

BIG TALK

The Empire has pushed back the Jotun armies in Bregasland this season, securing the regions of The Rushes and Ottermire, and restoring Imperial control over the territory. The presence of the Strong Reeds in the territory throughout the campaign is fast becoming something of a modern legend with people swapping stories of their involvement. Some of the stories assign quite incredible feats to the army's Proud general and their Loyal soldiers, yet most people are not fool enough to believe those tales, but it's cheers the spirits to swap the stories.

The victories thus far have not yet countered the new threats of coral-infested dead emerging from The Gullet or the shades of the dead laying claim to the desolate expanses of the Grey Fens. As summer turns to autumn, as harvests are gathered, and preparations made for winter, threats abound on all sides. Some joke that at least the Jotun will stand and fight on equal terms, instead of menacing good honest folk at night or lurching out of the dunes and sea gorse. Still most people are in good cheer - Bregasland will soon be free and the Jotun gone - again.

Well most people. Not everyone in Bregasland is cheering and waving flags for the Reeds. Memories of the Mathilda Fisher are still fresh and those who bore the brunt of that when the would-be queen was slain are still nursing their grudges. Few people can hold a grudge like a Marcher after all. The leaders of House Brawnness were executed and the remainder of the household and their allies have been a simmering brew that threatens rebellion ever since. Talk is cheap however and the House have done nothing but nurse their grievances up to this point when the return of the Empire forces them to finally pick a side.

Six months ago there was a chance to strike against the Jotun, to save Friar Bloughton from capture, and seek to open the door to the wayward Brawnness. A way to bring the sheep back into the fold so to speak. The Military Council favoured other courses of action at the time, and that window closed. Fate doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme, so they say. The chance to make peace with the rebellious house is gone, all that remains is to cauterise the wound.

It appears that Bloughton has been negotiating a deal with the Jotun, a way for the most aggrieved members of the household to pack up their things and march west. Ironically the Empire's victory has forced their hand - either they make good on their dreams of getting out from under the Empire or they shut up about it. The Empire has one last opportunity to lance this boil, whatever happens after this is in the wood for good.

Imperial prognosticators have detected a conjunction to the Whelksquay in the North Fens that will enable heroes to reach the area on the Saturday of the Autumn Equinox.

OBJECTIVE: KILL FRIAR BLOUGHTON

- **House Brawnness are conspiring with the Jotun to flee Bregasland**
- **The Jotun will gain a force of a thousand strength of doughty Marcher warriors to fight alongside their armies and the North Fens will cease to be rebellious**
- **If Friar Bloughton is killed then the rebellion will be stopped before it has chance to start**
- **If that happens the Jotun won't gain new allies and the North Fens will become permanently sullen rather than rebellious**

Fate has conspired to give the Empire a last roll of the dice - whatever happens after this, it will be a part of the territory for good. This opportunity is a final chance to resolve matters with House Brawnness one way or the other. The case against the Friar of Brawnness is an open book that any can read. Bloughton is a traitor who wants to take the remnants of his house West, to the side of the Jotun in Hordalant. The magistrates are clear that Bloughton and the members of House Brawnness who are with him can be legally killed in battle, offering a swift resolution to this new development.

If Bloughton is not slain, then the rebellious Marchers, Brawnness and all their allies, will pack their bags and march west. They'll find new lands they can farm in Jotun territory and get on with their lives there. The rebellious quality will be gone from the North Fens, but the Jotun will gain an elite warband of Marcher soldiers with a strength of a thousand to fight alongside their armies.

If Bloughton is killed then that will be the end of the rebellion before it has a chance to rise. There'll be no more talk of taking up arms against the Empire. The North Fens will cease to be rebellious, but with House Brawnness and their supporters remaining in Bregasland, the North Fens will become sullen and remain that way for the foreseeable future. The land will be permanently scarred by the memory of people like Bill Sykes whose Loyalty was to Bregasland and not the Empire. There won't be any chance in the future to change that. With the leaders gone, the die will be cast.

OBJECTIVE: SPEAK TO THE RAVEN JARL

- **Discuss Stephen of Sarcombe with Helma Skutasdóttir, the Raven Jarl**
- **With Helma's support, the Lictors can track down a new opportunity to deal with Stephen of Sarcombe once and for all**

Stephen of Sarcombe, the vengeance-filled traitor from the Mournwold, has caused havoc across the western Empire in recent years. Full of spite, and increasingly bold in his actions, the traitor is a canny and illusive firebrand. Wary of where he travels, who he meets with, or when he might arrive, he has slipped through Imperial lines on countless occasions. Whatever else he is, he's still a Marcher and he knows these lands like the back of his hand.

As his behaviour has become increasingly cruel and erratic, it appears that the Jotun too are also growing frustrated with him. Jarl Helma Skutasdóttir is known to have called him out during the capture of Meade, and there are rumblings that missives from General Bjorgthorn Hammerhand of the Southern Bear have begun to sway opinions with the Jarls-of-Jarls in both Jotun lands. He is increasingly seen as contemptuous, but their feelings are tempered by their honour. Stephen has fought for the Jotun for years, as far as they are concerned he is Jotun. Their honour makes it impossible for them to betray him.

The Sun Chamber asked the Sovereign Lords of the City of Bar and Bond, to take an interest in Stephen and help them hunt him down. In recent months heralds of the The Chainbound have frequently been seen in numbers across all the Marcher territories, investigating and seeking more information on Stephen. At the moment, the Lictors are restricted to the methodical collection of facts, conversations with former connections, and visitations to his old haunts in the Mourn. To have a chance to nab the traitor they need someone with authority to invite them in. If the Empire can find a way to satisfy Jotun honour then they can convince Helma to let the Lictors hunt him for him in Jotun lands. If that happens, the Chainbound will report back once they have an found an opportunity for the Empire to capture him.

OBJECTIVE: COUNSEL ON CORAL

- **The Jotun have also been impacted by littoral husks assaulting their shores**
- **Llofir has directed the Empire to seek out Ghodi Torvi to learn of matters in The Gullet**
- **Persuade Torvi to share what he knows of the husks with the Empire**

The trudging mass of seaweed and flotsam onthe foreshore outside Ottery was first presumed to be a possible lone marshling, then it introduced itself as a minion of The Rotlord, the eternal Llofir. It delivers a deadpan message concerning the threat from the depths of the Gullet. It seems that while the threat is causing problems for the Empire in lands that abutt the Gullet, they can draw small comfort knowing that the Jotun are also threatened. Llofir directs the Empire to seek out Ghodi Torvi, a rare Jotun interested in the Spring realm and occasional correspondent with the Despoiler of Grain.

The orc priest, along with their entourage, has driven Jotun efforts in recent months to combat the growing numbers of coral-infested husks that have come ashore both in Skallahn and in the Jotun-held regions of Bregasland. Torvi, aided by a small coven of ritualists, has successfully captured several of the creatures inside a warding where they have them under observation. The studious orc is understood to be trying to better comprehend the risks posed by the husks which seem to be continually changing.

Whilst the Empire might be able to speak briefly with the priest on the field, it would be next to impossible for academic discussions to happen during the battle. The Jotun will be outraged if the Empire kill Torvi, who is not a combatant, but nor is it likely to do the Empire any good. What could help is talking with Tovi and seeing if the Empire can persuade the ghodi to share what he has learned with them. It may be possible to use the night ritual, the The Cuckoo's Egg to bring him to Anvil to discuss the matter, but only if the Empire can convince him that he will be protected and respected. If not, then there may still be an opportunity to cooperate with the Jotun scholar that the Empire can benefit from.