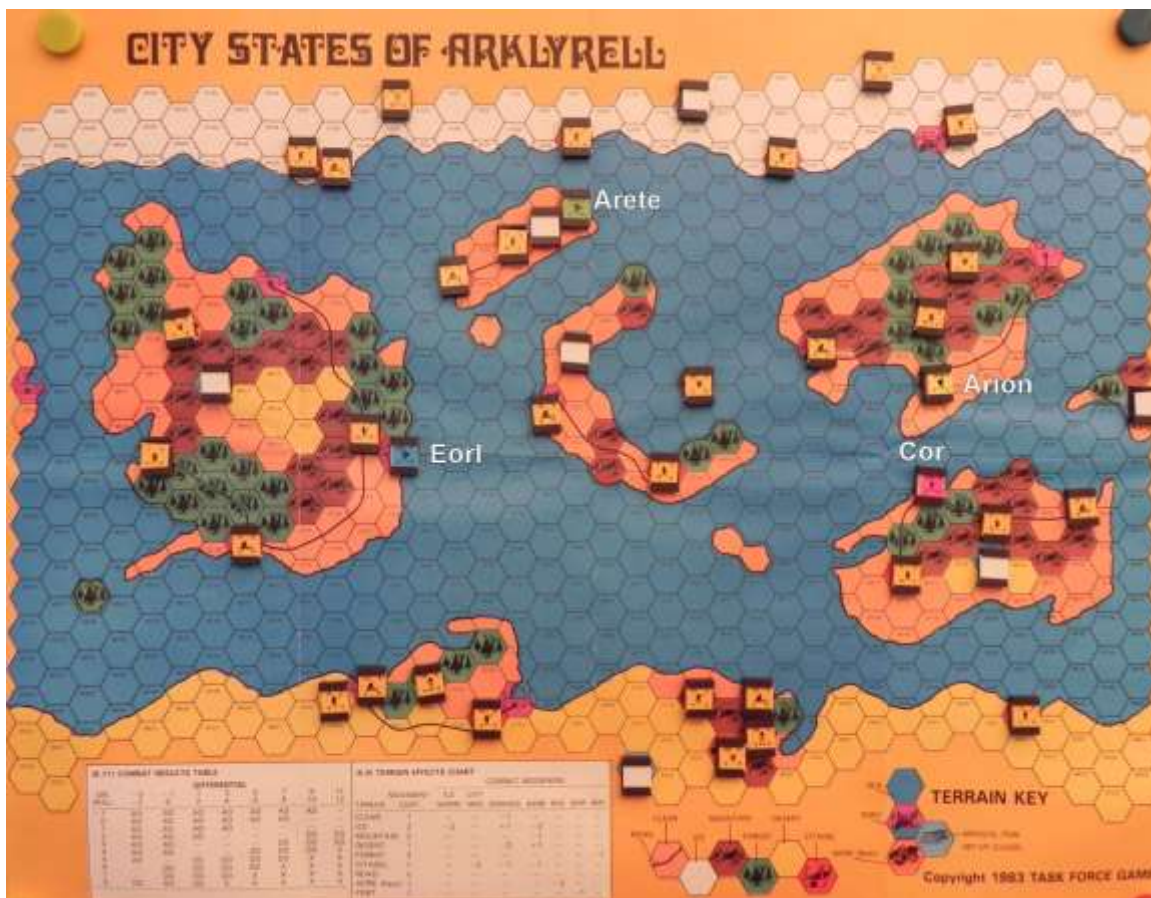
Because you have to keep track of your unit allegiance by ID number, some game aids have been created to help you. These are available on Boardgame Geek and Web Grognards. One is a PDF that lists all of the units, with columns for each leader. You can use check marks or spare markers to track who owns what, and who has already made recruitment attempts. There is also a program that will track this information as well as take care of die-rolling for recruitment and combat. Unfortunately, when I used it, it crashed when I tried the first combat roll. Like a nana,

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I hadn't saved any of the information up to that point. Rather than try to rebuild the data, I abandoned the program and used the PDF. I also took colored blank counters I happen to have and placed them in the vicinity of the units to indicate ownership. This worked well enough. (In the photos, the white counters mark Arion's troops, as I didn't have any yellow counters handy.)

## Setup

The game has a fixed setup. The beginning hexes of combat units are specified by type, as are the leaders' start hexes. Magic items are scrambled and placed face down in specified hexes, to be picked up by the first guy passing through them.



Initial Setup

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## Turn 1

**Arete** moves first. He moves into the magic hex to the southwest and picks up the Ankh. He continues moving to position himself between the city men and the fleet on his island. He tries to recruit the city men and succeeds. This also gives him control of the citadel (hex 1707). One down, three to go!

Next, **Arion** moves. He moves one hex north and attempt to recruit the city men in 3109. He succeeds; meaning he, too has a citadel. He moves into the hex.

**Eorl** simply attempts to recruit the city men that start adjacent to him, in 1212. He succeeds and enters that citadel.

**Cor** first moves to the magic hex on his island and picks up the +2 sword. Then he moves adjacent to 3016 to try to recruit the city men. He, too, succeeds and enters the citadel.

At the end of the turn, honors are about even, although Arete and Cor both have magic items.



Turn 1

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## Turn 2

**Arete** has a crucial recruitment task. If he doesn't pick up the fleet in 1507, he can't get off the island. Fortunately, he succeeds and advances into the port.

**Arion** goes for the air transport option, recruiting the rocs in 3207.

**Eorl** moves to the magic hex in 0710, but it's a poisoned well! That means he will miss his next turn. However, he can continue this turn, and he uses it to recruit the Roc in 0609.

**Cor** moves on down the road to recruit the city men in 3315.

Three guys now have some strategic transport. Cor has an extra ground unit.



Turn 2

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## Turn 3

With the Ankh in his possession **Arete** decides that he should head north to ice country. He sails to 2304 and then moves to pick up the +2 mace from the magic hex in 2303. Then he tries to recruit the barbarians in 2604 but experiences the game's first recruitment failure.

**Arion** decides that the central island holds the best prospects at the moment. Because his rocs can't get him all the way there in one turn, he stops to recruit the fleet at 2710.

**Eorl** is recovering from the poison wells.

**Cor**, accompanied by his city men, moves to recruit the fleet at 3614. He succeeds, giving him a route off the island.

Everybody is trying to expand from his original position, although Eorl is now behind.



Turn 3

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## Turn 4

**Arete** treks across the ice to recruit the ice worm at 2902 (automatic with the Ankh in his possession). He sends his fleet to the port at 3104.

**Arion** sails with his fleet in order to recruit the rocs on their island in 2311. However, they're not buying it. He sends his own rocs to the crescent island, where he intends to go next turn.

**Eorl** and his rocs move adjacent to 0513, where the city men join his cause. This means that he now has two citadels under his control.

**Cor** embarks his city men onto his fleet and sails towards the magic hex at 3811. However, it turns out to be poisoned wells. He has his fleet sail around the island to the port, where he meets them to sit out the next turn.

Eorl has gone from last to first with his acquisition of a second citadel. Arete has a powerful but slow unit in the ice worms. Cor is now a bit behind. Arion hasn't accomplished much, but the crescent island is his to exploit next turn.



Turn 4

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## Turn 5

**Arete** and his ice worms march to the citadel in 3203 and recruit the barbarians there. Now he matches Eorl's citadel count.

**Arion** sails his fleet to the magic hex at 1909, where he picks up Hazer's Dust. He then marches overland to reunite with his rocs, sending the fleet to an adjacent hex. He tries to recruit the city men in 2213, and succeeds. This gives him his second citadel.

**Eorl** and his rocs move adjacent to the fleet at 0815, where he succeeds in recruiting it.

**Cor** sits out the turn because of the poison wells.

Three players now have two citadels. Cor is falling behind. The number of neutral citadels is dwindling.



Turn 5

## Turn 6

**Arete** embarks his onto his fleet and sets out to the east, heading for the other citadel on the ice. He crosses the eastern side of the map and wraps around to the west. The ice worms, unable to be transported by ship, start moving overland.

**Arion**, realizing that the remaining magic hex down in the desert must contain the Orb, decides to go for it. His rocs carry him to within one hex of the destination, but he can go no further this turn. His fleet follows after.

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**Eorl**, coming to the same conclusion as Arion, makes his own sprint. He sails his fleet as far as he can and then runs for the magic hex<sup>1</sup>, grabbing the Orb from under Arion's nose. He then moves two hexes to the northwest and recruits the rocs in 2421. His other rocs follow in his wake, ending up adjacent to his fleet.

**Cor** decides to try to preempt Arete's obvious destination. He sails to the ice with his city men and marches them adjacent to the citadel at 1004. When his attempt to recruit the barbarians fails, he decides to take sterner measures, attacking. He has city men and the +2 sword to help him. The attack is a +8 (vs barbarian plus citadel's inherent strength). He rolls a 1 +2 (sword) -1 (barbarians in citadel) = 2. The result is no effect.

Arion has essentially wasted his turn. With the Orb, Eorl can now recruit the powerful berserkers automatically. Cor is lagging behind, and his defeat puts him in a difficult position. Arete will have to deal with a rival when he gets to the citadel he's aiming for.



Turn 6

<sup>1</sup> The rules allow units to disembark from ships and move on their own in the same turn. Unfortunately for Arion, you can't do that when transported by rocs.

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## Turn 7

**Arete** swoops in and recruits the barbarians at 1004, gaining the citadel right in Cor's face. Now he possesses three of the four citadels he needs. He's certainly the one to beat. His ice worms are still struggling to catch up to the action.

**Arion** sends his rocs back to the crescent island, where they can pick up his troops next turn. He sends his fleet to the island where he started, and marches his city men to embark on the fleet. Then he himself marches across the desert to the citadel at 1620 to make a rather desperate recruiting attempt of the nomads. This fails.

**Eorl** sends some of his rocs back to his original island so that they can collect some of his city men next turn. He also sends his fleet to embark his other city men. He uses the Orb to recruit the berserkers in 2521.

**Cor** is in a bind. He can't hope to take the citadel with Arete sitting in it. He can't embark his city men without occupying a port. He marches around the citadel to the adjacent port, where he fails to recruit the fleet in it. This could be the end of the road for him.

Arete is in the lead, with three citadels. Eorl has a strong army, but it's scattered right now, and a long distance from Arete's citadels. Arion has had a run of bad luck and is alone in the desert. Cor is trapped on the ice with no good prospects for offensive action.



Turn 7

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## Turn 8

**Arete** needs to leverage his current advantage before the other warlords can organize a response. However, he, too, is unable to travel by sea for lack of a port. He sends his fleet west, wrapping around the map in the direction of his citadel at 3303. Recognizing that the ice worms on that side of the board will take too long to get anywhere, he uses them to garrison the citadel, while the barbarians move into the adjacent port and wait for the fleet. Meanwhile, Arete himself moves to the other ice worm unit and recruits them.

**Arion's** fleet in 2710 transports his city men to 1906, where the ground unit disembarks and moves to 1806, adjacent to Arete's citadel. His rocs pick up the city men at 2213 and transport them north to 1909, planning to take them across the straits next turn. Meanwhile, Arion himself tries another Hail Mary recruitment, of the berserkers in 1419. This fails.

**Eorl** uses his rocs to move his berserkers as far west as they can go. In the meantime, he runs ahead and recruits the other berserkers (the ones that Arion just failed at). His fleet moves one of his city men units to the port at 1720, where they disembark. His other city men march southeast down the road to link up with his rocs.

**Cor** leaves his city men to march eastward on their own while he races to the port at 1904 in order to try recruiting the barbarians there. He sends the fleet east as well, so that it can either meet him there or divert to gather in his other city men in the southeastern island. The recruitment attempt is successful, which is a small comfort.



Turn 8

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## Turn 9

**Arete** considers using his ice worms to deal with Cor's lonely city men, but he decides that he has bigger fish to fry. He marches them towards the citadel at 1004 so that he can free its garrison for work further south. He ends up in position to attempt recruiting the fleet at 1105. Meanwhile, his fleet at sea picks up the barbarians on the east side of the map and starts hauling them west, to reinforce the citadel threatened by Arion's forces. The recruitment attempt is successful, and so he will be able to move out his second group of barbarians next turn.

**Arion**'s rocs complete moving their city men to join the others threatening Arete's city. Then the rocs start flying south to rescue their leader. His one fleet stays in port, where they are relatively safe. Arion himself tries to recruit a high-morale fleet in 1219, but he fails again. If his city men were to attack Arete's citadel on their own, it would be a 50/50 chance. Given his weak position already, he decides not to risk it.

**Eorl** concentrates his forces around the citadel at 1620. He has so much there that he decides to leave the city men and rocs on the western island, in reserve. First he tries to recruit the citadel's garrison of nomads. He must be more persuasive than Arion, because he succeeds. This gives him three citadels.

**Cor**'s city men continue to trudge towards the port he occupied last turn. He uses his fleet to pick up himself and the barbarians to transport them to the port at 2604, where he hopes to repeat the previous turn's success. After dropping them off, the fleet reverses course so that it can meet the city men next turn. Unfortunately, these barbarians refuse to join Cor.



Turn 9

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### Turn 10

**Arete** loads his barbarians into the fleet he recruited the previous turn and sails to the relief of the citadel that Arion's forces are besieging. The barbarians' place holding their citadel is taken by the ice worms. Arriving at their destination, the barbarians can't disembark in the same turn as they embarked. However, Arete himself can, and he moves into the citadel. Meanwhile, his other barbarian unit has made the passage from the east and lands on the island. He uses the barbarians and city men in the citadel to attack one of Arion's city men units, adding his own combat strength and the +2 DRM from holding the Mace. The result is DD: the defender retreats and has to make a morale check, which they fail. This means that Arion no longer controls the unit, which reverts to neutral.

**Arion**, faced with defeat, loads his remaining city men back onto his fleet and spirits them off to his citadel on the crescent island. Meanwhile, his rocs make landfall on the southern continent, and he joins them there.

**Eorl** is now master of the southern continent, and he's ready to move out. He loads his city men onto a fleet and puts it out to sea at point where it can threaten any of the three islands. Then he moves in his rocs and berserkers to surround Arion and *his* rocs, in such a way that the friendly rocs will be able to pick up the berserkers in the next turn. He himself moves to stack with one of the rocs and, incidentally, tries to recruit the fleet in 1219. That attempt fails, but it was just a target of opportunity anyway. His combined forces attack Arion. Arion gets off lucky with a DD result. It may be cheating, but I allow his rocs (and him) to retreat into the sea. Arion's morale rating is high enough that there is no change of the rocs becoming neutral.



Turn 10

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**Cor** leaves the barbarians he's been marching with and returns to the port at 1904, where he meets up with his fleet and city men. They sail to the east and wind up off the coast of the northeast continent. Meanwhile, his barbarians continue overland on the ice towards the port at 3104, which they will be able to reach next turn.

Eorl and Arete are now within reach of victory. Arion is in the worst shape, having lost one of his ground units and barely escaped the southern continent with his rocs. Cor isn't doing much better, as he holds but a single citadel and doesn't have much strength to gain another.

### Turn 11

**Arete** decides that speed is more important than recruiting those city men that Arion lost last turn. He loads up his barbarians into fleets and sails west, looking for an opportunity to grab one more citadel.

**Arion**, at sea with his rocs, flies back to the crescent island. He recruits the fleet at 1611. His other fleet, at the citadel on that island, disembarks his city men to garrison the city and then sails counterclockwise around the island in an effort to link up with him.

**Eorl** realizes that his ungarrisoned citadel at 0513 is vulnerable to Arete's invasion fleet. He sends his fleet to the port at 0815, where his city men disembark and march to the citadel. That leaves him with only his berserkers and rocs for offensive action. That's little enough, given that most of the citadels are garrisoned by city men. The rocs also have a more limited range than fleets. He gathers them up and flies to the eastern side of his home island, where he will be able to strike in several directions.



Turn 11

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**Cor** sails to the port at 2710 and marches with his city men to the citadel at 3109, currently owned (but not garrisoned) by Arion. After landing the troops, his fleet sails towards the port at 3104, in order to pick up his barbarians. In the combat phase, Cor and his city men easily overcome the citadel's intrinsic defense strength, and so it changes hands.

Now Cor has two citadels, while Arion is down to one. The two leaders, Arete and Eorl, are prowling around looking for that one more conquest which will give them the game. However, neither one has enough strength to guarantee success in an attack on a strongly-held garrison.

### Turn 12

**Arete** is at sea with two 3-strength fleets and two barbarian units (strength 4). Adding in his own combat value of 3, he has a land combat strength of 11. A citadel garrisoned by city men (as all but one potential target are) has a strength of 13 (10 for the city men plus 3 for the intrinsic defense). Arete does have the mace, which gives him a +2 DRM, but that's just enough to nullify the city men terrain bonus. So, he needs more strength. He retraces his steps, sailing back to the north central island in order to recruit the city men lost by Arion. Unfortunately, he rolls low and fails to recruit the unit.

**Arion** is fighting for his existence. He has only one citadel left, and that is garrisoned by his only good ground combat unit. His other assets are rocs and two 5-strength fleets. He decides to try his hand at recruiting the barbarians in 2804 that have so far resisted the blandishments of two other heroes. He sails there in one of his fleets, with the other trailing behind. The rocs take a position at the northern tip of the crescent island, where it is in range of his current position and his citadel. The recruitment attempt is successful. It's a relatively weak unit, but it's a start.



Turn 12

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**Eorl's** situation is similar to Arete. He does have better mobile troops, two each of 5-strength barbarians and 2-strength rocs. His own combat strength is 4, giving him a potential striking force of 18. On the other hand, he has no magical weapon. He gathers up his forces at the northeastern tip of his home island, where they are within range of two of Arete's citadels and within two turns' travel of Arion's.

**Cor** has two citadels garrisoned with city men, a 5-strength fleet, and a 4-strength barbarian unit. He carries the +2 sword and has the highest combat strength of any hero, 5. Still, he's going to need more than that if he's going to rival Arete and Eorl. This turn, he has his fleet pick up his barbarians and sail to meet him, although that won't occur until next turn. He stays in his citadel while awaiting transport.

This has been a turn of maneuvering, with some bad luck for Arete and good luck for Arion. Everyone is trying to get in position for a strike while looking over their shoulders for the threat from the others.

### Turn 13

**Arete's** situation has not improved. Not only did he not gain that city men unit, Eorl is in striking distance of two of his citadels. He decides on a preemptive strike against Eorl. Leaving his barbarians in the ports on the north central island, he takes his two 3-strength fleets and attacks Eorl's 5-strength fleet (carrying berserkers, which add nothing to naval combat)<sup>2</sup>. Adding in his own strength of 3, he has a comfortable +5 differential and a +2 DRM. Unfortunately, he rolls a "1," with a result of no effect.



Turn 13

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<sup>2</sup> The rules say that fleets may be attacked only when in ports. I decided that I don't like this rule, and I am ignoring it.

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**Arion** loads his newly-acquired barbarians onto one of his fleets. He sails both of them to the north central island where he tries to recruit the neutral city men.<sup>3</sup> He succeeds.

**Eorl** had been considering recruiting those city men himself, but Arion beat him to it. Instead, he turns to another one of his contingency plans, moving all of his forces by roc and fleet to Arete's citadel on the ice continent at 1004. It is defended by 10-strength ice worms, giving it a total strength of 13 against his 18. However, unlike city men, ice worms get no DRM bonus for defending a citadel. He rolls a "6," forcing the worms to retreat. They easily pass their morale test, staying loyal to Arete. However, that hardly matters, as Eorl's berserkers march into the city, triggering the sudden-death victory conditions. Eorl wins.

### Final Comments

This is a reasonably fun, very lightweight wargame. As noted in the comments above, there are a few rules ambiguities and just odd design choices. These are easily sorted out, although in a face-to-face game it would be better to do that before you get started. The turns run quickly, because there aren't many decisions to make or pieces to move. If I hadn't been writing down my actions and taking pictures, I could have finished the game in a couple of hours, more or less.

In terms of gameplay, there are a few things that could put you off. It is crucial that a player has some kind of transportation across water—either rocs or fleets. If he doesn't have that, he's doomed. It's possible that a bad recruiting roll early in the game could confine one of the leaders to one of the islands, effectively putting him out of the game. This game doesn't have a lot of combat in it. No side is going to have a lot of units to throw into attritional combat. There was a lot of running around the board looking for a good place to strike. Most combats were centered on citadels. There were few good reasons to attack another leader's forces in the field, although that was tried a few times.

Although this game uses "City States" in the title, it's really about warlords. Technically speaking, there aren't any cities in the game, as they are called "citadels." That may mean cities, or it may mean fortresses. In any case, the citadels function as objective hexes, but that's all. You don't get any resources from controlling these "city states." They are liabilities that need to be defended rather than assets to help you further your conquests. (Of course, all of the above is just quibbling about the name that TFG chose to give the game. The game is what it is.)

Another odd point about the game is that there is no magic in it, other than the magic items and (perhaps) the fantastical creatures. None of the leaders cast spells or anything like that. One might suppose that it's all going on at a level below the simulation, but this is pretty much a military game with some oddly named units. As with the role of cities, that not necessarily a bad or good thing, just an aspect of the design.

I decided to play this game because I was looking for a break from a more involved operational World War II game that I had on my gaming wall for months. It fulfilled that purpose. It's not an all-time standout by any means, but it's a nice little diversion, and it supports four players.

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<sup>3</sup> Here is a rules ambiguity. The rules say that one cannot try again to recruit a unit that you failed to recruit, unless another player recruited it and then lost control after combat. However, the rules say nothing about whether one can try to re-recruit a unit that one has lost in combat oneself. I am allowing this.